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Future Events - 2024

11th – 13th Oct

The Illustrious Order of Fools and Beasts Unconvention 2024 - Birmingham

This year, I am pleased to announce that we are joining in with Jockey Morris' Day of Dance. On Friday night there will be supper, bar, music/dance workshop and singing! On Saturday we will be travelling to the centre of Birmingham by train, so don't forget your Railcard, if you have one! (Travel costs are refundable if you wish). Jed is providing the Feast at the Centre. AGM and workshop on Sunday. Various accommodation available. Price has been kept at £80; this includes supper, two breakfasts, Saturday lunch and Feast. Sunday lunch may well be a small buffet: eat – or take home!

18th - 20th Oct

The Morris 18 - 30 2024 Tour

The Morris 18-30 are breaking new ground for their 22nd tour in the historic towns of Warwick and Stratford upon Avon, which have not previously been visited by the group. There will be indoor camping at 2nd Warwick Sea Scouts, St Nicholas Park, Pickard St, Warwick, CV34 4PR. (Access to the hut only from 9pm.) We are a team of morris men aged 18 to 30 (ish) who come together once a year to dance, have fun and make new friends along the way. Expect leap-frogging, side quests and much more besides.

There will be a tour of Stratford Upon Avon on the Saturday and Warwick on the Sunday - and possibly dancing at a pub Friday evening (definite maybe).

18th Jan 2025

2025 Jigs Instructional

The Morris Ring Jigs Instructional will be on 18 January 2025, as last year in Sutton Bonington near Loughborough. This is open to anyone from any of the JMO clubs who is confidently performing set dances from at least one tradition, an opportunity to work on your dancing skills and your performance skills. Expect a very intensive day looking at Cotswold jigs and how to dance them well. We'll provide expert tuition, great music and all meals for a very modest cost. There is limited indoor camping available for both Friday and Saturday nights. The pub sessions, particularly on Saturday evening, are outstanding. Contact jigsinstructional@themorrisring.org for more information.

1st Mar

Annual Representatives Meeting 2025

The AGM for the Morris Ring will be held as in previous years at Oak Farm Hotel, Cannock. Email with booking form to be sent out soon.

26th 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.

13th September

Ripley Day of Dance – Celebrating 100 years of morris dancing in Ripley

In 2025 Ripley Morris in partnership with Ripley Green Garters will mark the 100th anniversary of the first recorded instance of morris dancing in Ripley which took place in 1925. Morris dancing in Ripley evolved from the Ripley Folk Dance club formed in 1925. To assist in planning sides are requested to indicate interest by email to ripleymorris@hotmail.com with the subject Ripley 100 by January 31st 2025.

Squire's Musings

My previous Musings went out in early May as the season started. I'm writing this as the season is winding down, and I hope all of you have had a good dance season and have remained dry and well, particularly when the weather has been less than co-operative.

I have been rather busy, here and there over the country. I've tried to meet as many of you as I could, but it's inevitable that there are lots of sides I haven't been able to get to, and I am sorry for that. Let me start with this year's Ring Meetings (RM).

Over the last decade, the format of RMs has shown a significant change. Less common now is the Friday to Sunday event where we are accommodated somewhere with catering etc. This is down to a variety of factors: schools, an affordable and favourite location in the past, are becoming much less affordable and complex to hire, as they are having to make as much of their facilities as possible now with tightening budgets, to which must be added the increasing paperwork, H&S etc that is a fact of life these days. Hiring coaches for tours has become much more expensive, and combining them all, likely prices and bureaucracy are perhaps going to be just too much – and sides must have members prepared to do all the organising! Day events, on the other hand, are becoming more attractive.

The first RM of the year was a day-long celebration of Cambridge MM's centenary in April, described in the last Musings. The second RM was over three months later at Stratford-upon-Avon on 10 August, marking 65 years of Shakespeare Morris. This was also a day event, ably organised by Shakespeare, with dancing at several locations in the lovely town of Stratford, including one by (William) Shakespeare's birthplace, ending with the traditional massed show, with display dances, at the Bancroft Gardens close by the RSC. Sides there were from all three organisations; from the Ring were Gloucestershire, Flowers of Ilmington, 1st Sedgley, Jockey and Anker as well as the host team. The mayor of Stratford attended the final show, making him my third mayor of the season (see below). At that final show I had the privilege of admitting formally another Associate side to Full Membership of the Ring: Flowers of Ilmington did an excellent dance and it was a pleasure to be able to give their Squire Nigel Dunn their staff of membership and to see the feeling of achievement they showed (see photos).



Presentation of their Ring staff to Flowers of Ilmington at Stratford, 10 August 2024 (Photo taken from Facebook, photographer unknown)

Two weeks later all the officers were all up in Uppermill for that regular feature of the Morris calendar, the Saddleworth Rushcart. I can't list all the sides who were there lest I overlook someone, but it was a thoroughly enjoyable and strenuous weekend, and I will say that I was delighted to be able to dance there with my own team, Devil's Dyke MM. Saddleworth MM (SMM) organised it superbly as ever (even the weather behaved). You all know that with the need to pay for traffic management and now more medical support, the 'Cart is getting ever more expensive to put on, but the results of SMM's intensive fundraising have paid off and the future looks rosier than it has done since Covid. The Ring has been working closely with SMM to help where we can to secure things for the coming years.

The last RM was a one-day event at Peterborough on 28 September, marking Peterborough MM's 45th anniversary. To start on a sad note, the day was also dedicated to Pete Shaw (1948–2024), the founder of the side in 1979, whose funeral was the day before the meeting. On the brighter side, the day was sunny, quite in contrast to the rest of the week, and I saw some excellent dancing. As well as the Treasurer and yours truly, 15 teams were present, including from the Ring, the hosts, Leicester, 1st Class Stamp, Letchworth, Thaxted, Rutland and Golden Star, and members of Jockey, Thaxted, Lincoln and Micklebarrow, and Taylor's. For me the highlight was being able to watch Golden Star dance formally into the Ring (with three sides up!) and to give their staff to their Squire, Emma Shear-Elliott (see photo). They are truly an excellent side and we now have three full Ring sides in Norwich.



Presentation of their Ring staff to Golden Star, Peterborough 28 September 2024 (Photo taken from Facebook, photographer unknown)

So where else I have I been? One thing I was advised by my predecessors was not to go out every weekend. Nonetheless, I think I have been able to respond positively to every invitation I've had, and I have also invited myself to some events.

At the end of May, Sunday 26th, I went down to the lovely town of Rye to join East Surrey MM for their annual walking tour. You will have read in the previous newsletter the sad news that ESMM are not presently planning events for next season due to lack of dancers, and so I thought it was more important than ever for the Ring to show its support to one of our founder sides. Rye is beautiful, and ESMM were accompanied by Greensleeves, another founding team, and also by Black Swan Border Morris. I had a great time with all of them, and even came out unscathed from a border dance. We had lunch with the Mayor of Rye too. A new man for ESMM was dancing in that day, and I was honoured to be asked to present him with his rosettes! There was an added bonus that the last shows of the day take place in Winchelsea, so not only was I able to dance there, but also to visit the grave of one of my few heroes, Spike Milligan.

The following weekend (1–2 June), I was out more locally at the Thaxted Morris Weekend. So as to meet as many teams on the tour as possible, Helen came along and drove me around the different tours so we could see them all. In the evening I compered the massed shows, attended the feast, watched the Horn Dance, and then stayed over for the church service and dancing thereafter on the Sunday. It was an excellent weekend. And even more locally, on 9 June I was out in Letchworth on their DoD walking tour of the town, with a mixture of sides from all three organisations.

The last week of June was rather special. In my 32 years of dancing I'd only ever encountered the occasional person from a "traditional"/ "original" side, but within a week I'd had the good fortune to watch five of them! On Sunday 23rd, Headington Quarry Morris Dancers (HQMD) put on a small event in the Quarry to mark 100 years to the day of Cecil Sharp's death. I and the Bagman went along to represent the Ring and was able to see HQMD dance on their home patch, outside the Mason's Arms, accompanied by Mister Hemmings Traditional Abingdon Morris Dancers and Taunton Dene MM. The dancing was followed by a number of talks on aspects of Sharp's work, including ones by Michael Heaney and Keith Chandler. It was a fascinating day from so many aspects.

And it continued the following Saturday (29th), when I joined the Traditional Ilmington Morris Dancers in their home village who were celebrating 50 years since their 1974 revival. Dancing with them were Traditional Bampton Morris Dancers, Chipping Campden Morris Dancers, Faithful City MM and Gloucestershire Morris. The weather was beautiful and meeting and watching three sides with long histories outside the Howard Arms, the Red Lion and at other significant places in the village was very special indeed.

The next two weekends took me to the seaside. Devil's Dyke were invited to the Lobster Potty Festival in Sheringham for the first time on 6 July, alongside regular attendees Peterborough, Leicester, Kemp's and Northampton and many sides from the Morris Federation and the Open Morris. That was another excellent event, giving me the chance to meet a lot of sides across whom I had never come before. The weather was variable but we survived—I should commend Peterborough for continuing to dance in an true cloudburst.

For the other seaside event, I went in the other direction, down to Lyme Regis in Dorset for Lyme Morris' Day of Dance on 13 July. Lyme is a beautiful place, a very traditional seaside town. The day began with a procession along the Marine Parade, in which I accompanied the Mayor and Town Crier at the head of all the other teams, and then there were several dance spots within easy reach of each other. I think there were about 20 sides there from the three organisations; from the MR were Dartington, Exeter and of course Lyme. I enjoyed it very much, and it was good to meet so many sides new to me, especially Beltane.

After four successive weekends, it was good to have a break until Stratford (see above), where I completed my trio of Mayors. I then took myself to Winchester for their walking tour of the city on 7 September. I was made most welcome and had a delightful time with Winchester MM, East Surrey again, Westminster and Ravensbourne. Yet again East Surrey asked me to do a presentation, this time to three members with 50 and 30 years in the team. I really hope they keep going at least until their centenary in 2026.

The last thing (other than Peterborough) I did before writing this was to represent the Ring with the Bagman, Squire-elect and previous Bagman at the Morris Federation's Day of Dance and AGM on 21 September. Peter went on his own last year (I was going but was struck down by Covid) but I think it's the first time the Ring has had quite such a physical presence at another organisation's AGM. Events like this show that the JMO concept does work for bringing us all together, as there is so much more that unites us than divides us.

So that brings me up to date. There are no applications for Ring Meetings in 2025 yet, so please give some thought on whether your side would like to organise one. We know already that Adlington MM are going to be organising the next JMO DoD on 26 April 2025 in the Stockport area for the MR, so that's something for your diaries.

It has been a summer of decent dancing and great company and fellowship—the Morris at its best!

Virtually every side in the country is now going back into the practice and recruitment season, and so I wish you all well in all your efforts. We all know recruitment is still very difficult, but I know you'll do your best!

Good luck and all the best to all of you and your sides,

Nigel

I'd like to end with an important message to everyone.

In view of something that came to my attention earlier in the year, I feel I must remind all sides and their members how important it is to behave respectfully to other dancers, whether in their own side or organisation or in one of the others. Some of you may be aware of the Home Office's "Enough" campaign launched a couple of years ago. This includes calling out what might seem like trivial actions that cause discomfort to other people or make them feel harassed. There are many similar campaigns around, and the Ring is also committed to ensuring that people can participate in Morris events without concern about being harassed, and to remind everyone to call out anything they see that they feel is inappropriate. None of us want to bring the Morris into disrepute, and as Squire, I'd be very grateful if all Bagmen pass this on to their members.

From the Bagman's Desk

Whilst the Squire has been rattling round the country, I have not been idle. I won't give you the full diary, but highlights included Warwick, Sidmouth and Bromyard Folk Festivals. Sidmouth in particular was a personal highlight as I entered the John Gasson Jig competition for the first time. For those possibly not aware, it is worth reading up on and considering entering if you enjoy performing jigs. Unfortunately I didn't place this time, but I'll be back! Congratulations to Sam Overbeck of Ten Hill Morris, Mass, on his well deserved win, played for by no less a person than Richard Arrowsmith of the Melrose Quartet (and a former squire of Jockey!).

On that point, please note the Jigs Instructional is back at Sutton Bonnington in January, see 'future events' for details. I'll be there with a fair wind so look forward to seeing you there! Also coming up is the JMO in Stockport, organised by Adlington Morris Men on behalf of the Ring. Please do consider making the journey as Adlington are getting a very positive response from the local council, which is encouraging in the face of increased bureaucracy throughout the country. There's even talk of discounted hotel rooms for those wishing to stay for the weekend.

One important item from me, please make sure you update your side's details on the Morris Ring website if officers change at an AGM. It can be very time-consuming tracking people down as we send out communications and notices for membership subs. If any assistance is required in accessing your side's information please get in touch.

Please see notices of the ARM and election of the next bagman below. It's been an honour to fill this role for what will be 4 years by the time I step down, but I feel the time is right for someone else to have a go.

Peter



A brief moment of glory at Sidmouth (**Photo by Ben Potton**)

New Guide for Morris Side Officers

Paul Redhead has been helping the Officers greatly with constitution matters and particularly with safeguarding and Equality advice since 2021-2022. He has recently written a Guide for Morris Side Officers. In the Guide's own words:

"The smooth and successful running of a Morris side depends largely on the voluntary efforts of its officers. Traditionally that's Squire, Bagman and Foreman, and although titles may have changed and other roles created, the basic jobs remain the same, and taking on any of those roles can be a daunting task. Describing those roles, and providing a framework for carrying them out is what this Guide tries to do. It doesn't contain rules, and it doesn't teach how to dance. It's just a compendium of ideas on running a successful Morris side, to take / leave as you will, in the context of your own side. Every side is different so there's no one 'correct' way..."

It's a set of useful ideas for sides who might be uncertain about any aspect of how something could be done. As Paul says, there are no rules here, and no-one is telling anyone how to do something. That is very important, as the role of the Ring is to help and advise, but not dictate, to its membership.

We thank Paul for his efforts and this and other things, and we hope that members will have a look at it and find something useful in it for them.

It's available at <https://themorrisring.org/sides/guide-morris-side-officers>

Notices

Notice of the ARM

Notice is hereby given that the Morris Ring will hold its Annual Representatives Meeting (ARM) at Oak Farm Hotel, Cannock, on Saturday 1st March 2025. We are hoping to offer a workshop between the business meeting and the feast, so if any individuals or teams would like to help with this section please email bagman@themorrisring.org

Notice of elections at ARM 2025

It is Peter Austin's intention to step down as Bagman at the 2025 ARM. As per procedure any candidates interested in standing for election should send a 250 word statement and photo to bagman@themorrisring.org, along with a letter of nomination from a full member side of the Morris Ring, no later than Friday 20th December.

Appeal for Swords

Members of Dartington Morris are venturing into rapper and are after a set of swords. If anyone has a set of rapper swords that are surplus to requirements please contact baq@dartingtonmorris.uk.

Morris Ring Zoom account

A reminder to all sides that we have a dedicated Morris Ring Zoom account for online video conferencing. If anyone would like to use this Zoom account to host an online event, then please get in touch. Please ensure that any such event is appropriate to the aims of the Morris Ring and is also conducted with these aims in mind.

An Interesting Discovery – Nigel Strudwick

When the Bagman and I were inspecting the stock of Morris Ring staffs held by him to find examples for the two sides who were to dance in this year (Flowers of Ilmington at Stratford, Golden Star at Peterborough), we made an interesting discovery. In addition to (fortunately) two blank staffs, we discovered two older ones, the identity of one of which was unclear, but the other was very clearly painted down the length at one end with “Wargrave” and “Morris Ring” in large letters, and around the circumference at the other end in smaller letters “October 1934” and “Francis Fryer – Bagman” (see photos). The name Wargrave rang a distant bell, and a quick call to Matt Simons confirmed they were a side who had been in the Ring from the very early days—they seem to have been a forerunner of the current Kennet Morris, for which see the article on the Ring web site by our esteemed Web Editor, Peter de Courcy (<https://themorrisring.org/article/south-berkshire-morris-men-uncovered>). Fryer was very prominent in that area of the country in the pre-war period. I first encountered Wargrave when reading the booklet *Fifty Years of Morris Dancing* from 1949 (see <https://themorrisring.org/50-years-booklet>). [I should preface any further remarks by saying that I am not a Morris historian and am unfamiliar with lots of sources, so please correct me (as I’m sure you will) on what follows!]

The evidence of this staff surely indicates that they were admitted to the Ring at the Inaugural Ring Meeting on 20 October 1934, as they are mentioned as being present at that meeting on p.6 of the printed *The First Log Book* by Walter Abson, a transcription of which was published by the Ring in 1991 (one relevant part of it is at <https://themorrisring.org/about-mr/history>). As far as I can tell, this document does not specifically note their admission to the Ring, but that is presumably in the official minutes. Although clearly distinguishing them from the six Founding Sides, the *Fifty Years* booklet does call them an Inaugural Member, along with several other sides.

Wargrave were among the teams that were formed subsequent to the publication of EFDS News in 1934 announcing the formation of the Ring in Thaxted in June 1934. They hosted the sixth meeting of the MR in 1936. Peter deC’s latest reference to them is in 1952, and it would be good to know when they called it a day. If anyone has information about how and when the Wargrave staff was returned to the Ring it would be gratefully received. There is a piece of paper bearing the word “Wargrave” stuck onto the staff by—I would guess—a Ring Bagman at the time of its return.

I thought it would be of interest for the membership to be aware of the existence of this staff, as it is clearly an important object from the beginning of the Ring and a key document of an Inaugural Member, and should be kept somewhere safe. For the latter reason, I contacted Chris Wildridge (MR Archive Group chair) for advice, being aware that—as I have said at more than one ARM—3D items cannot be added to the Ring Archive at the Essex Record Office (ERO). Following enquiries, Chris got back to me saying that the ERO **was** prepared to accept “totemic items”, such as a side’s staff, as a deposit, and so it looks like the safely of the Wargrave staff is assured for the future.



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 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).

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).

