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## Newsletter No. 137

March 2025

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## **Future Events - 2024**

- 26<sup>th</sup> April                    **JMO Day of Dance 2025 - Stockport**  
*Adlington Morris Men have stepped forward to organise the Day of Dance for 2025 on behalf of the Morris Ring, The venue will be in Stockport, a council that was very keen to support the event. More details will follow, but save the date and watch this space.*
- 30<sup>th</sup> May – 2<sup>nd</sup> Jun        **Thaxted Morris Weekend        (Fully booked)**  
*Email [revansandson@sky.com](mailto:revansandson@sky.com) for a place on the waiting list.*
- 19<sup>th</sup> July                    **Anker Ring Meeting in Nuneaton, Warks**  
*Anker Morris Men will be holding a day of dance on 19th July 2025 to celebrate their golden anniversary. The format of the day will involve teams arriving in Nuneaton in the early (ish) morning, dancing at various spots around the town during the day and finishing with a massed display. Teams will be invited to find their own lunch – and time will be built in to the programme for this to happen – and then a high tea will be provided for participants and their families at the end of the day for a small cost.*  
*We would appreciate expressions of interest as soon as possible and approximate numbers for catering and organising purposes by the end of May. Please communicate with Emma on [em.melville@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:em.melville@yahoo.co.uk).*
- 22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> Aug            **Saddleworth Rushcart Weekend**  
*Once more to West Yorkshire we go. (I'm not getting into an argument, the white roses throughout Uppermill are pretty strong evidence).*
- 13<sup>th</sup> Sept                    **Ripley DoD Celebrating 100 years of Morris Dancing in Ripley**  
*A Day of Dance will take place in Ripley on Saturday 13th September 2025. The day will be run on JMO lines with sides dancing around the town. There will be plenty of opportunities for refreshment during the day with sides catering for their own needs. To assist in planning sides are requested to indicate interest by email to [ripleymorris@hotmail.com](mailto:ripleymorris@hotmail.com)(link sends e-mail) with the subject Ripley 100 by January 31st 2025.*
- 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> Oct            **Illustrious Order of Fools & Beasts Unconvention 2025 (Otley, W Yorks), hosted by Wharfedale Wayzgoose Border Morris**  
*The Saturday tour will be around Otley and Harrogate. There will be the usual mix of workshops plus the AGM on Sunday. Unfortunately, due to rising food and transport costs, the fee has had to be increased to £90; this includes Friday supper, two breakfasts, Saturday lunch and Feast. Please contact Robert for pro rata prices for a part weekend. Children under 16 half price! E-mail: [triggertroutter1@aol.com](mailto:triggertroutter1@aol.com) Closing date for Applications 10th October 2025. See Morris Ring website for form.*

## Squire's Massed Dances

The following are the massed dance choices I would like to see people doing together over the next two years.

Vandals of Hammerwich (Lichfield) (In chorus, show both times)

Lads a Bunchum (Adderbury)

Laudnum Bunches (Headington)

Valentine (Fieldtown)

William and Nancy (Bledington)

Young Collins (Oddington)

Riggs of Doom (In the style of Bampton) - this is a special privilege to be able to include this dance written by Utrecht Morris and I have included the music below for those of you unfamiliar with the tune. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByJUXfZ4LQ8>

v0.2.1 20160525

### 13. Riggs of Doom Bampton

Frans Tromp (2002)

A(AB)4

♩ = 150

(wordt vervolgd op volgende bladzijde)

### 13. Riggs of Doom

(vervolg)

Dans ontworpen door Mik Lammers (2002).

Contact your area rep if you need help and support with learning any of these dances.

Cheers

Emma

Morris Ring Newsletter No 137 March 2025

## Squire's Musings – Greetings from Emma Melville

Welcome to my first missive as Squire of the Ring. For those who don't know me, I am Emma, musician of Anker Morris Men (come and meet us on the 19<sup>th</sup> July at our day of dance in Nuneaton to celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup>), musician and sometime dancer with Dolphin Morris Men and dancer with First Class Stamp Appalachian (you can find us at Chippenham Folk Festival this year). I also run the Hinckley Bullockers who terrorise the poor people of Leicestershire on plough Monday. I have spent all my life in and around morris dancing so I can hopefully bring all that experience to bear in my new role. Some of you may know me as 'Bonnie Green' on Facebook (I have to avoid my students finding me) but, unlike some of my predecessors, I do not spend a lot of time at Belgian Beer Festivals, or being sent to Egyptology conferences in exotic places. Therefore, as the best I manage is the odd day course in the middle of Birmingham and nobody needs pictures of the Aston Expressway at rush hour, you will have to make do with pictures of morris dancing with the odd newborn grandchild thrown in.



I will start with an apology to those who I don't manage to get to see over the course of the next two years. I will do my best but events – like buses – seem to come along in threes (actually, I have already had 4 invites for the 7<sup>th</sup> June) so I am afraid I am going to disappoint some people. Please do invite me, though. I will get there if I can.



Starting them early – morris practice.....

Last weekend showed me that the 2 main issues for the Ring at present are preserving the past and securing the future – ie Archives and Recruitment. Hopefully, somewhere in this newsletter you will find a report from Uttoxeter Morris about their efforts and successes in recruitment over the past year. Their squire and Bagman spoke of their recruitment of 16 (yes, that's right, 16) new members this winter so I have asked them to give you all some idea of how they managed this.

Meanwhile, I know every team is building an archive of their history and has little idea of what to do with it when it isn't sitting in someone's loft. I have spoken to the Archive Group and they, hopefully before the next ARM, will prepare a paper for teams on what an archive is, how to look after it, where it can be stored, whether it should be digitised, and so on. If you have any questions in the meantime then you can contact them through the Ring website (Matt Simons is the current Chair) and they may be able to advise.



.....and the pub

Well, I think that's about all for my first go. I look forward to meeting you all over the course of the year and sharing a dance, a song, a tune, a drink - and the joy and fellowship of the morris.  
Emma

### **From the (Past) Bagman's Desk**

I will freely admit at the outset that I was not expecting to write this particular missive. Regular readers will know that I intended to officially end my term as Bagman at the ARM. However, to smooth the transition and to help get things rolling, I have agreed to help put this newsletter together as there are several things the officers want to communicate to the membership.

Without further ado, I am pleased to announce the ARM voted Rob Evans of Thaxted Morris Men to succeed me in the bagman role. Those who know Rob will know of his exceptional work as Bagman for Thaxted, so there can be no doubt as to his credentials. I congratulate Rob and wish him the best of luck. We have formally agreed to dance out/in at the Thaxted meeting at the end of May, which I gather is fully booked already so no pressure! I will finish with my waffle now and wish all of you a good dancing season in 2025.

Peter Austin, (soon to be) Past Bagman

### **An introduction from the armchair of the Bagman Elect**

Dear Friends I know, and Friends I've yet to meet

A huge thank you to all the clubs that entrusted me with their vote in the recent election for Bagman of the Morris Ring. I would also like to offer my condolences and thanks to Jono who ran with me in the election, who has been extremely sporting. Thanks must also go to Peter Austin who has worked tirelessly in the role for the past four years. As the Bagman position is being handed over in a smooth transition, I've not a lot to report just a week and a half in - but I'm sure things will ramp up very quickly and I'm keen to get stuck in! Emma and I attended the Devils Dyke ale this Saturday past and a fine night it was with good food, good dancing and great company.



A brief introduction - you may know me through my work on the Thaxted Morris weekend or through my children. Lattie, who dances with Dartington and will be making me a grandfather in April, Billy who is Squire of the 18-30 this year, Tommy and Joe who dance with Thaxted and Cambridge and Molly who dances North West with Chelmsford.

Plans for the 2025 Thaxted weekend are coming together, we are now fully booked with nearly three hundred and fifty dancers and musicians attending! This rivals the biggest event we have ever held, which was the one hundredth anniversary of the Thaxted Morris Men in 2011. This coming weekend of dance will be the 98th consecutive event (taking out the war and the covid years). Looking to the future, we are already laying plans for the centenary meeting of the Morris in Thaxted, which will take place in 2027. There have been some excellent dances chosen by our esteemed Squire for mass dancing for the upcoming Thaxted Weekend, and I look forward to dancing them with you at many events over her two-year tenure.

I also hope in the post as Bagman that I will get to meet as many of you as I can, and above all listen to you, encourage positive engagement with the Ring as well as grass roots involvement from as many that will.

Rob Evans, Bagman Elect

**Photos from the ARM**



**Spot the ball...  
Lewis Elliot**



**Staff and badge of office are passed to the  
new Squire  
Joe Oldaker**



**Presenting the Bear  
Joe Oldaker**



**Ain't nothing but a family affair. Mother, Son, Daughter and Son-in-Law dancing Appalachian  
(Past Bagman Jon Melville was out of shot but playing accordion)  
Joe Oldaker**



**The survivors meet in the lounge for a debrief  
Lewis Elliot**

## Notices

### Sticks – Ellie Duncan

I'm a woodland owner and member of a local coppicing group as well as a Morris dancer and musician. I'd like to draw your attention to the Regional Coppice Federation reps who can put you in touch with coppice workers/owners who are ideally placed to provide good quality Morris sticks. This is the ideal time of year to strike up a lasting relationship as coppicing is done before nesting season and takes advantage of rapid spring growth for regeneration.

Coppicing is very good for biodiversity so by getting your sticks from a coppicer you are helping to keep a longstanding woodland management community alive. They don't charge much for their products and some are happy to barter. For example, we've just exchanged a case of cider provided by one of our side members for 40 long hazel sticks. Here's the link to the regional reps

<https://ncfed.org.uk/the-ncfed/members/>

### King John's Morris Men 50th Anniversary!

Ex-Members! Plans are going ahead with organising the event celebrating the 50th Anniversary of King John's Morris Men. It will be held on Sunday 31st August 2025 starting around noon and going on into the evening. It will be a Social event rather than a Formal one and it will be a chance to catch up with old friends. Many further details to follow, but you now have the date and format. A number of ex-members have already expressed an interest, so now that that we have made the date available, we would be grateful if you could confirm that are able to attend. Please contact [bagman@kingjohnsmorris.org](mailto:bagman@kingjohnsmorris.org)

### Jim Hirst – 1930-2025

Chapel-en-le-Frith Morris regret to announce the death of founding member and first squire of the side Jim Hirst. The officers of the Morris Ring would like to express their condolences to his family and friends at this sad time.



**Jim Hirst(left of centre with staff) with the rest of Chapel after receiving their staff from the late Ivor Allsop (MR Squire 1978-80) at the Ledbury Meeting in July 1980, with past treasurer Barry Care on right of shot.**



## Uttoxeter Morris: Notes on New Member Recruitment

It seems that whenever two or more Morris sides get together the conversation will quickly turn to "how are you managing recruitment". When I joined the Uttoxeter Heart of Oak Morris in 2006 I looked around and I was not surprised to see that nearly everybody in the group had achieved six score years and all were male (I was later to learn that many were founder members from 1954). I was an easy recruit, I fancied doing Morris dancing and looked up the nearest Morris side on The Ring website. From that time (and before) there have been many attempts to recruit members, they were mostly unsuccessful. What follows is some reflection on both the failed attempts and recent successes of these activities.

From the point of my joining the Side the number of dancers slowly dwindled as the march of time naturally meant that aging bodies were no longer able to strut their stuff. The Side struggled along and the number of events we were able to attend also decreased. A low point was reached in 2022 when we were only able to dance at twenty events (in comparison to fifty in 2024). This was the point where we formalized the arrangement with our friends from Stafford Morris, we had tried to help each other up to this point informally, but recognised that it was necessary to have a joint dance schedule for the year (we shared a single page on MorrisBook). Indeed it was doubtful that we could have managed a single event on our own during that time. Recruitment was often discussed, especially at AGMs, and this led to ad hoc recruitment attempts. Adverts and articles in local papers were tried in conjunction with 'open' practice nights. We handed out flyers at events. Prior to The Ring decision to admit women members we made the move to encourage women members to join. This led to an all female side dancing in parallel with the men. Some of those female members eventually made the transition to the full side. Also at this time a very young member called Sam attended our practice nights, and due to his age his parents had to attend at the same time. Little did we know what a difference he would make in years to come!

In 2022 a small group of the old guard (myself included) did the 'traditional' thing and applied for a "We love Uttoxeter" grant from the Staffordshire Community Organisation to mount a programme to attract new members. Our plan was to contact local organisations and offer a presentation and dance demonstration in order to generate recruits. We were able to use the 'Community' data base and found about 70 organisations, from the Girl Guides to the Lions and from local doctors' surgeries to allotment holders, to offer our services. We worked up a PowerPoint presentation and had rehearsals of our show. We invested the grant money into a projector and portable loud speaker system. We sent out emails with flyers to each of the selected groups with an invitation to join us, or for us to join a meeting that they could organize internally. We only got two positive responses. The sum total of recruits was nil.

At about this time we were conscious that our friends at Stafford were having great success in recruiting, mainly female members, as their young Squire - Max Haynes – along with Andy Chell, used their considerable skills in social media to create a buzz on the newly fangled (to us) internet. The learning points that we gained from Stafford:

- be consistent – Stafford posted every Monday, "*Stafford Morris is practicing tonight! Come along – here's the time and place.*"
- better traction is achieved by using reels/short videos rather than static pictures
- be committed - share updates across other Facebook groups, ask members to re-share
- regular posting makes all the difference

I think our Squire 'elect' (that young recruit I mentioned earlier) – Sam Egerton - was motivated by this and went into action. In no time at all he mounted our social media campaign and contacted the BBC local radio to start promoting Uttoxeter Morris. That initiative got the TV stations interested which led to both the BBC and ITV featuring us during the prime time evening news spots. Sam's main themes were:

- a) that the long tradition of Morris dancing in Uttoxeter would soon die if we could not recruit new dancers/musicians to join us, and
- b) to emphasize that we were an 'all inclusive' group and that everybody was welcome.

To these ends Sam ensured that our oldest dancing member, eighty seven years young (a founder member of the side in 1956) and several female members were featured (again supported by Stafford Morris), with active joyful Morris dancing going on in the background.

What followed was an avalanche of new (mostly female) faces turning up at our practice sessions. We also realized that attracting new people was only the start; if the initial contact and interaction was not positive then those attracted would only turn up once and would be lost. A plan developed to do the following:

- we must be warm and welcoming
- we prepared a simple name badge system that could be repeated at each session so that all those who attended could refer to each other by name
- we wanted the dancing to be 'fun' so we would not worry about too much detail e.g. correct 'stepping' was less important than learning the sequence of moves in the dance. The detail could follow later ...
- we would teach only the 'simple' dances at the start and build slowly (the stick dances seemed to go down well with many new recruits)
- for people new to dancing the effort and physical strain would be hard at the start ... they could do as little or as much as they liked
- no 'subs' would be payable for the first year ... ("we want to ensure that this new hobby is right for you before you commit")
- for those who continued to attend practices we would help them to prepare the 'uniform' ready for the dancing season (e.g. the Side ordered and paid for a set of bells for every member)

Sam's enthusiasm and teaching propelled us forward in all these endeavours and he was massively supported by Max Hayes and Andy Chell (from Stafford Morris), they implemented these themes and created a fantastic atmosphere to both learn and have fun with Morris.

We have gone from a Side that struggled to put out a set of six, to one where we regularly have twenty plus attending practices and events on a regular basis. On the musicians side we have additional melodeon, fiddle and banjo players. More important than the sheer numbers is the change in atmosphere about the Club. In discussion with many of the 'old hands', we all agree that the new members have brought a new energy and sense of fun to each and every occasion. This has introduced new life and made each gig something that nobody wants to miss. What a difference to the days when we could not even put out a full side without some arm twisting. Huge thanks all our new members – both dancers and musicians!

Well that is the view from an aging white male from the 'old guard'. To show some balance I thought it would be instructive to collect some views of those on the receiving end ... some comments and

observations from the new starts who attended those first few crowded practice nights and decided to stay with us:

*“At my first practice night I was unsure what to expect as this had been a male Morris side in the past. However, touched by Sam’s personal invitation to join the side, and greatly inspired by his passion for the Morris, energy, enthusiasm, and his vision for the future of Uttoxeter Morris as an inclusive, welcoming and thriving local Morris side, encouraged by Kirsty and Andy, and inspired by Stafford Morris, this is what brought me to the side. I decided to stay with the side because from the very outset I was welcomed by the squire, Kirsty and Andy, the committee and our friends in Stafford Morris. I also now play the Melodeon for the side. I am proud to be a member of this friendly, welcoming, inclusive, supportive, diverse and thriving local community of Cotswold Morris dancers and musicians, fulfilling my lifelong ambition to dance traditional Cotswold Morris. It is an honour to be upholding this most ancient of English traditions and to be a part of keeping it alive for future generations.”*

Tess Hartley

*“I don't know what made me go along to my first practice, I really don't. The first practice was so hard. I am disabled & chronically ill, & it really knocked me for six. The wonderful Kirsty Higgs messaged me, saying it had gone rough for her too, and perhaps we should stretch before we start. This just instantly made me feel better, and not alone in my knackered-ness. The second time I attended practice I actually brought 3 new members with me; my husband Al, who had Morris danced as a child, my son Harper, 17 at the time, & one of my closest friends, Caroline, who, like me, is just a little mad. I persevered through many injuries, using miles of support bandage & pain meds. Though my dancing is much more on par with the 80 year olds in the group, I'm still a valued member of the team. Going to that first practice totally on a whim has impacted my life so massively & so positively it's a little unreal. I still struggle physically, but everything I'm doing will hopefully slow my deterioration & if nothing else, I'm having an amazing time. (Oh I also crocheted 26 bespoke-to-each-member dolls & their respective instruments etc. because I felt like it).”*

Rian Coleman (now first female officer and Bagman for Uttoxeter Morris)

*“I joined Uttoxeter Morris in 2008 aged 10, after my mum bought me a toy accordion, but started off learning to dance. I instantly took a shine to it, and by the age of 17, I had become the youngest Squire in the country, and an accomplished musician for the side. Having danced all around the country, occasionally turning up to dance with other teams too, Morris dancing soon took a massive place in my heart. Seeing the decline of my “home-side” Uttoxeter Heart of Oak Morris, I accepted the role of Squire again in October 2023, along with the foreman job I took on in 2022 with the aim to save the side. After a mad media rush and a very busy year of practicing, along with 50 events, 2024 was the most successful year in the history of Uttoxeter Heart of Oak, and I am proud of every member old and new for their commitment and dedication in preserving this fantastic ancient tradition we all love”.*

Sam Egerton, Squire.

I have tried to share the learning from our recruitment efforts, both good and bad. I hope that these are some help for those experiencing our former difficulties. Certainly, when Morris sides meet and this topic comes up at least there will be some additional specific ideas to discuss.

**R Graham ‘Rim’ Riminton** (former Bagman), Uttoxeter Heart of Oak Morris

supported by **Andy Chell** (Bagman), Stafford Morris

## **Morris Ring Publications**

**Matt Simons:** Editor of the Morris Dancer  
matt.j.simons@icloud.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: <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>

## **Call for Contributions**

Any items of urgent Morris-related news, please send to me at [bagman@themorrisring.org](mailto:bagman@themorrisring.org) for inclusion in the next Newsletter.

If you have any photographs, you can send them to Duncan Broomhead, the Morris Ring Photo Archivist ([duncan.broomhead@btinternet.com](mailto:duncan.broomhead@btinternet.com)).

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](mailto:Charliecorcoran7@ntlworld.com)).

