



SQUIRE: Nigel Strudwick
3 Town Farm Close, Whaddon, Royston SG8 5RT
Email: squire@themorrisring.org

BAGMAN: Peter Austin
8 Pease Close, Warwick, Warwickshire, CV34 7BA
Tel: 01926 339351
Email: bagman@themorrisring.org

TREASURER: Clayton Francis
Tel: 0208 3957821
Email: treasurer@themorrisring.org

Newsletter No. 131

July 2023

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Future Events 2023

All events listed correct at time of publication. Please check the events page on the Morris Ring website or email bagman@themorrisring.org for latest information

- 26th – 27th August **Saddleworth Rushcart – Ring Meeting No. 367**
It's back. Saddleworth Morris Men invite yourself and your side to attend the Rushcart in 2023, on Friday 25th August to Sunday 27th August (the Bank Holiday weekend).
- 9th Sept **Belper JMO Regional DoD**
Changed location from Derby, more details will be published soon. Email bagman@themorrisring.org to register interest.
- 16th Sept **Norwich JMO Regional DoD**
We invite you to spend the day Morris dancing in the historic city of Norwich. The four Morris sides based in the city; Kemps Men, Golden Star, Fiddlesticks and Big Jigs have joined forces to arrange a Day of Dance to which everyone is invited. Express your interest by emailing us - further details will be available in due course. norwichdayofdance2023@gmail.com
- 23rd Sept **Chester JMO Regional DoD**
More details to follow. Email devadayofdance@vivaldi.net to register interest.
- 22nd – 24th Sept **Australian Morris Ale 2023**
Hosted by Marlee Morris and held in Fremantle, WA. Email stevencmansfield@gmail.com for details.
- 7th Oct **Newcastle JMO Regional DoD**
Dancing will be from 10 am until 4 pm approx. Dance teams please apply to newcastlejmodod@gmail.com stating: team name, contact name and details (inc phone number), home base, dance style, and approximate numbers.
- 7th Oct **Bath JMO Regional DoD**
We invite you to spend the day Morris dancing in the historic city of Bath. Somerset Morris, Holt Morris and Bristol Morris Men have joined forces to arrange a Day of Dance to which everyone is invited. Bath has some fantastic dance spots, as well as some fabulous pubs to quench your thirst. Booking from located here https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfqIE7w8xm5_AQQ3p1qAaUFsYPY2sNKxEtEwgoPBzZ8k0Jqpw/viewform?usp=sf_link

21st Oct

JMO 20th Anniversary DoD in London

Currently a placeholder, hoping to finalise details soon. If interested in attending email bagman@themorrisring.org

27th – 29th Oct

The Illustrious Order of Fools and Beasts Unconvention 2023

Open to all budding or experienced Fools, Beasts and Morris Characters from any team from the Ring, Open or Federation, or independent. A truly JMO event. This year Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men are hosting the Unconvention as part of their big anniversary and it will be based in and around Brighton. Our base will be Henfield Cricket Club, Brighton Road, Henfield, West Sussex BN5 9RP. Form available at

<https://themorrisring.org/event/2023/oct/illustrious-order-fools-and-beasts-unconvention-2023>

2024

27th April

Cambridge Morris Men, Centenary Spring Day of Dance

Currently a placeholder, hoping to finalise details soon.

28th Sept

Peterborough Morris Day of Dance

Currently a placeholder, hoping to finalise details soon.

Squires Massed Dances 2023

Massed dances are one of the things the Morris Ring can do well, they are made better if we can do them with some uniformity. With this in mind I have added notes to some of them so we are all doing the same thing. If your club has a different interpretation, please don't think for one minute I am trying to dictate to you a correct way of doing things, I just want us to put on a good massed dance for the public.

Adderbury: Black Joke
Lads-buncham

Bampton: Rose tree (finish on rounds)
Sidestep (to the tune of either Speed the Plough or the Quaker)

Bledington: Idbury Hill
Young Collins

Brackley: Jockey to the Fair (long version)

Bucknell: Queens Delight

Headington: Constant Billy (Foot up, Cross over, Back to back and finish on Whole hey)

Fieldtown: Valentine
Balance the Straw.

Lichfield: Vandalls (In the chorus show the first time and clash the second except the last time when it is show twice)

Squire's Musings

Out and about

It's been a relatively quiet start to my two years. Since the ARM, I've been to the Devil's Dyke MM Ale and Letchworth Morris Ale towards the end of the practice season. I also was at Devil's Dyke's annual Easter Bank Holiday Monday dance-out with Thaxted in Thaxted, which this year took place in the church due to the weather. My dancing in the main dance season has been somewhat curtailed by a cycling accident, but I have still been able to attend the Westminster Morris Day of Dance in London in May, and the Thaxted Weekend at the beginning of June. July has seen two outings, the first to White Rose MM's celebration of their 70th anniversary at the beginning of the month, which was a very jolly occasion and exhibited their continuing strength as a side. The second was, however, a very sad event, the funeral of Vic Martin, a beloved stalwart of Foresters Morris and a true gent, in Bottesford, Leics.

Don't forget, if you would like me to come to your event just get in touch via squire@themorrisring.org

JMO

I hadn't realised it, but 2023 was the turn of the Ring to chair the JMO. It's probably fair to say I have spent more time on this than on specific Ring business. This has, however, been driven principally by the decision of the three organisations to mark 20 years since the important amendment to the 2003 Licensing Act that excluded Morris from a number of potential difficulties presented in the original proposals for the legislation. These events are happening in September and October and there will be a list of them elsewhere in this Newsletter.

The JMO is also looking into other matters, such as those of equality, diversity and inclusion and we'll be reporting back to the membership. IMPORTANT: later this year we will also be offering advice on the Trust Registration Service, a recent extension of Government anti-money laundering regulations. This is now catching club and society bank accounts where funds are held by nominees such as club officers, on behalf of a club's membership. A national register of such arrangements is now maintained via HMRC. It is now compulsory for certain details to be put onto this register and the Morris Ring in conjunction with the JMO committee is looking at further guidance on this issue to assist member clubs.

Recruitment, well-being and safeguarding

These issues are ever more important in their separate and yet related aspects. Newsletter readers are referred to Paul Redhead's comments elsewhere in this issue. Paul was involved very much in the drawing up of the new Ring Constitution, and he has agreed to act as our representative on the JMO's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion sub-committee.

Music

Back at the ARM, Clive Dumont presented a workshop after the main meeting on the subject of playing for massed dances. He was also at the Musicians' Workshop hosted by Letchworth Morris three weeks later. Playing for massed dancing does primarily apply of course to Cotswold, and the existence of written notations going back as far as Sharp, and the availability of Lionel Bacon's "Black Book", means that the majority of Cotswold sides share a communality of dances. I'm not a musician, but it's quite clear that most Cotswold sides normally dance to one or at most two musicians, and that is very different indeed from playing as part of a very large band at (say) Ring Meetings and other days of dance.

Clive has many interesting things to say about this and rather than paraphrase his words, I have asked the Bagman to include the whole document in this newsletter. So do read that please!

Performance

With music comes dance, and the heart of Morris dancing is the performance. While Clive's points on music apply principally to one tradition, when talking about performance, it doesn't matter what style of dance you and your team do. The ultimate aim of all the time spent practising is the public performance. I am writing this in the middle of the dancing season so there aren't at present too many opportunities to try out some of the following thoughts away from the public, but it might be worth Squires and Foremen spending some time working out about how they can encourage the dancers to think about the elements of performance (not just how to do an individual dance!) and introduce it into your practice sessions.

I realise that each area of Morris has particular traditions of performance—for example, rapper, while often done outside, it's real home is indoors and particularly in a crowded pub. Nonetheless, I hope that the following will give food for thought.

We've all seen sides that do a cracking performance in public, but I'm sure we have also seen others that are highly unmemorable. When in public, we all represent the Morris, whether outside a pub or at a massed show. It's not just about how you dance—it's how you perform and handle the interaction with audiences. What I want to do is encourage every Ring side to think about the following, whether you are in a big massed show or your regular dance-outs during the summer.

- use the space. The larger it gets, the more difficult it can be, but stretch your sets to allow the side to use as much of it as possible. Don't hide in a corner!
- get the audience closer if you can. The closer the audience the better the interaction with them. I realise that at most large events (e.g. Thaxted Morris Meeting), the location of the audience is pretty fixed, but if it's possible, get the audience closer or even go to them?
- be proud of what your side can do. "Own" both the dance and the space—make the audience sit up and take notice—say to them in effect "We're here—look at us!"

The remaining thoughts relate more to when you are doing a complete show on your own:

- lots of sides play music just before the first dance is going to start (my side call it “beating up”). This draws the attention of the audience and tells them you are there and about to start, and gives them time to get outside. If your side doesn’t do this, perhaps think about doing it? Starting with a stick dance can have a similar effect.
- avoid “milling about”. This is really important if the audience is mobile, as lulls in the performance will make the audience move on to whatever they were going to do next. Try and organise a set list, so everyone has an exact idea of what is coming next and whether they can do it or not. Help newer members who haven’t yet got the dances fully in their minds. If there is an unavoidable pause, perhaps ask the musicians to play a tune to maintain the show’s momentum.
- work the audience. There are bound to be pauses in a set list but No. 1 shouldn’t have to talk to the audience to keep their attention as his/her job is to get the set ready—make use of your fool or animal, and if you have neither, make sure you have a member who is happy to engage with the audience with some humorous patter while the dance is being organised.
- avoid over-long introductions to the show or to the dances themselves; don’t go into the history of the Morris, details of the tradition etc unless you have been specifically asked to do this by the organisers. The average spectator wants to hear music, watch dancing and enjoy themselves, and if they want to learn more, they can ask after the show is over.

All the best for the season, dance well, and enjoy yourselves!

Nigel

Bagman's Reveries

In July the sun is hot, is it shining? No it's not!

It seems every time I come to write a newsletter we unaccountably have dismal weather. Just as well I don't write many!

Not much to add to Nigel's comments. I'm currently in the calm before the storm as the rapidly approaching weekend will see me stewarding at Warwick FF, please come and say hello if you see me. Aside from the usual late summer events that are regular placeholders on the calendar, we have the JMO events in September/October. Again, if you haven't already booked into one of these please consider coming to join in the fun!

Looking further ahead, it's never too early to start thinking about events for next year. We have already had some interest in hosting meetings in 2024 but we'd love to hear your ideas for events as the Ring turns 90 years old!

In other news, we will be looking to elect the next Squire at next year's ARM. We will also be seeking a new treasurer at the same time. I will write again in the Autumn confirming the process, but if you or someone you know is interested please feel free get in touch. Candidates for both positions will need a nomination from a member club so it's worth having conversations now while we're out and mingling!

Enjoy the rest of the summer

Cheesy

Recruitment, well-being and safeguarding

Each Morris side is different, but we all have plenty in common. Recruitment is, for most of us, an ongoing concern: even sides with a decent number of members need new people and, for those with an age profile closer to 70 than 50, recruitment is vital.

Recruitment has lots of aspects – where, when, and how to get the word out, but how to retain new people once they cross the threshold of the practice hall is pretty important too. How we teach, how we communicate, how we treat new members all matter and deserve thought. This is where well-being comes in: one of a good Squire's key tasks is to keep things harmonious and to be aware of (and act) when anyone in the side is uncomfortable or making others uncomfortable.

Safeguarding is a particular aspect of well-being – making sure that any young or vulnerable members are protected from harm. Even sides with no such members need to be aware of the issues involved, and most organisations, the Ring included, have specific policies and guidance on 'Safeguarding'. You can find the Ring's policy here <https://themorrisring.org/sides/safeguarding-policy-morris-ring>

The policy focusses on the Ring's own activities and is not intended to be adopted as such by member clubs. For one thing the Ring keeps the things it actually requires clubs to do (or not do) to the minimum consistent with good fellowship and the avoidance of disrepute. For another, each side is different and an approach which suits one will not suit another. Nonetheless we think every side needs to give safeguarding some thought, and that the Ring can help ease the way

A familiar example of this is the realm of 'Health and Safety', which all sides need to think about. The Ring provides advice, examples and general guidance, but doesn't issue a general H&S policy for all. The same applies to 'Safeguarding' and so the Ring has drawn up Safeguarding Advice for member sides to consider, explaining why it matters, even for those with no vulnerable members, and suggesting how to review the question. As well as the protection / legal aspects we think the focus on well-being matters, which brings us full circle to recruitment.

We hope you find the Guidance on Safeguarding useful. It's online at <https://themorrisring.org/sides/safeguarding-policy-morris-ring> Do please let us know of any questions and suggestions you might have.

Paul Redhead

Devil's Dyke MM

Playing for Massed Dance Displays

Morris Ring Meetings

For many years four-or-so Ring Meetings have been held throughout the dancing season, subject to host Sides being identified to stage them. The typical principal features of a Ring Meeting are a coach or walking tour in the host Side's locality, a Feast, an optional church service ...and one or more massed dance displays.

Impromptu multi-Side displays may also occur, such as during individual coach tours, though it is the more formal pre-planned ones involving all attending clubs that concern us here. These usually feature a public address system, which helps ensure that the music is clear and fully audible across the dance arena.

It is with justifiable pride that, as expressed in Newsletter No. 128, "Massed dances are one of the things the Morris Ring can do well...". This doesn't come about without significant commitment, forethought and shared effort.

The Morris Ring Musician

The Squire, or their deputy for the event, will usually invite one player to lead the massed dance musicians. This is an individual recognised as having the knowledge and skills necessary for the role and may be an experienced player from the home side or another suitable musician.

The appointment of this 'musical director' was initiated by the then Squire, Geoff Jerram, in 1987 and is signified by the wearing of a silver medallion that was presented to the Morris Ring by Benfieldside Morris Men in memory of their musician, concertina player Tom Prince. Cast into its surface are the first six notes of Tom's most requested tune, "Bells of St. Mary's".

The role is, essentially, three-fold...

1. To determine the required tunes and tempos for the massed dances
2. To direct the assembled musicians (the 'massed dance band')
3. To lead the playing of the tunes, or nominate a suitable alternative player

Organisation and Execution

Exploring the implications of these three points a little further...

A list of the dances to be included in massed dance displays for the coming season is determined by the Squire of the Morris Ring and routinely circulated to clubs via an Autumn edition of the Bagman's Newsletter, along with a request that Sides practice them in anticipation of their taking part. Generally speaking, these will be widely known dances from the Cotswold Morris canon.

Some basic additional direction may also be included, though as it's not readily practicable in the context of a Ring Meeting to ensure a faultless consistency in interpretation and rendition, it is inevitable that some variation in performance will arise from time to time. As regards the dancing, this is rarely a cause for significant concern, as whilst each Set will determine its own version, differences are unlikely to prove disruptive and may even add interest for the audience. If the music

is not as consistent as possible, however, the sound broadcast across the dance arena can become confused and indistinct - a consequence that has been charitably described as audible 'mush'.

The Morris Ring Musician's first task, then, is to decide upon the correct version and key for each tune and make that known to all players. Whilst this might conceivably be something that could be communicated to all attending musicians in advance of their arrival, in practice it can tend to be a detail that's left to be shared immediately prior to the performance, if at all; so it behoves the Morris Ring Musician to ensure that that doesn't occur.

A neat end to the tune is important for a defined conclusion to the dancing, so instruction as to how that will be achieved, along with any signal to be employed, is also to be commended. (The late Jim Catterall, for example, used to turn to face the musicians and raise his enormous Paolo Soprani melodeon above his head, then bring it down forcibly on the last note ... and woe betide anyone who played a sound after that!)

Whilst the Morris Ring Musician will normally lead the playing, occasions will arise when it's prudent to pass-on that baton to another player who's better used to the particular tune or Tradition in-hand, in which case the Morris Ring Musician should so direct.

The dancers need to be able to hear the music clearly, so intelligent use of the public address system is required. It's usual in respect of most dances, for the music to commence with a 'once to yourself'. As with almost any other dance setting, this introduction is best rendered solo by the lead musician. Apart from signalling the assembly to prepare to dance, this custom establishes the tune, its rhythm and perhaps most importantly, its tempo, for the information of both the dancers and the other players.

If there's but one microphone, the lead musician plays to that. If more than one, the leader needs to be happy with the nature and balance of the sound produced by any additional players using them and must have the mandate to direct accordingly.

All players not contributing directly to the arena sound via the microphones should stand back so as not to add unnecessarily or intrusively to the amplified output. A distance of at least two meters is ideal and, combined with the players not blasting out the tune as loudly as they can, will significantly reduce adverse effects from both the dancers and audience' perspectives, whilst also reducing interference with the playing of those at the microphones. Playing staccato and avoiding dragging basses helps create a crisp overall sound, so notably reduces 'mush'.

The sound of the lead player's instrument must predominate, so, unless otherwise directed, other players – including those at the microphones – need to control their own output volume so as not to overwhelm that primary sound. All must continue to bear in mind that their purpose is to support the dance and not seek to be more prominent than each other. A good yardstick is that if you can hear your own instrument above those of your neighbours you're probably playing too loudly. That said, being able to hear oneself play is essential to ensure accuracy and, for some instruments, tolerable tone production, so good sense and empathy balanced against necessity needs to prevail.

Individual clubs will have their own interpretations and habits with respect to any given dance and this is no less so when it comes to the tune and how it is played. In order to avoid 'mush', however,

every musician when part of a 'massed dance band' needs to put aside their regular renderings and ensure that they play in concert with the lead player. This is no different to when playing in any smaller group, but the adverse effects are inevitably so much greater when one or more instruments sound out-of-place in such a large one as a massed dance band.

As part of the organisation of the event, every effort should be made to put time aside in advance of the first massed display for all musicians who wish to play along in the massed band to be gathered together to be briefed by the Morris Ring Musician. This is an opportunity to relay the basic 'rules of engagement', practice together the tunes to be used and deal with any queries or problems arising. If it's practicable, an hour thus spent on a Friday evening, say, in 'honing' the performance in advance will pay dividends when it comes to the quality of presentation and responses from the dancers, the audience and indeed, fellow instrumentalists. That said, many will want to play in the massed band simply because they are there and not doing so would detract from their enjoyment of the event, so if they are unable to attend a briefing the Morris Ring Musician may wish to offer direction in their regard immediately prior to the performance. Excluding someone from taking part is never desirable, but a rogue player who fails to 'fit in' can at best prove an embarrassment, whilst one whose efforts impose adversely upon the performance could potentially ruin the occasion for all. (The inclusion of a brief guide in the event's 'welcome' pack' may also prove helpful - see Synopsis below.)

As regards the tunes themselves, to once again ensure clarity and avoid 'mush', these are best kept limited to their basic structure so as to provide the dancers with only the signals required to encourage their best performance. The addition of unnecessary chords, harmonies or counter melodies, not to mention 'twiddly bits', really must be avoided. Any desirable deviation from or addition to the essential melody and its related expressions and dynamics can be directed by the Morris Ring Musician, but should otherwise be avoided.

Synopsis

There is doubtless much more that can be said regarding finer details and each Ring Meeting will throw-up its own idiosyncrasies and problems to be solved. The following summaries will nonetheless serve as an adequate aide-memoir for all musicians choosing to play in a massed display band and if issued in advance will reduce the risk of displeasure or disappointment...

Taking the lead ...and following... for massed dance displays

Leading a massed dance band?

- ☐ know required traditions & tunes
- ☐ choose keys to best suit band (or not, if you dare!)
- ☐ brief band on expectations
- ☐ practice together if possible
- ☐ arrange playing area – microphone(s), space
- ☐ choose key players to be amplified

- ❓ play to lead both the dancers & the musicians
- ❓ choose a “typical” tempo (you can’t get it right for all!)
- ❓ don’t play to a particular Set, but strike a happy mean
- ❓ clearly indicate finish to band

Playing in a massed dance band?

- ❓ know traditions, tunes & keys
- ❓ watch & follow leader - not dancers
- ❓ play the leader’s choice of tune version and key
- ❓ keep clear of microphones unless asked to use one
- ❓ don’t play louder than the leader
- ❓ ignore your Side’s usual tempo
- ❓ play staccato, with only light bass (if any)
- ❓ add no embellishments
- ❓ finish on last note - cut dead!

Clive D 3/23

With thanks to the late Jim Catterall, Mike Chandler, Charlie Corcoran, John Jenner and Brian Pollard.

The Hansa

I am currently Squire of East Suffolk Morris, but I am also Chairman of the Ipswich Tourist Guides Association and through that work I have recently been introduced to a major international cultural organisation, The Hansa. There are some two hundred member towns and cities across northern Europe, including eight British towns – Ipswich, Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn, Boston, Hull, Beverley, Edinburgh and Aberdeen – and listening to the way in which the groups, particularly in the East of England, are looking to expand the work of the Hansa it occurred to me that this could present an excellent opportunity for Morris Sides to develop links with communities and dance teams across Europe.

The modern Hansa organisation has very clear aims:-

Today, the Hanseatic cities are reconnecting with their great past: In 1980, the International Union of Cities THE HANSA was founded in Zwolle to revive the common heritage of the Hanseatic era. Any town or municipality that belonged to the historical Hanseatic League or was associated with it (e.g. as a kontor, trading post or through regular trade relations) can become a member of THE HANSA. Today, it is no longer about asserting economic interests, but rather about exchange and cross-border cooperation. The Union of Cities aims to promote the cultural heritage and Hanseatic identity in the member cities and to work together for a united and peaceful Europe. Essential topics of cooperation are tourism, culture and sustainability.

The Hansa has an excellent web site that illustrates their work and shows the extent of the organisation across Europe - <https://www.hanse.org/en> Their Headquarters are in Lubeck, but the annual gathering can be in any of their partner cities. Here, the current chairman of the British arm is very keen to develop links between our Hansa towns, and the English Hansa Cultural Trail has been established, running from the ferry port at Harwich.

We're really pleased to be able to report that the English Hansa Cultural Trail is now on the main Hansa website:-

<https://www.hanse.org/en/union-of-cities-the-hansa/cooperation-projects/hansa-england-route>

I know that many Morris teams have developed connections with dance teams and organisations in mainland Europe, but I feel that here is an organisation that could present enormous opportunities for Sides to get further involved with European cultural activities. The people I know here in the Ipswich branch are keen to see where a connection to the Morris World could lead, but clearly, moving forward will be entirely up to individual teams to make contact with their local Hansa group. If your team is interested I would be more than willing to help to put you in touch with the organisation, but I would urge you to explore the possibilities that are on offer. Ed Worrall, Overseas Rep for the Morris Ring, is also keen to help Sides that would like to take this further.

Mike Garland

Squire, East Suffolk Morris, and Past Squire of The Morris Ring.
mike.garland1@btinternet.com

Ed Worrall

Past Squire and Overseas Rep, The Morris Ring.

Morris Ring Publications

Matt Simons Editor of the Morris Dancer
matt.j.simons@icloud.com

On-line Links:



The main MR website with lots 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 for inclusion in the next Newsletter. Less time-dependent updates and longer pieces will be saved 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).

the MORRIS RING
founded 1934