

The Morris Dancer

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THE MORRIS DANCER

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*Cover Picture: Căluș dance at the Saxon fortress church in Cristian, Sibiu, Romania.
Photo: MediaWiki*

At the 2014 Jigs Instructional, the three Editors agreed to remind readers what sort of material would be accepted for each Ring publication. In the case of The Morris Dancer, it is any article, paper or study which expands our knowledge of the Morris in all its forms and associated traditions. It is better that the text is referenced, so that other researchers may follow up if they wish to do so, but non-referenced writing will be considered.

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Editorial

What has always interested me is the ‘authenticity’ of revival Morris dancing¹. Even the word “revival” carries with it an implied questionable authenticity, since much of what is danced as the Cotswold ‘tradition’ has been mediated by collectors of indigenous English dance and by the revival sides who perform the dances. It is clear that the badge of ‘authenticity’ carries with it a sense of ‘worth’. What is indigenous traditional dance *worth* to that society? Does it have a social value to the members of that society? And how does revival traditional dance convey *authenticity* and *worth*?

Since the 1960s, dance anthropologists have given the study of dance a higher profile in the academic world, taking a broader cultural, multi-disciplinary view of dance in its social context. Such writers as Theresa Jill Buckland and Susan L Foster have expanded the study of dance into ethnography and cultural theory. The study of dance in a broader, culturally sensitive, context driven and politically sensitive (that is: feminist, gender-critical, cross-cultural and notions of the body) way has redefined the area of study as *Critical Dance Studies*. Such studies have re-shaped the way in which dance, including traditional dance, is appreciated and understood within its cultural context, and redefined the way in which dance is appreciated as an ubiquitous human activity.

I suppose the question to ask here is why study dance? It is simply because dance is so ubiquitous in human societies. It is clear that dance is a basic facet of all cultures and, I would suggest, folk dance is a common phenomenon at the root of every culture with a history. The movement of bodies in space to music or a rhythm is almost a defining aspect of all such cultures and where these are dances grown from within and by that culture, we find ‘folk dance’. Such folk dance reflects an aspect of the cultural building blocks of the identity of that society, although not necessarily recognised or feted by said society. So I would argue that the study and appreciation of folk dance in its cultural context gives us a window through which to view that culture, our culture, and thus is *worth* studying.

However, the all-too-common trope that an indigenous folk dance is free from external cultural influences and is passed down through history without change is, of course, a fallacy. Every social phenomenon is subject to influence from any number of sources. For instance, there are many examples of state manipulation of indigenous folk traditions for nationalistic purposes. Anthony Shay (2002) has documented ‘how state-sponsored national dance companies from countries such as the former USSR as well as Turkey, Egypt and Mexico accommodated their repertory and choreography to the prevalent state politics.’(Helena Wulff, 2015) In the USA and in England early 20th Century collectors and revivalists had both social and national agendas in their efforts to revive indigenous folk dance traditions. As a consequence, collected folk dance material has been mediated and manipulated to conform to the prevailing cultural imperative. And the Morris is no exception, as is well documented.

So, to return to our mutttons, as Rablais says. The academic study of dance, whilst expanding our appreciation of this cultural phenomenon, seems to me to treat all forms of dance as equally relevant. All manifestations of bodily movement deal with meaning, function, cultural context and choreographic form or a combination of these elements, but in academia, less so with authenticity and value. Academic rigour and formal systems of dance notation, such as Labanotation, give the

¹ Here, I am thinking more in terms of Cotswold, Border and Molly since my knowledge of North-West Morris, Sword and other traditions associated with ‘The Morris’ is embarrassingly sketchy).

Tango dance ethnographer useful tools to compare and evaluate this form of dance, but does a Brazilian Tango danced in a studio in New York have the same 'worth' as a Cotswold set dance danced by a revival Morris team in Coventry town centre, although both can be critiqued using identical academic tools. More pertinently, does an Abingdon Morris display on Mayor's Day have the same cultural resonance as a newly-formed Border side's display of their own invented material in Buxton? Of course not, I hear you say, the former is 'traditional' and the latter a contrived modern construct loosely based on some sketchy collector's notes. The implication here, of course is that identifying a dance as 'traditional' adds extra cultural value or worth in some way.

We all believe we have an empirical ability to judge the relative quality of things in our culture. A painting by Van Gough is demonstratively worth more than one by Mrs Jones from the evening art class. A house with a view over the Lake District is usually considered to be worth more than the same house in a large inner-city housing estate (my apologies to those of you who live on an inner-city estate). Of course, many factors operate on this kind of evaluative reasoning: in art, it is rarity, quality and status. But in dance, particularly in our area of interest, Morris dancing, the worth of a dance is linked to some of these factors, but also to its' cultural standing. But this is not always true; a state-sponsored choreographed display of Russian folk dance, whilst being an amazing display of grace and athleticism, seems somehow inauthentic, a piece of theatre rather than an indigenous regional folk dance. The Riverdance for example, is traditional Irish dancing on steroids, produced for mass consumption. But is revival Morris in the same category? Is it simple mimesis, a tidied-up version of the original traditional village entertainment and somehow worth less as a result? Dear reader, I leave it for you to ponder and judge for yourselves. However, we must remember that without the collectors and the revivalists, much traditional folk dance would have vanished from these shores, so maybe therein lies at least part of its cultural worth and authenticity.

In this edition of the MD, I reproduce an article by Liz Mellish and Nick Green, originally presented at the 'What to do with Folklore?' International Interdisciplinary Symposium, Institute of Ethnomusicology SRC SASA, 24-29 September 2009 and Trapped in Folklore? Studies in music and dance tradition and their contemporary transformations, 2013. A very good juxtaposition of Romanian folk dance and English Morris dance, well researched and including some interesting analysis and an insight into Romanian traditional dance that most of us may be unfamiliar with.

George Frampton's look at newspaper reports of traditional Molly dancing is an excellent and thorough piece of research. Let us also hope that, like Jameson Wooders, George will continue his researches and turn up some more fascinating Morris history.

As well as providing us with a memoir, John Jenner has listed some excellent material for future researchers in our field in his second contribution: the Travelling Morris and Old Dancers. It certainly demonstrates how much time and effort the TM spent in talking to the old dancers and validating their practice from the horse's mouth.

An intriguing glimpse at a tangential but relevant part of Morris history is provided by Jameson Wooders. I can only hope that his curiosity will take him into other neglected corners of our tradition.

Peter Harrop's response to Julian Whybra's articles in previous editions of The MD. Julian is not a writer who steers shy of holding a controversial view on folk tradition, however if one holds to this standpoint, one must expect some well-researched flack.

Finally, I include an excellent article on Border Morris developments since 1963 by John Swift. Well researched and comprehensive, I have learned a lot from John's writing and I hope when you read it, you will appreciate this facet of English traditional dance a lot more as a result. John's essay on the Border tradition is a must-read for anyone interested in both Cotswold and Welsh Border Morris, being an excellent encapsulation of Border's history and development in recent times.

It is my aim as Editor to provide a space in which writers, traditional dance historians, ethnographers, anthropologists and anyone interested in the study of Morris dance and associated traditions, can share their research and ideas.

In this time of the Covid-19 pandemic, I hope you all stay safe and well.

Mac McCoig
October 2020



Molly Dancing. Cambridge MM on Plough Monday 1989, performing 'Birds a-Building'. Photo: George Frampton

Traditional folk dance performance in the 21st century: Romanian *căluș* versus English Morris: revivalist versus ex-communist?

Liz Mellish and Nick Green

Introduction

Since the late 19th century, when rural ways of life began to disappear, a variety of approaches have been undertaken to record, preserve and even revive rural folklore in different parts of the world. Many of these approaches have led to new or adapted forms of the original material which most 'traditionalists' regard as 'folklorism'. In this paper, the authors will consider the ways that this dilemma has been resolved in two specific places, Romania and England, in connection with the theme of this book 'trapped in folklore' by focussing their discussions around two specific traditions, the Romanian *căluș* and English Morris. Research into rural traditions, dance and song started in both countries around the same time. However, after 1948 Romania followed the Soviet model of folklore performance, with an abundance of professional and amateur folk ensembles and regular national competitions to stimulate folklore production, whilst in England folk dance has remained as a minority interest, despite revivals occurring in the 1960s and 1970s, and the term 'folk' is often seen as having a rural uncultured image.

The aim of this article is to make comparisons between these two traditions by focussing discussion towards three specific questions: 'what is the state of the performance today?', 'how are these dance forms viewed by locals and as part of their nations' culture?' and 'where is this going or likely to go in the future? We address these questions from the perspective of a connection to the community, taking a hypothesis that the state of performance of the folklore is related to the wider community's perception of the folklore, and that the performers of these dances do this for recreation as part of their social life.

Romanian *căluș* VERSUS English Morris

Romanian *căluș* has predominantly two forms, the *căluș* healing ritual of southern Romania (also found in the neighbouring regions of northern Bulgaria) that takes place every year at the time of *Rusalii* (Pentecost) and the *căluș* dances of southern Transylvania and Banat which are performed as part of the new year rituals (see for example Kligman (1981) and Giurchescu (1992)). English Morris is best known for the dances documented in the 'Cotswold' villages in the southern Midlands of England which still continue to be danced in a few villages. However, there are similar dance practices documented in the southwest Midlands, now commonly referred to as 'Border Morris', in eastern England, as 'Molly dances' and in Lancashire and Cheshire, in northwest England there is a different form also referred to as Morris, or 'Clog Morris'.¹ English Morris dance has been part of several 20th century folk revivals, and it was early in this revival history, by 1912, the myth that Morris was a survival of ancient ritual customs had been initiated (Buckland 2002: 419). These revival Morris teams are connected through three country wide associations; The Morris Ring, The Morris Federation, and Open Morris.²

Similarities can be seen between the older village versions of English Morris and Romanian *căluș* in terms of the participants and their performance. Both have teams of men with a leader and involve

1 England also has several hit-and-sword dancing traditions which are not connected to Morris, although often included within 'Morris' by dance enthusiasts.

2 The websites for The Morris Ring, The Morris Federation, and Open Morris can be found at <http://www.theMorrisring.org/>, <http://www.Morrisfed.org/> and <http://www.open-Morris.org/> (all accessed 21 January 2012).

dances in which the dancers perform a set of rehearsed steps and figures in unison, in some cases with the aid of a prop such as a stick. Most often the dancers wear some form of costume based on the local rural dress of white linen with coloured ribbon decoration. By setting out these points of general similarity the authors are not intending to endorse any proposal for mutual origins.³ In this paper this comparison is intended to provide a starting point for a discussion comparing two similar dance traditions in two different folk dance constructions and the use of these within the community. An important difference between Morris and *căluș* is the continued belief in the function of the *căluș* healing ritual, compared to Morris being a form of dance performance predominantly for gaining money.

Both *căluș* and Morris have a long history of performance, with the earliest documentary reference to English Morris being in 1458 (Cutting 2005: 103), however, there are tentative references to Morris in England during the preceding centuries. The earliest archival documentation, recording the performance of ritual *căluș* dances in front of groups of noblemen in Transylvania, is dated 1572 (Bârlea 1982: 35–6) and by the mid-19th century the *căluș* tradition in Transylvania was being used as a means of reinforcing Romanian identity during the period of Hungarian rule (Martin 1985: 119).

History of research into rural traditions in Romania and England

Research into rural traditions, dance and song started in both countries around the same time. In England at the start of the 20th century the collector Cecil Sharp was largely responsible for the interest, documentation and revival of Cotswold Morris. He collected dances and tunes, and published these in a series of books dating from 1907 (Sharp 1907, Sharp, Sharp and Macilwaine 1910, Sharp and Macilwaine 1911).

In 1909 the Morris dance was included in the Board of Education's syllabus of physical exercise (Sharp and Macilwaine 1910: 7), and in 1934 six clubs founded 'The Morris Ring', which became the national association for Morris men (Peck 1949: 1). In Romania, research into folk dance started around 1910 under the auspices of the Romanian Academy, and in 1921–22 the academic Romulus Vuia⁴ published an article on the origins of the *căluș* (Vuia 1997 (1922)). The ritual aspects of the *căluș* tradition have been the subject of extensive scholarly works in Romanian literature (Oprisan 1969; Semuc 2009; Stancu 1997) together with discussions on the appropriation of this tradition as a national symbol during the communist regime (Giurchescu 2001: 115–117, Giurchescu 2004, Kligman 1981, Proca-Ciortea 1978) and the listing of the *căluș* tradition as UNESCO intangible heritage (Giurchescu 2009; Mellish 2006).

The first occasion when Morris met *căluș* was at an international folk festival held in London in 1935. The participants at this festival included a Cotswold Morris team and a *căluș* group from the southern Romanian village of Pădureți (Howes 1935: 14). The *căluș* dancers created a stir in London by refusing to dance until Douglas Kennedy, Chairman of the English Folk Dance and Songs Society (EFDSS), scoured London to locate fresh garlic for their ritual flag, as without this they did not consider they would have their supernatural powers (Giurchescu 2004, Mellish 2006: 5). After the Second World War the dances included in the *căluș* ritual were choreographed into dance suites which were included in performances by the wide network of folk ensembles that were established

³ This view has sometimes been part of speculative discussions in popular culture. For example see the Wikipedia pages at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morris_dance and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C%C4%83lu%C5%9Fari> (both accessed 21 January 2012).

⁴ Romulus Vuia (1887–1963) was the first director of the Transylvania Ethnographic Museum in Cluj. In Romania early research into folk dance was also undertaken by Niculescu-Varone (1884–1994) who travelled round villages collecting dances in the period from 1919 to 1934 (Niculescu-Varone and Gainariu-Varone, 1979), and the ethnomusicologist Constantin Brăilou (1893–1958).

based on the Soviet model of folklore performance, and from 1976 an annual *căluș* festival was held in the town of Slatina (Giurchescu 1990: 53). At the same time the practice of the ritual *căluș* was forbidden in villages as part of the central drive for modernisation (Kligman 1981; Mellish 2006).

Despite a succession of revivals since Cecil Sharp's activities, particularly those in the 1950s, and 1970s, English Morris dance has remained largely a minority recreational interest for urban participants who formed a community network linked by a mutual interest, or what Turino terms as a 'cultural cohort' (Turino 2008: 235). Some teams in the 1970s revival challenged the Morris Ring's conservative approach by creating new styles and forms of performance presentation and in particular the rule that limited participation only to men, by allowing women to participate in the dancing (Buckland 2006: 26). In parallel to these developments, in the Cotswolds a few village teams continued, or were revived, based on continuous dancing of their tradition within the village community.

What is the state of the performance today?

Căluș and Morris both continue to be performed in Romania and England respectively. In Romania, the *căluș* ritual is still performed in a few villages, there are also village based groups that only perform *căluș* dances (Giurchescu 2004), and the majority of urban based folk ensembles throughout Romania include a suite of *căluș* dances in their performance repertoire. In England there is a cultural cohort network of revival Morris teams that are linked through one of the three nationwide organisations, and these teams are formed from members that are often lifelong enthusiasts and continue to dance in the teams from youth to well past retirement age.

In both Romania and England, the traditional or folk dance repertoire included dances for social occasions and dances for performance only. In general the performance forms are centred on men's dances, originally performed only by all male groups, whereas the social dances are for mixed participation of men and women in couples or circle formations. In post Second World War Romania, social dance forms were arranged for performance to an audience by choreographers from folk ensembles. This transfer from social dance to performance has been far less prevalent in the English folk dance world, with only occasional attempts to choreograph social dances for performance to an audience. Thus social dances have remained as a participatory form used only at social occasions.

The Romanian dance ensembles have maintained the gender separation for the performance of dances that were originally men's dances, but the ensembles have brought the social dances to the stage for mixed gender performance. It should be noted that the ensembles also have social events at which the members participate in the social dance repertoire in their un-staged form. In the Morris teams many have progressed to become mixed gender teams or have invited both men's and women's team to events, which leads to mixed gender performance of the previously male dominated performance dance.

The *căluș* tradition used to take place in villages, being performed in the street or house courtyards, with the *călușari* going for house to house performing their ritual as required by the households. Similarly Morris was performed on the street or in other available spaces, and these performance spaces have been maintained by the various revivalist movements. In Romania, performances by folk ensembles and village dance groups now usually take place on a raised platform or customised arena space which gives a different vantage point for the spectator, whereas Morris is nearly always performed at the same level as the audience. This is probably in line with the cultural expectations in the two countries. In Romania, facilities such as theatre stages, open air theatres and temporary stages are readily available for events, and these provide a location that has audience areas with good viewing positions. In England the hiring of such facilities is expensive and generally beyond the

finances for folk groups. Also the cultural linking of these to high arts events leads to a desire from many of the revival folk participants to separate their dancing from such an association.

The participants of the dance have changed due to the transfer of dances to the English revival teams and the Romanian ensembles. As mentioned above the Romanian *căluș* dances were originally from certain regions, hence there was once a locational limit to participants. However, it is now included in the performance repertoire of ensembles from all regions of Romania⁵ and in the same way, Morris from the Midlands ('Cotswold' in the south Midlands and 'Border' in the west Midlands) is now danced by groups based in all regions of England. Linked to this transfer to a nationwide participation is an increase in urban participants. The revival movement in English folk dance has a significant urban base (see for example the list of Morris Ring member teams (Peck 1949)). Many of the ensembles in Romania are urban based and the participants are typically university students and graduates, although there is also a strong base of village groups whose participants are either children or of mixed age. There is a historical difference between Romania and England in people's connections to the rural village. In England, by the early 20th century the industrial revolution had given rise to a predominately urban population, with the majority not retaining family connections to a village, whereas in Romania the increase in urbanisation took place only after the second world war and many Romanian urbanites still maintain regular contact with their family villages where elderly family members still reside. As discussed above, the gender mix has changed; since the 1970s the revival Morris teams have included, firstly women's teams and later many mixed teams, blurring the previous gender separation between performance and social dance forms, whereas Romanian ensembles usually have an equal number of male and female dancers, but only the men perform the *căluș* dances.⁶ These changes in participants appear to have put the English Morris revival and the Romanian ensemble membership to approximately the same basis; a mixed gender social group dancing for recreation, from countryside locations and there is a significant membership of urbanites. In terms of the people involved, the authors suggest that the motivation for dancing and socialising in recreational traditional dance groups is the same in England and Romania. Today, Morris dance takes place in the revival side and is regarded as a social activity, with a focus on an English pub and in some cases is more social than dance!

During the Romanian communist period potential choreographers attended a state organised training scheme, and more recently local training schemes have been set up in the main cities of Romania. In Romanian ensembles, dance instruction is usually undertaken by the ensemble choreographer who in many cases gained his or her dance knowledge through their own participation as a dancer in one of the urban ensembles, but often also had a village background. Dance instructors' connection with urban ensembles does lead to the dissemination of urban performance ideas into the villages setting, but this is not a new phenomenon, as Bartók noted that Romanian communities are 'inclined to take over the habits of performance of urban people' (Bartók 1967: 4).

In England, Morris teams and folk dance groups can be started by any keen person. These individuals are often from the social dance environment and have little trained dance experience. Through the 20th century the Morris Ring organisation was instrumental in maintaining the quality of revival teams by organising teaching workshops, however, the desire to remain as a 'folk' activity in English culture perceptions could be viewed as leading to the reverse of the Romanian situation. Performance ideas appear to have moved in opposite directions. Morris dates from the period of genteel, graceful male dance, yet the post 1970s developments have a tendency to depict the rural as rustic and ungraceful,

⁵ This is mostly true for the southern *căluș*, whereas the Transylvanian and Banat *călușari* are seldom included in folk ensemble's repertoire outside of their regions of origin.

⁶ In Romania we have observed a recent trend for the inclusion of women performing dressed as men both in *căluș* dance suites and during suites of couple dances where the ensemble has a lack of men.

but this could be part of a general trend in male dance in 20th century England as well as a reflection on the way that rural life is viewed. In Romania the ensembles strive for the grace and control that comes with dance training, and stage presentation skill with an aim to depict the village as refined. The choreographed version of the *căluș* dances performed by folk ensembles had certain features of the original custom removed as these were considered inappropriate during the communist period (Kligman 1977: 36), and the dance is choreographed to highlight finesse and virtuosity where ‘dancer’s dexterity is officially acknowledged and rewarded’ (Kligman 1981: 150). The participants in the Morris Ring revival teams aim to try and maintain the Morris dances without making any changes in the manner of performance from the village teams in the Cotswold villages. However, after the 1970s revival, re-inventions and creations were added to the repertoire of English Morris, with these more recent performances having vigorous dancing, often in diverse brightly coloured costumes, in comparison to the genteel nature of earlier Cotswold dancing. These changes may be more to do with the cultural expectations in the two countries than with debates on the ‘correct’ preservation of folklore. A valid discussion could consider allowing performances to change to find a new purpose in the community versus allowing creativity to give life in artistic terms, but will too much artistic creativity lead to a short term fashion and not a community tradition?

How is this viewed as part of the nation’s culture?

The different histories of *căluș* and Morris have influenced how these two traditions have continued to be practiced, accepted and respected within their local communities. These aspects are important to the continuation or preservation of a tradition both in terms of those who perform the dances and the audience, as without acceptance, the local community is unlikely to provide an appreciative audience. A ‘living’ tradition might be seen as one where the community of participants use their creativity to change and progress the dance into new art forms, for example some of the post 1970s English Morris. However, this can also separate the ‘living’ tradition from the local community, leaving the appreciative audience as those predominantly from within the cultural-cohort, so only a network of interested enthusiasts. We have found during our research in Romania that the local forms of music and dance are often still used in the local community, both in towns and in villages, and are given respect by the community, including those that choose not to participate. This leads to less change and creativity in the performance practices, but a continuing participation in traditional dance and music activities in the wider community. The authors would suggest that the underlying views of ‘rural’ or village life in England and Romania can be considered as a major factor in how the *căluș* and Morris tradition are viewed by the mass of the population in England and Romania.

In England, rural is often viewed as rustic and uncultured, so English Morris dancing with its rural associations is often ridiculed in the British media and on television. It is not seen as a cultural treasure, instead it is often considered as a social activity on the edge of the community. This leads to media comments such as,

“But we are distancing ourselves at an ever-increasing rate from our folk culture. [...] the English folk dance and song movement has been reduced to a curiosity, an anomaly, almost an object of ridicule” (This Is Bristol 2009).

“A lot of people have misconceptions about Morris dancing. They don’t know anything about it but choose to ridicule it” (McGregor 2004).

“The Morris Ring claims the stereotypical image of men prancing about in colourful costumes, waving handkerchiefs at each other with bells attached to their knees, isn’t appealing to youngsters who consider the past-time an embarrassing relic” (Weatherall 2009).

Alternately, those within the newest revival movements claim that the interest in Morris among youth is increasing, possibly indicating the start of another cyclical revival,

“There are more people dancing various styles of Morris dancing than there has been for a long time” (McGregor 2004).

“But North Morris dancers claim that just isn’t true and that there is plenty of young blood coming through” (Weatherall 2009).

Unlike England, many Romanians view the village as the heart of the Romanian soul and take a pride in their rural heritage and consequently view the local music and dance, including traditional *căluș* as a national treasure that is worthy of preservation for posterity. Around 2003 an application was made to UNESCO for the recognition of the *căluș* as UNESCO intangible heritage, and this status was granted in 2005 (Unesco 2005). The suite of *căluș* dances takes pride of place in staged folklore performances, and is widely conveyed this way in media. For example, the Romanian dance talent show ‘Dansez pentru tine’ (the Romanian version of ‘Dancing with the Stars’) which is broadcast on the national Romanian Television channel TVR2, regularly includes *căluș* dances ⁷ whereas similar English shows include ballroom, Latin American, contemporary, or hip hop dancing, but certainly no Morris. One of these ‘Dansez pentru tine’ performances was led by choreographer Marin Barbu and involved a mock contest between the Doina Gorjului ensemble dancers and the contestants. Marin has a family history of *căluș* and is now a star in his own right through his involvement with this television show.⁸

But why is this? Maybe the closeness of much of the Romanian population to the village holds the rural dance and music in higher respect? Maybe the various folk dance forms still form part of the lives and memories of much of the population? In England the widespread community use of such village traditions died out mostly by the twentieth century, leading to Morris and other folk traditions being predominantly a revivalist recreational interest for only a small part of the population.

Where are these traditions going?

The final question under consideration is where might be the future for these two dance traditions in terms of participants, community and change. In England, dancers can remain actively participating in performances for longer compared to the Romanian ensembles which tend to have a continual new entry of youth and retirement of the older members, who remain active in social events whilst occasionally dancing as ‘veterans’. Recently in Romania there has been an increased interest in local dance, the folk ensembles currently have a strong younger membership, who in time replaces the older members in the adult groups. Many expected that after 1989 the organised ensembles and their form of dance would be rejected due to their close links with the communist regime. However, despite many ensembles and dance groups closing in the early 1990s due to the withdrawal of state funds and a dip in enthusiasm for folk related activities, from around 2005 renewed enthusiasm has led to an expansion of groups in all parts of Romania, and an increased interest in Romanian traditions such as *căluș* that many view as part of Romanian cultural heritage. Is it that the stronger links to rural life

⁷ See for example http://www.protv.ro/video/dansez-pentru-tine_wilmarkreinventeaza-calusul-romanesc_2523.html (accessed 21 January 2012) or <http://dansezpentrutine.protv.ro/video/12702/pagina/91/momente.html> (accessed 21 January 2012).

⁸ An on-line video of this performance can be found at <http://video.acasa.ro/muzica---videoclipuri/doina-gorjului-vs-dansez-pentru-tine-trupa-de-dans--234e3fad47fa8eabf03a.html#> (accessed 21 January 2012).

have led to the integration of village ensembles into the village structure (in schools and on festive occasions) often with support from the local mayor? Maybe the higher regard for folklore performance, possibly due to the image portrayed by the higher aesthetically developed urban ensembles, allows individuals to participate without ridicule? Does the stage representation of folk dances meet current expectations in performance?

So could the difficulty Morris has in its image be related to the performance not meeting the expectations of the wider urban community? There is a recruitment issue with many dancers ageing, but this is not helped by the negative image of Morris and the lack of connection to the community, although there are a few locations with village traditions that do regard their heritage with respect. It may be that the situation in England a century ago more closely matched that of current Romania. Although there are many more people actively participating in Romanian ensembles compared to England, and there is a much greater exposure in the community, in some areas of Romania, one can see the genre of local dancing is becoming less of a customary practice, or habit, at events, and more of a tradition, a practice continuing as a tradition that is respected.

In the Banat region of Romania we have researched the network of activities run by an array of dance teachers in collaboration with local schools and “culture houses”. The sponsorship by the mayors and schools, local competitions and teaching of traditional music all helps the integration of traditional dance groups into the local community in Romania. A similar initiative through the schools can be found in the teaching of molly dancing in the Fenland region of England, in this case funded by a central source and provided by a single organisation,

“World Festivals Ltd who have been successful in obtaining funding to teach molly dancing, local story and traditions in Fenlands schools since 2003. The Heritage Lottery Fund has supported three projects with an investment of nearly £300,000. Our World Festivals have so far, taught over 2000 primary school children to dance”
(Molly Dancing 2012a)

Returning to the ideas of creativity in performance, the inventing, recreating and adapting of traditions which can be seen in some the 1970s Morris revivals, several decades later is not seen as particularly representative or respected in the wider English community, or integrated into the local community. However, the creation of the so called ‘Border Morris’ thirty years on is showing a strong following with many groups across England and so becoming a tradition in its own right. The ideas of artistic creativity are part of the direction for spreading and teaching molly dancing and other forms of English folk traditions,

“Stimulus to develop their own, often unique, style of dance, music and costume”
(Molly Dancing 2012b).

“Aim to capture an atmosphere, style and vigour that may be associated with the ploughboys of old and of the wild, barren, dangerous nature of the landscape in which they worked” (Molly Dancing 2012b).

This idea of the art form of traditional dancing having an intentional creativity and positive desire to stimulate creative thinking is in contrast to Romania where there is generally less change within the current framework of the choreographic adaptation for the typical stage performance. One could argue that the existence of traditions is by definition a situation where there is less change so that the tradition has meaning to a wider range of generations in the community, although some adaptations and creations naturally become popular and set the path for the future dancing. There are some attempts to modernise and adapt to the current society, such as,

“The Demon Barbers bring traditional rapper sword dancing bang up to date by mixing it with hip hop and techno soundtrack. Now the group has just been awarded a £25,000 grant from the Arts Council to create a brand new show in the spring” (Yorkshire Post 2009).

Will this create a new direction and popular form for the future, or is this a creative idea that will only have temporary meaning to one generation?

Conclusion

This paper set out to consider to what extent two specific traditions, Romanian *căluș* and English Morris have continued to be practiced as living traditions and so have not become ‘trapped in folklore’ in a form that resisted change. It did not attempt to examine these in terms of the few villages where these traditions still exist within their communities, but in terms of the wider organisation of dance groups that continue to perform these traditions in the respective countries in the twenty first century; the revival Morris teams of England and the folk ensembles of Romania.

We have put forward the ideas of ‘respect’ from the wider community and the role of ‘creativity’ as factors that have affected the image of these dance traditions. A living ‘tradition’ or revival has to be accepted and respected in the wider community and deliver performances that meet the community’s expectations in order to continue as more than a minority interest or cultural cohort. Many Romanians view traditional *căluș* as a national treasure worthy of preservation for posterity, and as a dance which takes pride of place in staged folklore performances, whereas English Morris dancing is frequently ridiculed in the British media and is considered as a social activity on the edge of the community. This difference in opinion may be related to the different histories of urbanisation in the two countries which leave the English dancers without a connection to a rural location whereas many Romanians are still closely connected to their family villages. In the Romanian case the performance has moved to stage locations, and choreographic features have been added that allow the performances to be part of the current expectations for TV media and festivals. This ease of adaption to current media presentation seems to have been aided by continued teaching and the organisational structure instigated by the initiatives of the previous socialist government, something that the predominantly socialist “folk” movement in England has not wished to pursue.

The use of ‘creativity’ to take the dances to an artist activity by introducing changes to the format is minimal in the Romanian case. This means that performances continue to resonate with audiences from a wider background and age range. In the case of English Morris attempts have been made to integrate creative versions into the current community, but it is possible that this may create a temporary ‘fad’ which only fills a niche in contemporary culture.

The authors would conclude that the two different approaches taken have enabled the performance of these two genres to continue and that in both cases the course of action taken has been determined by external factors that are specific to the original location of the folklore.

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Călușari dancers from the Olt region of southern Romania. Photo: Catalin Stoenescu

'Bedizened in Faded Finery' – Traditional Molly Dancing from Newspapers

George Frampton



The Little Downham molly dancers, 1933 (copyright, William Palmer estate).

Most of what we know today about the Cambridgeshire Plough Monday/Boxing Day Morris or Molly dance tradition is derived from four Cambridge-based academics and one professional folk singer in the mid-twentieth century. Each encountered people who once took part in their respective villages, and retrospectively describing their experiences. These interrogators were Joseph Needham, Arthur Peck, William Palmer in the 1930s ¹ and Russell Wortley from the 1930s until his death in 1980 ². Add to that musician Brian Cookman in Little Downham village alone ³. What is missing from their findings is any contemporary eye-witness account of the day. These could only live, of course, in diaries and newspapers. Today, thanks to the computer, Google and its associated search engines, the job is much easier. British Library Newspapers too, is in the process of digitising its paper collections, but is stymied by time and funding considerations and, as I type, has ground to a halt! However, whilst it was still readily accessible at its bespoke newspaper library in Colindale Avenue at Hendon in the 1990s, I amassed a collection of information from which this article is drawn. On visits to Cambridge and Sheffield, I also copied what was relevant from the late Dr Wortley's files at each location, by which to draw comparisons.

Newspaper research ought to come with a health warning, as readers of the so-called tabloids may concur or ignore. They are choc full of editorial comment, obscuring events of the day. But at least, they did give us a snapshot of vernacular Plough Monday practice. One further problem in this task, is that Plough Monday practice not only could comprise Molly dance, it might also include plough drawing (or 'witching'), 'mumping' or 'lomping' (which was 'begging with menaces' not to put too fine a point on it), and children begging. In the parts of Cambridgeshire where Molly dancing was practised, there were no mumming plays as in Lincolnshire and the counties to the west for which we can be fortunate in simplifying things.

Rather than simply giving a blow-by-blow chronological commentary of examples, I have organised them into three sections: Plough Monday in the villages around Ely, the same around Cambridge, and lastly, how the day was commemorated in Cambridge city itself.

Around Ely

In fact, it was Cecil Sharp who set the ball rolling in a song hunting tour, where he met a Robert Grimditch in Ely Union, who told him about the Molly dancing he participated in at nearby Little Downham, unaware the custom was extant.⁴

But our first newspaper report from the district comes from January 1854, which related:

‘On Monday last, ... the grand affair of the day was a party of men gaily decorated with ribbons of many colours, they had a violin and a banjo, and paraded the streets of Cottenham, Landbeach and Waterbeach as Morris-dancers. Surely when the poet wrote of the ‘shadowy morris dance’, he had not in his imagination such substantial realities as were seen on Monday; for these men, reality in their vigorous steps which could hardly be called ‘shadowy’ or come under the appellation of the ‘light fantastic toe’. However, they seemed in high glee, and the coppers were given freely, which were very acceptable, as most of the performers through the bad weather, were out of work.’⁵

We must wait another 35 years before we hear more; a less than sympathetic report from 1890, even if the date for Plough Monday was misconstrued or ought to have been a week earlier that year!

‘Plough Monday. This ‘day of days’ amongst the farm labourers was unmistakably recognised at Ely on the 6th instant. On which occasion, several men and youths desiring to keep up the old custom, decked in gay ribbons and other striking apparel, pounded the streets, and performed a series of ridiculous antics – much to the amusement of groups of schoolchildren who were wont to follow them.’⁶

Plough Monday at Stretham in 1894 was shunned by its Molly dancers, leaving it to ‘the small boys’ going round from ‘eight to nine o’clock went round pleading for money, and ‘men dressed up in all manner of costumes, and with their faces and hands coloured’ went round the houses, while ‘several parties dragged ploughs around the village. ‘On Tuesday, two or three parties of Morris dancers accompanied with ca concertina paid visits in the village. Everything passed off very well.’⁷

At Waterbeach, the same newspaper reported in 1895 that ‘although through the fall of snow directly after Christmas, ploughing has not been completed, a number of young men determined to keep up Plough Monday and, bedecked in female attire and grotesque costumes, danced round the village.’⁸

Circumstantially, three years later in 1898, it was reported how ‘Plough Monday was well-observed in the (Waterbeach) village. Several young men – one in female attire – paraded the streets, accompanied with plenty of music, and finished up at ‘The Hopbine’.⁹ It should be appended, the word ‘Morris’ or ‘Molly’ is absent, and no dancing is cited, although one might ponder on why the music?

The Morris dancers’ continued existence was acknowledged at Waterbeach the following year, as it was cited how ‘the festival was duly observed in the district on Monday, and the ‘Molly Dancers’ were well-supported. In the following week’s issue, we learn that ‘the Molly Dancers’ congregated at The Hopbine Inn and partook of an excellent supper, the proceedings concluded with an enjoyable dance.’¹⁰

A report for January 1913 spoke of Plough Monday in Wilburton, describing boys begging for coppers as well as plough drawing by an older team. In addition, we are informed 'The villagers were further amused by the antics of the Morris dancers.'¹¹

Whether or not, Cecil Sharp's presence in Ely sparked an interest in 1913 at Little Downham is unknown. However, that year, we learn

'... Parties of five dressed and beribboned in a most grotesque fashion to represent various beings, human or otherwise, arm themselves with a broom, sweep a space in front of your door and perform an energetic Morris dance, ending with the usual solicitation for coppers ... In years gone by, one of the figures was always adorned with a tail, which must have meant something ...'¹²

The following year, this was followed, saying:

'The ancient custom of the 'Molly Dancers' has been observed this year with greater gusto than usual ... The dresses were extravagantly ornate, and a most respectable and well-behaved party started the tour of the village in the morning hours ...'¹³

The Little Downham dancers are specifically reported for the last time in 1934, when 'a party of Molly dancers attired in toppers, blackened faces and gaily-decorated uniform paraded many parts of the parish, singing and dancing over the broomstick.'¹⁴ I say 'specifically', as in 1937, 'Plough Monday was celebrated according to the old traditions. A party in fancy dress armed with a broomstick and an accordeon, paraded the village, but were not accompanied by the decorated plough.'¹⁵

These two references to the use of the broomstick as part of the Molly dancers' performance at Little Downham deserve comment. The broom dance was usually performed under cover, inside public houses and social functions. In formulating the brief repertoire of his Mepal Molly Men for 1977, Brian Cookman was unaware of any newspaper references, unless he was told by surviving Downham members of the Shelton family who formerly took part. Despite their buffoonery with brooms seen every January since then, the original Mepal members were more controlled in their humour, compared with recently. Personally, I love 'em, having guested this year as a 1930's Biggles-masked character this year (based on Palmer's photographs)!

Around Cambridge

But the remaining research more or less focused on the villages around Cambridge, as that was where anything remotely 'danceable' existed, such as Joseph Needham's findings in Girton and Histon. In 1948, Russell Wortley interviewed centenarian Joe Kester in hospital. He was originally from Hardwick to the west of the city, but told his enquirer about other villages in the area which had Molly dance teams and which, in their time, would engage with each other in Cambridge on Plough Monday, before dispersing to their respective villages.¹⁶ One of these places was Haddenham.

The first we hear of this was in 1890, when 'In keeping with the old practice, a number of individuals on Monday, in attractive 'get-up', promenaded the streets, and performed a few antics which passed for 'Molly-dancing', evidently to the satisfaction of the juvenile portion of the community.'¹⁷

No further clues as to the nature of the dancing, and the same newspapers offer any further idea on 15 January 1892, when it tells us that 'Plough Monday was recognised here in the usual way: the Molly Dancers going round, &c.'¹⁸ In 1895, the story was reiterated, adding '... the Molly Dancers going about in the evening.'¹⁹ Hillrow lies on the westernmost fringe of Haddenham village, and the same newspaper appended the report that a wooden plough was taken round there. However, two years later, its news stated, 'Last Monday, the Molly dancers went round as usual, and in the evening a piece

of wood to represent a plough was drawn through the village by the farm lads...'²⁰ It seems facile to interpret the Molly dance reported, pertained to Haddenham owing to its proximity, and the fact that the plough drawing at Hillrow was mentioned in 1895.

In 1899, we are told that at night on Plough Monday in Haddenham, '... several young men gaily dressed in women's attire and with blackened faces, tried their best to give selections of music and clog dancing ...' adding further that the plough drawing and its associated whip cracking has 'almost died out'.²¹ Circumstantially, the passage just cited refers to molly dancing with a defined step, although not cited as such. Also, this is a rare reference in text to 'blacking' being used by molly dancing. Until 1974, no photographs of any Molly dance team had ever been published.²² There may be other interpretations today when the practice of 'blacking up' has become an issue with its allegations of racism, but I must add that either it was not thought then to be an issue so why mention it?; or no open question of disguise or facial disguise was ever asked by Wortley and others, but if it was volunteered, it was done without prompting.

In the villages around Cambridge, it is difficult to give a precise date when molly dancing ceased there – or in the city itself. However, in 1899 at Girton 'Plough Monday passed off very quietly. A few ploughboys of about 25 years of age went round the village to the music from a concertina.'²³ Not mentioned specifically as 'molly dancers' of course, but thanks to Joseph Needham, one might speculate this being their identity, as at nearby Histon, the same newspaper that year says 'The 'Molly dancers' were not represented, as the fellows that generally formed the band have gone away or found something to do ...'

Into Cambridge

The earliest reference to Plough Monday dancing in the city itself was in 1841, when it was reported 'Our streets were, as usual, filled with lads and lasses from the country, bedizened in faded finery, and dancing to anything but sweet music ...'²⁴ The writer admitted these dancers didn't demand a heavy tax on its onlookers, but was otherwise disapproving in his tone. It appears that four years later, a similar group or groups were more aggressive:

'On Monday last, the town was infested by predatory bands of truculent rustics, dressed in an outlandish and savage guise, who paraded our streets in companies of six or eight, and after executing a wild and somewhat terrific kind of dance, they surrounded passengers and made violent incursions into shops, demanding money ...'²⁵

The reporter goes on to suggest this took place 'until the evening' when they were succeeded by mumpers armed with sticks demanding halfpence, reinforcing the notion of competing Plough Monday celebrants, albeit at different times of the day.

The 1846 account given here is easily the most endearing and graphic, saying:

'We had a fine importation of ploughmen and ploughboys as well as imposters ... who entreat you to 'remember the poor ploughboy.' The town for the time seemed all alive. Fiddles were scraped in every street, the dancers capered most vigorously, and ploughs rattled over our pavements ...

One little circumstance, however, occurred during the day which gave rise to an introduction of some of the holiday folks to the magistrates on Tuesday morning. It appeared that two dancing parties met together in one public house for refreshment, and a trial of rivalry sprang up between two gipsy fiddlers, of the rival clans of the Smiths and the Shaws, and the latter broke Smith's fiddle about his head, for which he sought recompense. "I'll tell yet what it was" said Shaw to the bench. He played so infernally out of tune, which he knows I can't abear, that I gave him a knobber, and I'll pay for't." "You

will?" says Smith, "then drop twelve bob." "Twelve bob?" cried Shaw with ineffable disdain. "Lor a messy, why it's not worth nor three and a tanner; but I'll go to another shop and buy another as good as that poor thing." The Mayor, "That's a fair offer. Go and do so." Smith, "Is that what you calls fair? What's he to pay for my head what a'broke? I wish Mr Pym of The Hazels was here, he'd do justice – and no mistake!" The Mayor, who evidently did not like to play second fiddle to any other magistrate, "And so will I if you are so impertinent; there's such a place as the Town-Gaol, so be careful." "Town-Gaol?" says Smith with amazement, "Come, Shaw. Let's go and get the new fiddle." And the two rural Paganinis left the court.'²⁶

It is rather easy to read that passage glibly and with amusement. Joseph Kester told Russell Wortley that gipsy violinists were often called upon to supply the music, Larry Shaw being given the nod during his Hardwick dancing days. We don't know whether he or a namesake was the 1846 miscreant! Although the agricultural services of the travelling people were on demand during key seasons in the nineteenth century, rather than as social pariahs viewed by some today. Family feuds were known to exist – both in travelling and settled population, and the Smith-Shaw dispute was perhaps part of that. Who knows?

In 1850 'the town was, as usual, thronged with mobs of those pathetic nuisances, the Molly dancers. The collections being at an end, the men, the women too, speedily found their way to public-houses, and there, dissipated their gains before returning home to their respective villages...' ²⁷ The reporter then unfairly included whip cracking and mumping in extending his last sentence without bothering to investigate the mutual independence of such troupes.

The 1846 account tells of 'truculent rustics from the neighbouring villages who, from daylight in the morning till a later hour in the evening, went through the streets dancing to the sound of a fiddle. They were accompanied by men dressed in smock frocks with little wooden boxes slung over their shoulders in which they deposited the halfpence collected in the everlasting wooden spoon...' ²⁸

In 1857, it was reported that 'others with fiddle and 'molly', danced away to the no small amusement of the juveniles ...' Not, however apparently, to the public, whom the reporter disapprovingly claimed was molested by these intruders who used 'all their exertions to get a halfpenny from every passer-by.' ²⁹ However, a rival journalist was more sympathetic, appraising

'... the host of rustics from the neighbouring villages in a variegated and grotesque attire ... some being dressed as soldiers, and the get-up of the 'mollies' in many cases, would have deceived a practised eye had not their antics been more immodest than those of the most immodest women. Their awkward 'pas de grotesques' however, were the means of bringing them plenty of coppers ...' ³⁰

In 1859, the Plough Monday story was compounded with an unfortunate occurrence which the reporter attributed to Morris dancers:

'A sad accident also occurred in Bridge Street during the morning from the ridiculous exhibitions of Plough Monday. A party of Morris dancers, some of the fellows dressed in female attire, were ringing bells, cracking whips and dancing, while a boy was driving a horse with a tumbril. The animal was blind and, being frightened, ran away knocking down the poor boy whose name is Ryder and who lives in South Street. The cart went over the boy's back. And the horse continued its career up the Savings Bank where it was stopped by Mr W Ellis who lives opposite ...' ³¹

Despite the apparent enormity of this exaggerated description, the reporter went on to own that the boy was sent home from Ransom's surgery, but was 'progressing favourable.'

It was said briefly in 1862, 'some danced (with) huge whiskerless fellows being attired as the 'Molls' (with) the begging boxes ... thrust under the nose of every passer by ...'³² In the following year, it was noted that 'groups of ploughboys, ornamented in ribbons and gay attire ... paraded the streets and went through various jigs and dances ...'³³ In 1865, it was reported 'a quantity of wild, bucolic dances were executed in the street to the enchanting accompaniment of a hurdy gurdy and badly-tuned fiddle.'³⁴ The following year, 'parties of 'mollies'' perambulated the streets, without any mention of dancing.³⁵ But in 1869, 'groups of ploughboys ornamented in ribbons and gay attire' going through 'various jigs and dances'.³⁶ In 1872, a journalist set himself up as a musical connoisseur, describing 'several 'wopstraws' (accompanying) a very indifferent plough with a still more indifferent fiddle, and a still more indifferent 'Mary' (sic) (who) paraded the streets for 'jist one ha'penny.'³⁷ The same newspaper in 1878 related the year's 'exhibition of ploughs and Morris-dancers dressed up ... (but) a tame affair (with) not more than one or two of these displays ... (were) seen on the streets.'³⁸ We are uncertain as to the truth of this, or if there was any underlying reason for any decline in the festivities, as in January 1881 'the customary troupes of Morris dancers attired fantastically in ribbons and rosettes, paraded the streets of the town and, not to be outdone, some juveniles organised a company of their own and, with blackened faces, sought by their own ludicrous gyrations, to cozen the public into the bestowal of 'coppers' ...'³⁹ In 1893, 'rival troupes of Morris dancers paraded the streets of the town, extracting the nimble penny from all they could influence, and being most consistent in a regular visitation to the public-houses on their way ...'⁴⁰ When asked by Russell Wortley to recall the last occasion the Hardwick dancers performed in Cambridge, Joseph Kester was hard-pressed, but the estimate was at some time during the 1890s. An 1899 account elucidates '... although the festival has almost died out of late years, there were two or three sets of Molly dancers parading the streets in the most extraordinary 'get ups', soliciting coppers.'⁴¹

Russell Wortley's Findings in Context

Let us conclude by putting into context some of Joseph Kester's intimations to Wortley. His subject, born in Hardwick in 1847 and having lived there all his life, found himself in Chesterton Hospital 'because of old age and having no-one to look after him at home, suffering from occasional black-outs due to high blood pressure.' Despite his advanced years, his memory was remarkable, and was able to answer most if not all of Wortley's questions on 17 January 1948. He recalled that sets from all the nearby villages had Molly dance teams, citing Coton, Madingley, Dry Drayton and Hardwick (to which Russell appended 'etc.'). The 'etc.' was, hopefully, evident in a letter to Chris Cawte written in October 1979, where it is assumed Kester had told Wortley that 'they reckoned to get eight dancing teams meeting at Market Hill in the early afternoon ... these were Madingley, Dry Drayton, Girton, Hardwick, Comberton, Barton. Grantchester and Haslingfield.' The Hardwick team 'set out in the morning and walked the 10 kilometres into Cambridge, meeting the Madingley team on the way. Each gang knew their own area of the town for dancing to avoid overlapping, all meeting in the afternoon at Market Hill for an altogether, before starting the walk home.' His younger brother Harry whom Wortley estimated to be around 80 years old told him in 1948, that 'he last remembers seeing Molly dancers 47 years ago in Cambridge when he saw the Girton set dancing in Hills Road – soon after he started work at Foster's Mills' setting the date when teams last danced there around 1901.⁴²

It is a pity that little of this newspaper information was to hand in formulating a Molly dance repertoire for January 1977, otherwise a more vigorous and energetic approach might have been used worthy of the adjective 'terrific' used in text. As it was, Russell Wortley and Cyril Papworth, both over 60 years of age, led workshops based on what they knew or could extrapolate from. In the former's case, using

his own research findings; in the latter's, based on the Comberton feast dances he grew up with – both with interpretation, trying to infuse a little morris vigour into the result. The Cambridge men set the pace in and around Cambridge during the day on Plough Monday and would have continued into the evening at Balsham, but were dissuaded by its villagers who preferred the hankies and the bells. The Mepal Men too, stuck to the Ely area, doing a tour of schools, villages and pubs. I asked if they were ever stopped in their tracks and reminded of the Downham teams of the 1930s, and was informed by some 'they were a welcome sight back'. The ribbons or 'favours' that adorn their jackets are donations from well-wishers whilst on tour. As it is, it took the national folk festival scene from 1979 onwards and Whittlesea Straw Bear festival inaugurated in 1980 to showcase revival molly dancing, led primarily by the Kent-based Seven Champions molly dancers, whose energetic militaristic stomping style became the template for what was to follow. With hindsight, it could have been very different! 43

Notes

1. Joseph Needham & Arthur Peck, 'Molly Dancing in East Anglia' in JFDSS, vol 1, no 2 (1933) pp. 84-5; William Palmer, 'Plough Monday 1933 at Little Downham', in English Dance & Song, vol 36 no 1 (1974)
2. Russell Wortley & Cyril Papworth, 'Molly Dancing in South-West Cambridgeshire', in 'English Dance & Song', vol 40 no 2 (1978); Russell Wortley. unpublished MSS, University of Sheffield, Cambridge Public Library
3. George Frampton, collection
4. Joseph Needham & Arthur Peck, *ibid.*
5. Cambridge Chronicle, 14 January 1854 page 4
6. Ely Weekly Guardian, 10 January 1890, page 8
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36. Cambridge Chronicle, 16 January 1869, page 5
37. Cambridge Express, 13 January 1872, page 5
38. Cambridge Express, 12 January 1878, page 5
39. Cambridge Express, 15 January 1881, page 5
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42. Russell Wortley. unpublished MSS, Cambridge Public Library

43. The author, George Frampton was member of the Seven Champions molly dancers 1982-92 having charted their progress after first seeing them perform in the 1979 Sidmouth Folk Festival and later over the next three years. He has been an associate of the Mepal Molly Men since the 1990s, after having seen them first perform at Whittlesey in 1984



*Photo: The Little Downham molly dancers, 1933 (copyright, **William Palmer estate**) showing George Green (accordeon player and boxman).*



Cambridge Morris Men 1989. Photo: George Frampton

Memories over 65 years of Morris.

John Jenner

Introduction

This article was originally written simply for private reference, but as it may be of interest to other Morris men I have extended it and added points of explanation etc. I met men who knew Cecil Sharp and attended his Summer schools (Rolf Gardiner, Kenworthy Schofield and others) and knew well the founders of the Morris Ring among them Joseph Needham, Arthur Peck and Walter Abson and later many other members of the Cambridge Morris Men, who were active within the Ring, both full members Russell Wortley, Lionel Bacon, Bob Ross and honorary members Douglas Kennedy, Jack Putterill and Morris Sunderland. When I started there were few clubs and the Morris was not well known by the public and I have danced through the great expansion in the 1970's and 80's to the present time of decline in the number of men's clubs and activity, but thankfully it still maintained by a number of keen young men, and also in the Traditional villages and at Thaxted.

Cambridge

For a number of years before I took up Morris I had been to various country dance classes originally to accompany my mother and had certainly seen Morris dancing at least at the Albert Hall. Russell Wortley persuaded me to come to CMM practices in October 1955, then held in St Giles Church rooms in Pound Hill. There were not many of us and they put up the rent to 10/- (50p) a week so we moved out to the Music Room in the Malting House, which Mrs Stewart once again provided free to the men. Practices had been held in that room in the twenties and again in the mid-thirties. There was only one another new man Alan Archer who had also country danced so we progressed fairly quickly under the guidance of Rollo Woods and Russell concentrating on Adderbury and Fieldtown, until there was a full side of men at the practices by about 9.0 'clock when we danced other traditions.

On Plough Monday 1956 we, only four men and Russell to play, went to Balsham (a village about eight miles east of Cambridge) and after a delay Russell persuaded the Plough Boys to take out the plough, which they had done in the previous three or four years, but for some reason they were not going to do that year. Although it was dry and pleasant overhead the roads etc. were thick with very wet slushy snow. We put on bells over our wellingtons and danced as best we could in the conditions. My first public shows, but a tradition that I have always valued since. The summer dancing followed the usual series of Friday evening shows, always Grantchester on the Friday following most exams and in Cambridge at Great St Mary's and the Mill in May Week (the second week in June), with little dancing locally thereafter. I remember one year at Grantchester the show was extended by the audience to an hour and half, much to the pleasure of all but especially the landlord. At the end of term there followed tours of the Travelling Morrice in June and August or September.

Practises and dancing in and around Cambridge continued each year with occasional visits to Thaxted, where the crowded Friday evening sessions in the Bull remain firmly in the brain, including the year when they had a new landlord on the Wednesday. I attended a few other Ring meetings, especially at Whitley Bay, where because I was the Ring Bagman's chauffeur I was offered mushy peas with our coffee (or was it tea) at 11.00 in the morning by Geordie Osborne's family. The feast included "Fish'n Chips a la traditional Englaise" and the fine cockney deputy mayor of Whitley Bay. It was the first and only time that there was massed Rapper during the main show by, I think, seven teams, it was not a success.

We always danced on Poppy Day as part of the University Rag Day sometimes on our own and sometimes as part of the great procession and we continued with this event after Rag Day in November stopped. For many years we danced on King's College front lawn during the Cambridge Festival, in association with the EFDSS. As I said I started practicing in the Malting House, however as it could not stand the stain of dancing we moved around various pubs in Cambridge, including the Burleigh Arms, where they banned us after one dance as the dart board was going up and down as we danced. We then had a long spell in Chesterton Preparatory School, at the bottom of De Freville Avenue, where we were joined one evening by a man wearing only a gown and MA hood, all he said was that he had been drawn by Russell's whistle. Very sad and at the end of the practice we asked the police to take him to Fulbourn Hospital, where he was in fact known to them.

The early seventies saw the great revival in the Morris and we often had three sides up at practices so we had to move to the old school room at the back of St Luke's Church, a very satisfactory place until they pulled it down to make more car parking space. With more men we were able to promise to give special shows at conferences, dinners and fetes. The only fete I remember was at Sawston where we discovered, while parking the cars, that Thaxted had also been invited to dance at the same time, rather than fight it out we agreed on a joint show.

Some of us got involved with an "Elizabethan Jigs" organisation from Stevenage and in 1962 we went to Ingelheim in Germany to perform with them, but also to dance in the town as the CMM in a joint show with the band of the Ulster Rifles, then stationed in Germany. In the evening after the four hour show one of the bagpipers was past playing and had to be stood on stage with his reed removed from his pipe, and the very fine sergeant who was so Irish that I could not understand him, and the show had had to be organised through a German interpreter, could not be found when the band went home and was subsequently taken back to barracks by taxi.

For a few years in the 70's we danced regularly at Elizabethan Feasts at "drug" conferences for foreign doctors organised by ICI. These were very profitable and we danced twice each evening at King's and St John's, alternating with St John's choir, and I remember on one occasion we managed to squeeze in a show in Queens' as well. We danced after dinner at the first big conference at Churchill College where the catering manager tried to convince me that four hundred people would finish their meal by 8.30 pm, so that we could then dance. By 9.00 they were still on the meat course and at 10 we discovered that there were four speeches as well as coffee etc. We subsequently gave a very short show at about 11.45 pm. The Mayor, who I happened to know, was very pleased that it was a short show as he felt unable to leave the table to take place, but very much needed to. Another Elizabethan Feast we went to was in Chelmsford and were surprised to find Ewart Russell (then Bagman of the Ring) was a paying guest, we apologised as we had assumed that Colchester MM had been asked but could not attend, apparently they didn't know anything about it.

In February 1974 we heard the very sad news that Arthur Peck had died after a few weeks in Addenbrookes, William Palmer came to the practice that evening and after an eulogy by him we stood in silence for a short while. The funeral at Little St Mary's Church was very well attended with many Morris men present, not in kit, but the Squire of the CMM wore the brand new silver badge for the first time. The College had arranged a Memorial service in the College Chapel on the same day as our Annual Spring Day of Dancing and I met the Master with a view to us taking part in some way. It was agreed that we should dance on the front lawn with the main gates closed so that the general public did not treat it as spectacle, whereas he would explain to the congregation during the service. The photo of us all dancing Bonny Green Garters was printed back to front in the College magazine with the musicians all playing left handed. In 1995 for Joseph Needham as a Past Master, he was carried in a funeral procession around the College, this was followed later in the term by a Memorial Service in Great St Mary's Church and afterwards by a show outside the church watched by a huge number in

full academic dress and by a crowd of surprised tourists. I have attended many other funerals or Memorial services representing the CMM from 1960 for Kenworthy Schofield and later Rolf Gardiner in 1971.

In 1975 Selfridges built a village inside the top floor with a dancing area by a stream outside a pub and wanted Morris men for a fee there every day throughout the summer. We gave two fine shows to crowds from whom we also collected and between the shows we drank ale at their expense. As Russell had to get back to Cambridge we rushed to the station still in our whites and having drunk quite sufficient joined a very crowded commuter train to the "amusement" of other passengers who tried not to notice us.

We visited Balsham on Plough Monday again once or twice in the sixties, but it was not until 1974 that we started the regular visits. The local plough boys had reformed to support local charities and after one year invited us to dance the Morris during the evening. Russell thought that we should revive the Molly in Jubilee year 1977, so with the help of Cyril Papworth, practises were started in the Michaelmas Term. The first practise was a disaster as Cyril thought that we should dance slowly, as he had been taught by his ancient relatives, however the undergraduates, of which there were many, flatly refused to appear as old men. It nearly came to blows or a walk out but was relieved by Russell playing at Cyril's speed and the men dancing two steps to a beat. However by the next week agreement had been reached between Russell and Cyril and the men's current way of dancing the Molly was devised. Later that year we gave a show in Cecil Sharp House.

Since then we have been out during the day molly dancing, usually starting at Comberton, although it was there in the afternoon in 1980 that Russell collapsed, and despite being attended to very quickly by the village doctor was taken to hospital and died, still dressed as the Molly. For two years we danced the molly at Balsham, but they said they would like us to revert to the Morris as it was showier and we, the dancers, appeared to enjoy it more. A few years ago we revived the Abbot's Bromley Horn Dance, but it was not a great success.

Helmond

While quietly sitting at home one Saturday evening in February 1972, I had a phone call from George Guest, then the well-known St John's College choir master saying that a member of the visiting choir from Helmond wished to enquire whether "there was still Morris in England". I assured him that there was and that we were one of the oldest revival sides. So in mid-April a side of men set off for Holland in order to take part in the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the Helmond Morris Men. They had remained in a time warp from the thirties and had never danced in the Helmond streets, let alone collected. However on the Saturday morning after special permission from the local police "if they do it in England then they might as well do it here" we had a show in a pedestrian area accompanied by music issuing from the street lights. John IV's (Allen) fine fooling was completely new to them. In the late afternoon there was a joint performance in the local museum, surrounded by curious paintings from the War years. They relaxed a little during a social evening together and on the Sunday a show was given to an invited audience of friends and some past dancers. The Helmond side danced only Headington Morris, from a Dutch translation of Cecil Sharp book I, (they also danced Flamborough sword). They danced all exactly the same and very well with straight faces but alas so boring to watch. We were a very scratch side of Travelling Morrises with Robert Ross fooling on the Sunday. The differences between the two sides could hardly have been greater. During the course of the show I spoke with one man, who had been their only connection with England, having attended an EFDSS instructional by Douglas Kennedy, "did I know of him?" (I had recently been to his 80th birthday party). He had his eyes opened, and remarked that we seem to enjoy it more than them. The weekend started our friendly association with Helmond, but also was the start of a rapid modernisation of the

Helmond men. Over the next few years some of us went over for weekends to instruct in various other traditions. John Weaver for Brackley, Antony Heywood for Fieldtown and myself for Bampton. At that time Russell was stressing that Bampton always turned out half way through the rounds and came back on a larger diameter circle. I discovered much later that since my visit they danced Bampton rounds very like Fieldtown. The Helmond Men having interpreted my instructions rather differently. So if even after a weekend with a full side men can get the wrong idea, how on earth did Cecil Sharp get it "right" in one or two sessions from one old man?

American Travelling Morrice

Michael Blanford and others had joined tours of the ATM since its inception and I thought that it was time to investigate the use of our name across the pond, although I had known some of their organisers for twenty years. So in 1994 I joined their 19th tour and after I retired I have been on four more tours, coupled with an extra holiday, including one show with the Vancouver Men where I discovered that village fetes are just as badly organised as they are here. On the ATM I found the traditions danced much the same, but the speed and activity very different. Dancing Sherborne at half our usual speed and twice as high, I was able then to cope with but in recent years I only dance the less active traditions. The number of shows per day is less but they tend to be more formal and longer, the pub sessions are held earlier in the day and men return to camp for supper and singing. However the audiences fully enjoy the shows and the beer, although cold, is good and the company friendly and welcoming to visitors with many stories to tell about the Morris in England.

When the American Travelling Morrice had a tour in the Cotswolds in 2006, the final show was in Campden. As men, maybe 50 in total, moved out of the Eight Bells to go to the Market Square. it seemed sensible to me to process with Winster and the American's just could not believe that the Morris without any prearrangement could take over a village street with no difficulty or permission. In 2015 on another ATM tour a very good joint show with the ATM and the John O'Gaunt Men went on till it was almost dark, I was on traffic duty and as I knew BBG would require the whole road. I stopped a car with its headlights on only to find that in it was the local constabulary. "Don't worry don't let us stop your enjoyment." I had to explain to the crowd that it was anyway our planned last dance and that the police were more than happy.

The TM was started in 1924 and except during the War there has been at least one, mostly two tours each year, although recently due to the lack of younger men and the ageing of many of the regular men the tours have only lasted for half a week.

During the years I have been on at least one tour each a year and there have been so many memories of fine occasions and interesting men, that it seemed best to cover some of these in a separate article.

Back to Cambridge and The Morris Ring

Although we in Cambridge are well aware of our links to the founding of the Morris Ring, we have not been able to attend a great number of meetings, except for Thaxted. Where my first proper visit was in 1958 when I was squire and we were asked to dance as part of the offertory to God in the church on Sunday, this was only the second such occasion and Father Jack went to great lengths to tell the congregation not to mention it outside the church in case the press should find out. How times have changed, not only is dancing in church often at other Ring Meetings, but we have even had the Feast in Thaxted church on two occasions. Conrad Noel would be very surprised but pleased, and I have recently read that there was dancing during a service in 1938.

In 1971 I was bagman for the Cambridge Ring Meeting when over 300 men sat down to the Feast in the Hall of Trinity College, when the unlimited beer cost £105. The week-end collection included exactly £200 in the new 2p pieces. This was, I think, the last meeting when all tours, excluding the two Cambridge walking tours, were arranged for men to drive in their own cars and most men had a single room in College albeit with mass washing and similar facilities. On the Sunday the procession formed up in Great Court and as the music started the main college gates with two men on each door (which are normally never opened on a Sunday) swung open by permission of the under-porter on duty, to allow the men to process the 200 yards or so to Great St Mary's Church for the service, during which the verger had to rush to the loudspeaker system as he had expected a "normal" preacher not "Father Ken" [Editor's note: Father Kenneth Loveless's (1911 – 1995) voice, even in his later years, needed no amplification. For more information see his Obit by Stuart Wilson in the Independent Tuesday 23 May 1995].

The Travelling Morrice

I went on my first tour with the Travelling Morrice at the end of June 1956 in the Cotswolds when Oxfordshire CC had just decreed that milk must be purchased in bottles and that camps must have a communal fourth. The former was sorted out by me as the "little man" collecting the milk from the farmer and immediately tipping it into the men's jug, the fourth required the purchase of a large piece of hessian the club had a suitable trowel. The BM (Captain F Maynard) was the main musician and Arthur Peck was the stalwart backbone and logmaster. After a few days I offered the BM a drink and he had a double gin in a pint of draught cider which, since it cost me 2/6, was the only one I bought him on that tour. I gathered it was his favourite request to new men who didn't know him. On a much later tour he told me that nobody knew what BM stood for, but it had been in use since his first tour in the 1930 and arose because he was often not there at the start of the show and it was probably "bloody" musician or Maynard. The BM had played for the Travelling Morrice on and off since then but now had to be got over from Ireland where he had retired, however his playing remained excellent whether on the fiddle or pipe and tabor, although it was said that he had never danced. On Wednesday afternoon we visited Islip Church way out in the fields and I had offered to ride Perceval Hornblower's bicycle but while in church some cow had ridden it and without noticing I had a large brown stain in an awkward place on my only white flannel trousers, however I washed them when we got back to camp and dried them on Philip Smithers' (one of the founders of the Standon MM) Rolls Royce car bonnet. Since then I have always taken at least two pairs on tour. (see story later when I needed the three) The tour finished at Chipping Campden with a fine show and meal in the Church Room to give me a lasting likeness for the place and their Men (see below).

Being young, keen and active I went on the first four days of the second tour that year near Marlborough. It rained almost continuously and a man went ahead to arrange an indoor venue where possible and I was the only man who remained in his shamiana [Editor's note: Shamiana – Indian ceremonial tent. I'll just leave the image of that with you] while other men moved into the defunct farm buildings, Adrian Griffith taking over the bull's pen and unpacking all his case (including Army formal evening cloths) as he had just returned from Germany. When sitting in some village school teacher's house we watched the telly and were told that the average month's rain for September had already fallen by the 4th. We then gave the show in her school where the floor was tacky from wet varnish, doesn't matter if you ruin it as the children will be back on Monday anyway. The dancing during the days was so bad that the Foreman, Ian Brown, decreed that we should do the same dances at each show, which meant that at Calne, due to some timing mix up we danced exactly the same show twice continuously in the same situation. I left later on that day and understand that the men objected and Ian Brown allowed other dances to be done. I gather that on Russell's first tour the same situation arose and as Russell had been collecting throughout that particular show he didn't dance during the next couple of shows until the foreman asked him why.

Since then I have been on at least one tour a year and joined for a long weekend on many second tours. Most of my memories of happenings are on first tours and of course many are recorded in the logs and it is very difficult to sort them out and to pick out the best. It was on my first tour that we met Mr Rolfe (no Christian name recorded) of Bucknell, many of the men knew him and other old dancers well, but to me it was an early memorable experience. Until their deaths the activities and interactions of Arthur, the BM, Perceval and Russell set the whole tone and language of the tours. Being in the back seat of Arthur's pre-war MG saloon (ERB 21) with the BM or Perceval in the front seat was an education, the heat rose in discussion and as no windows were allowed to be opened it got very warm. Arthur often used to reverse his car until he hit something and on one occasion when turning round in a narrow lane he got a large amount of the bank up his exhaust pipe and the car drew to a conclusion, other men had to sort out the problem.

There are so many stories about Perceval that they would fill a book. It was never clear when he would join the tour and when he did it was at some curious time, place or method. Once he arrived at the Fox at Great Barrington having come from Gorsley by 8 seater taxi. On another occasion he was due at Kingham Station on the Sunday while Russell and I were postering, we agreed to pick him up, we met the 2.00 train, no sign, so we returned, a little late, for the 4.30 train, still no sign, so we asked the station master whether he had seen a large man with plenty of clobber get off the train to which he replied- "no I haven't seen Mr Hornblower yet this year" (note that we were in mufti). He arrived later at some bus station. On a Forest of Dean tour we took tea at his cottage, where to visit the outside IVth one had to cross the county boundary. The fooling of Russell, Webber and John IV were highlights of tours. Bob Ross was always good to have around if you could stand his pipe smoke and on one occasion he left all his tobacco and pipe etc on the top of my car, it didn't make all the journey to the next show and had to be retrieved from the road, by some following man.

I was bagman on the Northwick Park tour in 1957 and drove my Austin seven one evening around the camp as the grass was as high as the bonnet and the light effects amused the men, however I discovered on the way home that this had filled the radiator with grass seed and dislodged the exhaust pipe. However the skinny swimming after midnight in the lake was well worth it, provided you kept in the warm top three feet of the water.

My first tour as Foreman (also CMM Squire) was in Derbyshire in 1958, where it rained a great deal, particularly in Buxton. I had negotiated a show in the "private" village of Edensor on the Chatsworth estate preceded by tea in the drawing room of the vicarage (where years later the Dowager Duchess moved into on her widowhood). In the IVth was a calendar some months out of date with a picture of the Forth Bridge but no man dared mention it to the vicar. The men enjoyed afternoon tea served by the vicar's daughter and were just saying their thanks when the phone rang, "That was the Duchess's butler, Her Grace is on the green and wonders where the dancers are". Unusually, the men very rapidly formed a procession and Winstered down the road. We collected £1 from the Duchess and half a crown each from her three children and the nanny. We later danced and went round Chatsworth House and I wrote to thank the Duke for his hospitality, he apologised that he had to been at Wimbledon as President and enclosed £5. How things have changed over 60 years.

The next time I spoke to a Duchess was while fooling for the American TM at Blenheim Palace in 2006, when not knowing I assumed her Grace (from Sweden I think) was a foreign tourist and asked her from whence she came, "I live here" she replied and my quick thinking apologies and her aristocratic politeness saved the day and we had a pleasant harp. Thinking about Woodstock many years before in 1964 we were in the Star at lunchtime having too much ale and I decided that the quickest way to the IVth was outside rather than through the very crowded bar, however just at that moment a coach load of young and fine American "Debutantes" were "doing" Woodstock so I had to delay my visit and

they “did” Morris dancing in two minutes, whether they think from their photos that all Morris men have crossed legs will never be known. Later there was a post lunch show outside the Bear, but no sign of Russell, so I returned to the Star to enquire of the landlord, an ex-Oxford policeman, who having emptied his pub was watching the show at his doorway, let me and remarked “I didn’t like the look of that man”, and I found Russell in the IVth having drunk four & a half pints of draught cider. Bob Ross who had probably had as much ale drove Russell’s car to the next spot, Combe, where Russell lay motionless, with a very white complexion, on the green throughout the show, but as Bonny Green Garters was being played Russell moved, and I was talking to a villager who nearly had a fit “Good heavens, is that a man I thought it was a dummy, my dog’s been doing all sorts of things round him”. Just to say that Russell fully recovered after tea.

In the Forest of Dean it was Russell who suggested that we should dance late in the evening within Goodrich Castle, a fine ruin but with a removable front gate. In some alehouse the next lunchtime he mentioned this late night activity to the young lady he had invited to join us, to which she replied “yes I know I am the curator”. The lack of other Morris Club’s activities in my early days reminds me of a show at 6.00pm in a commuter village in Sussex during which the audience steadily increased, on enquiry it seems that it had been announced on local TV that the men were dancing in the village so they came out to watch.

At a show in Guiting Power I was talking to a lady, almost the only audience, who lived on the square and came out to watch all the various Morris shows, she commented on how she was enjoying our very good show, I ask why particularly to which she said “well you’re the first Morris man whose spoken to me”, at that moment some man had very clearly got himself in a dance that he didn’t know and went wrong “oh that doesn’t matter he’s got to learn and that sort of thing doesn’t spoil the show”. We have had many good extra shows late at night inside or outside pubs, or private shows. Usually by special request at short notice and these are usually fully enjoyed and gave extra ethos to the Morris and more upmarket drinks for the men, sherry with Captain Spencer Churchill and with Lady Hesketh or tea or cider with “ordinary” folk or at a school.

In 1961 Robert Saunders (who, if Walter when he awoke refused to be nominated as the first bagman of the Ring, had offered to take it on) was back in Cambridge and agreed to run a tour centred on Rolf’s estate at Springhead in Dorset. Rolf gave us a talk on the start of the tours and danced with us on one day. This visit was followed by him attending the Annual Feast after many years, and to his speech which is published elsewhere.

One evening in the Feathers Inn near Coleford 1963 after the men’s food, I was sitting a little away from the other men, with Arthur and Bill Dove, an American research man, and the conversation turned to Arthur’s current work in translating Aristotle’s well known book on animals. Arthur mentioned Unicorns to which Bill casually said “I had one as a young boy”. It appears that many young lads brought up on the plains of California were given a young calf whose horn buds were moved together and as they grew the horns were twisted together. Apparently the unicorn became the leader of the bullocks and then of the herd, to which Arthur replied that Aristotle had said that too, and there were a few other things that Bill mentioned which Aristotle had noted two thousand years before. Arthur was amazed by the whole thing arising out of a casual remark.

Over the years we have visited a number of breweries and two stand out: At Batemen’s in Lincolnshire we never got past the entertainment room. George Bateman who should have been showing us around was away and his head brewer was busy, so we had a pint, when he joined us he wanted one so we had a pint, he then got called off to give out the wages, so we had a pint while we waited, when he returned he wanted a pint so we had a pint, he then realized that as his men had been paid there would be nothing to see so we might as well have a pint. After this the men felt that the few staff

present needed to see a dance, but it was really to get the men active again. Having been drinking for over a couple of hours we were very late for tea, when we arrived at the Old Station Tea Rooms. Run by two young ladies, the men were in a fine state and faced with a huge afternoon tea including a large quantity of cream buns and meringues. The ladies were glad to see us as they were getting concerned as to how to get rid of all the cakes etc. It is fair to say that the men did full justice to the tea, but that the next show was not of the best. Another fine brewery visit was in Shefford in Bedfordshire, where a small industrial unit brewery (Banks & Taylor) had invited all their neighbours on the site to enjoy a party. Ale was dispensed continuously from jugs so no track could be kept of amount drunk and Anthony Ledford (a young big drinking rugby man) downed two yards of ale in addition to a large number of pints. At the next show John Weaver joined the men straight from work and remarked that he had never seen such a rush for the fourth or the men in such fine state. A third visit which comes to mind was the Beamish Brewery in Cork, I think we went round the site, but before that I danced the "Nutting Girl" (on Russell's advice my only or at least main jig) on the top of a very large copper vat which they had mounted, but not fully supported, in the reception area. Once men got into the entertainment area and were served by two young ladies, that was the end and the tea time show in the town later didn't come to much.

As the pubs in those days closed during the afternoon it was traditional for the men to have afternoon tea, usually by special arrangement, in a pub. On one occasion in Cornwall the tea in the large teapot was rather strong and Webber, who liked weak tea, commented on this to the landlady "oh I always put in a quarter of pound of tea, the cricketers like it and I thought that you would be the same". On the 1976 hot Lancashire tour, when the men had been drinking at least a pint before and after each show, I arrived first for the tea at the pub, where it was all laid out but no sign of teacups. On enquiry "oh I thought you would like beer", men really needed a change but of course later had beer too.

The many visits and joint shows with Chipping Campden stick in the mind. On my first occasion after the feast in the Church Hall a young CC man (or boy) I was speaking to, got so beside himself that he crawled into "bed" between a motor bike and the wall it was leaning up against. He was later rescued and taken home just round the corner and proceeded to shout my name to all who did not want to listen. He stopped dancing for some time, but years later on a similar occasion. I recalled this story to a "new" man, to which he replied "yes that was me". Since that first time we have been many times but three special occasions spring to mind. During the show at the special weekend to celebrate the 40th anniversary of our first meeting with Campden in 1932, a side of men five of whom had been there 40 years before with one man and the musician who were there 39 years before, danced Dearest Dicky, followed by a picked side of young men dancing Orange in Bloom.

As there were so many on the 1974 50th Anniversary tour at Longborough, seven men broke away from the crush of other men at the Coach & Horses, to dance throughout the flat street in the village, starting outside the Joynes's cottage at the far end and dancing Longborough, including the processional for two bars between houses, continuously for over an hour. At the T junction, we were giving up, but danced again at the special request of Harry Taylor's granddaughter. There were so many men in Campden that the show started with two sides dancing the Rose, one around the cake and the other around the flag, and the feast etc had to be held in the school.

Travelling Morrice abroad

By the early 90's Harry Kitchener having got fed up with small English village audiences, partly due to over-dancing and familiarity, arranged a number of tours abroad and in particular to Ireland. The reaction was amazing, the support we received from all, their lack of knowledge of the Morris, some had seen it on TV but none had actually seen a live side. With only one exception we were welcomed to play, dance or join with the local band in the pubs. I can only mention a very few of the numerous

fine occasions. On our very first evening, having driven across to Sneem in the far south-west, and settled into a church hall, we took fish & chips in the local establishment and got talking to the management, before passing off to a local alehouse where the landlady was celebrating a year in residence and there was Guinness at an Irish pound a pint, until 9.00pm. The fish & chips shopkeeper came in and it turned out that he was the local singer for the evening. Our men were fully encouraged to join in and a good evening followed. The men had vowed to leave early to go to bed, however they felt guilty at having drunk so much cheap Guinness, so decided to stay longer, at least for another couple of hours. That was the first of numerous such occasions.

On a much later Tour at a lunch time show in Belmullet the local "Straw Boys" interrupted our show, as is their custom, and they danced and performed a full mummers play. A large crowd had gathered, the main village street having been closed off by the local constabulary who supported the whole event and was quite happy for us to stop when we wanted. After the show we joined the Straw Boys in a pub where the subsequent session lasted until 5.00 clock. This was recorded almost verbatim on tape and it is clear that a fine afternoon was had. Our last show in Ireland was up north, where we were joined by two young female fiddlers and the landlord spoke to a regular visiting coach driver who happened to say that he used to dance "a little". We persuaded him to dance although he "didn't have his dancing shoes" but danced in his socks and the landlord turned to me, "he said he dance a little". It was a very fine show of old fashioned Irish dancing, he had clearly been done more than a little.

During our tours of the Channel Islands we danced in Sark, (we think the first Morris there) with no traffic and interested locals and tourists. At one show while men were dancing Dearest Dicky an ancient lady rode straight through the set at precisely the correct time in the middle of the half gyp, timed better than even Morris Sunderland or any other fool, At the time I was speaking to an islander who had been brought up in Bledington so was interested in us, I commented on the lady's actions. "Oh that's Aunt Agatha; she's over 90 and almost blind anyway".

We also had a very hot but well received tour in Venice, where in the evening on one occasion we went to a "pub" and the landlord allowed us five minutes of song, which extended to well over an hour of singing by us and the locals and dancing in a very small space to a cornet; the only instrument that the men had with them.

Conclusion

I will conclude by saying that I have, over so many years fully enjoyed the Morris even though restricted to the one Club, and got to know many fine men from Cambridge, in the Morris Ring and from and other countries, and keep in contact with many of them. As I do not now rise off the ground as far as I used to or would like, I still enjoy fooling, collecting (precuniating) and speaking with the audience, where it surprises me that even now so many have not seen a show and know nothing of the Morris, yet are really interested.

In Cambridge, where an organisation for men, including Kenworthy Schofield, started to practice and dance the Morris in Trinity College in 1920, very soon opening practices to all other men in the University and Town, and then after the first Travelling Morrice tour in 1924 a club was formalised as the Cambridge Morris Men. It is therefore sad for me that, in our Centenary year, we cannot attract young men to the Morris and that we not able to celebrate by dancing out.

Traditional Dancers met by The Travelling Morrice and by the Cambridge Morris Men

John Jenner

			COTSWOLD		
Page	Year	Tour	Tradition etc	Contact	Comments etc
7	1925	3	Abingdon	Hemmings Mr	Abingdon Heys, Sang their tune for their Princess Royal
8	1925	3 v	Abingdon	Abingdon men	Didn't know about dance, but sang a version of "A Hunting we.."
4	1924	1	Adderbury	Blunt Miss	Not met, it appears that she is a local folk dance enthusiast
8	1927	5	Adderbury	Blunt Miss	Watched the show
12	1936	17	Bampton	x Morris Ring	First tour on which New Bampton was danced
0	1924	CMM	Bampton	X	Reminiscences of George Cook. During Whit Monday, Invited to dance Maid of the Mill and discovered that they did the heys very differently from him
1	1936	CMM	Bampton	Wells William	Organised by the Ring and met all current Bampton side etc
3	1947	CMM	Bampton	Wells Billy	RW & Kenneth Savory view dancing. early evening RW invited to dance
3	1952	CMM	Bledington	Alcock Cecil	Dance Morris in Bled'n in 1939
2	1924	1	Bledington	Benfield Charles	More tunes Fore capers body upright, knee bent
2	1924	1	Bledington	Benfield Charles	Now living in Bould. Mainly Bledington but Played fiddle various tunes
5	1924	1 v	Bledington	Benfield Charles	More tunes Both common to Long'gh and Bledington
7	1925	3	Bledington	Benfield Charles	Fetches over (from Bould) by car
8	1925	3 v	Bledington	Benfield Charles	Verified Cuckoo's Nest & Balance the Straw
8	1925	3 v	Bledington	Benfield Charles	Got Princess Royal (diff from Book III,) also fiddled Idbury Hill
10	1929	7	Bledington	Benfield Mr	Son of Charles who had died
11	1931	9	Bledington	Benfield Charles	Talked with him and Mrs Franklin daughter of old Mr Hitchman
2	1924	1	Bledington (Idbury)	Bond Richard	Young Collins & Flowers of Edinburgh
6	1924	1 v	Bledington (Idbury)	Bond Richard	Bled & Idbury do Counter twists and hands up at the jump
2	1945	CMM	Bledington	Franklin Charles	His wife daughter of John Hitchman died 3 or 4 yrs ago
13	1937	19	Bledington	Hall Lewis	Summary log only, but records meeting
2	1945	CMM	Bledington	Hall Lewis	George Hathaway's B'r in L. More talk than usual and many stories
14	1945	23	Bledington	Hall Mr	Order of Leapfrogs, Hook legs and capers kick forwards not back
17	1949	30	Bledington	Hall Mr	Was celebrating his 83rd birthday
3	1924	1	Bledington at Stow*	Hathway Mr	Bledington dancer mentioned a Lewis Hall also Bled'n
8	1925	3 v	Bledington at Stow*	Hathway George	Revived the Bled'n side, showed the heart box they had used
11	1931	9	Bledington at Stow*	Hathway George	Watched and approved of dancing. Later visited his home etc
10	1930	8 v	Bledington	Hathway Mr	Add'l note re meeting- Hey Away danced in one file A & B music
13	1937	19	Bledington	Hathway George	Summary log only, but records meeting
13	1938	20	Bledington	Hathway George	Mr H. Out sang the BM's fiddle, so missed useful comments
2	1945	CMM	Bledington	Hathway George	R W visit
2	1924	1	Bledington	Hitchman John	Remembered all dances Words to Leap Frog

5	1924	1 v	Bledington	Hitchman John	Played the Squire, We took too many steps to the tune
7	1925	3	Bledington	Hitchman John	TM danced Hop Frog with song to Mr H's delight
8	1925	3 v	Bledington	Hitchman John	Like Ruby's playing and played Maid of the Mill on her fiddle
10	1930	8 v	Bledington	Hitchman John	Called on Used to be squire of Bledington men
10	1930	8 v	Bledington	Hitchman & Taylor	John Hitchman dies 27-11-29 and Charles Taylor Dec 29
5	1924	1 v	Bledington	Taylor Charlie	Oddinton dancer but also danced with Bled & Long'gh
9	1929	7	Bledington	Taylor Ch.s (Minny)	93 Oddinton man knew Bled & Long. Taught new Leapfrog to tune of Swag'g Boney and many other dances & page of memories etc
1	1930	CMM	Bledington	x	Heard of deaths of John Hitchman & Clarlie Taylor
9	1929	7	Bourton-o-t-w'r	x the butcher	Presented us with a pig's bladder & cow's tail
8	1927	5	Brackley	Howard & Giles	Month of May
8	1927	5	Bucknell	Powell Mr	Played for most of TM show Cuckoo's nest etc Photo with Rolfe bros.
10	1931	9	Bucknell	Powell Joseph	Visit. Played some tunes saw his drum made from parchment and promised to make drums for Arthur P
1	1931	CMM	Bucknell	Powell Mr	Played several tunes
12	1936	18	Bucknell	Powell Joe	Version of Trunkles tune. F Freyer tried the pipe , found it very difficult and tuned differently to normal more like Provence pipe
8	1927	5	Bucknell	Rolfe Eli	Met with him & his brother and played his pipe
12	1936	18	Bucknell	Rolfe Mr & Mrs	Son of Will Rolfe , shown hand clapping of Shepherd's Hey jig
Apx	1956	48	Bucknell	Rolfe Mr	More speech than dancing Photo outside The Trigger Pond
1	1924	1	Burford *	East Mr	Mentioned Billy Laugh'em, Hobby Horse, Pipe & Tabor
14	1945	23	Chadlington	Cooper John	His father was Fool & Squire of the Chad'n side (Russell at length)
11	1932	11	Chipping Campden	Ellis Lionel	First joint show a great success
12	1933	12	Chipping Campden	Plasted Ormund	Joint procession & show , Fine fooling by Ormund
7	1925	3	Chipping Norton	Freeborn Mr	Butcher who gave a large pig's bladder. Then Peter Fox fooled
11	1931	9	Chipping Norton	Gregory Mr	Danced with the Kingham Morris with some men from Bledington
9	1929	7	Church Icomb	Taylor Ch.s (Minny)	93 Oddinton man knew Bled & Long. Taught new Leapfrog to tune of Swag'g Boney and many other dances & a page of memories and Morris stories and competition between the Icomb & Sherborne (lost start Left Ft)
1	1937	CMM	Cotswolds*	x	Several visits to the trad'l villages
13	1936	18	Deddington	Deeley Mr	Foreman the Ded'n Men. Joint show with Ded'n (Traditional) MD
13	1938	20	Eastleach*	Pitts Tom	Albina had collected new version of Old Woman Hummed Pr Roy
13	1937	19	Eynsham	x Whole side	Sides taught each other's dances. Men entranced & enraptured
13	1938	20	Eynsham	x Whole side	Joint show in Witney, their dancing superb, bladder remarkable
10	1931	9	Fairford	Price Mr	Sang folk songs allowed Joe N to take down unrecorded songs
1	1924	1	Fieldtown	Franklin Mr	Hey with Hop back into places

7	1925	3	Feildtown	Franklin Alec	Capers in 2nd half of stick taping in Bobby & Joan. Helped with Princess Royal, doing capers very firmly
8	1925	3 v	Feildtown	Franklin Alec	Showed Princess Royal and Nutting Girl with Hockle backs between A & B music also None so pretty and Mrs Casey
1	1924	1	Fieldtown	Pratley Mr	You dance fine
10	1931	9	Leafield	Pratley Mr	84 who remembered dancing in Fieldtown
11	1931	9	Fieldtown at Stow*	Sherborne Mrs	Aged 80 , father Mr Busby had been fiddler to Fieldtown Morris
16	1949	30	Guiting Power	Denby Mrs	Her father-in-law danced with the GP Morris also 1887 Jubilee
16	1949	30	Guiting Power	Carter Daniel	His Pipe & Tabor sent to Brit Mus as oldest instruments in country
17	1949	30	Iccomb	Taylor Charlie	Gone in c 1900 to White City with others to demon'e and teach
2	1924	1	Idbury	Bond Richard	Bled. & Idbury Young Collins & Flowers of Edinburgh
6	1924	1 v	Idbury	Bond Richard	Bled & Idbury do Counter twists and hands up at the jump
4	1924	1	Ilmington	Bennett Sam	Garrulous and rather puffed up
4	1924	1	Ilmington	Johnson Michael	Old Man but not actually a dancer?
11	1932	11	Ilmington	Bennett Sam	He got his fiddle and played for most of the dancing
17	1949	30	Kingham	Melton Mr	Mummers play at K and sang song about 18 pence in my pocket
13	1936	18	Kirtington	Pearman	Spoke of the Lamb-ale
Apx	1956	48	Kirtlington	Nicholson Mr	Danced Kirtlington Trunkles, Step missing in corners caper
Apx	1956	48	Kirtlington*	Pearman Bob	Not seen. Fine dancer, carried the flag, Played W & D. Came to Bucknell
3	1924	1	Longborough	Joynes Mr	Tunes copied from Mr Tom Taylor
12	1933	12	Longborough	Joynes Mr	Showed the men his Music book . BM insisted Prin R, in wrong time
14	1945	23	Longborough	Joynes Mr	Some remembered L'h side Put down by BM's wife's Grandfather vicar
3	1924	1	Longborough	Taylor Harry	Offer to instruct etc Saturday Night collected
7	1925	3	Longborough	Taylor Harry	Jockey to the Fair and New version of Swaggering Boney
8	1925	3 v	Longborough	Taylor Harry	No shuffles in Foot Up and various other corrections
1	1930	CMM	Longborough	Taylor Harry	Much gone off in the last year
3	1953	CMM	Longborough	Taylor Henry	Son of Harry, Saw Morris at Stow when at school, Not dancer but used to play
11	1931	9	Longborough	Taylor Thomas	Show watched by him and Mr Joynes
5	1924	1 v	Longborough	Taylor Charlie	Oddington dancer but also danced with Bled & Long'gh
8	1925	3 v	Long'h at Stow*	Hathaway Ned	Danced offside foremost to Harry T of Long'h Told of British Grenadiers side step & caper through dance
1	1933	CMM	Long'h Lowell Swell*	Hathaway Henry	Now 74 danced at Log'h . TM needed a fool and fiddle not loud enough
17	1949	30	Long'h Lowell Swell*	Williams Mr	Taylor's of Long'h joined men from L S to dance 70 years ago
18	1951	33	Longborough	x middle aged man	Brought photo of TM in 1924 for inspection
11	1933	12	Lower Slaughter	x Old man	Stories about rivalry between Barrington and Sherborne sides
11	1933	12	Lower Swell	Hathaway Mr	Used to dance at Upper Slaughter (mainly like Longborough)
12	1933	12	Oddington	Sandles Mr	Granfather of a lady , danced with Upper Oddington Morris

5	1924	1 v	Oddington	Taylor Charlie	Danced with Bled & Long'gh Highland Mary to Sherborne step
8	1925	3 v	Oddington	Taylor Charlie	Only Oddington dancer left but did not see him
7	1925	3	Oddington	X Several old Men	One whose grandfather played the pipe
13	1936	18	Padbury	Gibberd Mr	Morris dances led by Mr P last seen about 30 years ago
13	1936	18	Piddinton	x no names	News that there was former existence of Morris trad'n
13	1937	19	Sherborne	Jones Charlie	Summary log only, but records meeting A delightful old dancer
16	1949	30	Sherborne	Jones Charlie	Told C Jones had died about Christmas time
2	1946	CMM	Sherborne	Simpson Jim	Old Sher'e dancer died 1941
10	1931	9	Sherborne	Townsend Mrs	Husband danced Sherborne (d'd 1929) she knew names of dances Was delighted to see "proper dancing" again (6d for the box)
3	1924	1	Sherborne	Townsend Albert	Sang song to Highland Mary
7	1925	3	Shipton & Milton	Longshaw Mr	Had been fiddler and he itched. Liked Ruby Avril's playing etc
			FOREST of DEAN		
Page	Year	Tour	Village	Contact	Comments etc
15	1947	26	Beaven's Hill*	Baldwin Charles	From whom C Sharp had collected the Morris Call at Clifford's Mesne Met his granddaughter Mrs Taylor
6	1925	2	Bream	Scott Mr	Talked about bream but not dancing
6	1925	2	Bream	Beach Richard	Sang song the Jovial foresters (tune not known)
6	1925	2	Bream	Niblett Mr	Didn't know or had forgotten any tunes or dances
7	1925	2 v	Bream	Beach Richard	More songs collected (not very good)
17	1950	31	Bromsberrow Heath	Hill Ralph	Old dancer. Also Mrs Hill (no rel'n) played many tunes. men danced to them
17	1950	31	Bromsberrow Heath	Hill Alvin	Danced 70 yrs ago. Mrs Hill played again and mentioned her sister Miss Bishop and that they were daughters of the "King" of the team
18	1954	41	Bromsberrow Heath	Bishop Miss & sister	Mrs Hill played & sister sang and played a tambourine. Russell recorded
6	1925	2	Chepstow	X Name not known	Recall Chepstow Fest'l 40 yrs ago. Sang tune Shepherd's Hey Bampton
3	1947	CMM	Dancing Green	Baldwin Steve	RW; S B a 1st rate fiddler son of Charles Baldwin (not George B per Sharp)
15	1947	26	Dursley Cross	Sterry Eli	Talked about the Morris and they had a flag (Russell only)
17	1950	31	Dursley Cross	Sterry Eli	Delighted to see the men. Gave 2 half-crowns and a dozen eggs
15	1947	26	Gaunders Green	Phelps/Williamson	Cecil Sharp had seen Thos Plelps and others (Russell only)
15	1947	26	Glasshouse Inn	Watkins Mrs	Only person who may have seen the Morris
17	1950	31	Glasshouse Inn	Smith Mrs	Landlady who 52 years and remembered seeing old dancers
2	1946	CMM	Joys Green*	Ward Peter	RW visit with Penn and also mentioned speech with Mrs Workman
15	1947	26	May Hill	Boddingham Robert	One of the old dances RW met Mrs B
15	1947	26	Newent*	Lock Fiddler	Fiddler from Gorseley RW sat in pub next to his son Leonard Ryles
18	1954	41	Peterstow	Wall Jack	Danced 40 yrs ago at P'w and had worled with S Baldwin
16	1948	28	Plump Hill	Bennett Bill	Old Morris dancer but not contacted. Clown was Bob Blewitt
17	1950	31	Ruadean	Penn Martin (83)	Ruadean men went in 1883 to Lydbrook to get instruction. And other stories

2	1946	CMM	Ruadean	Penn Martin	RW visited and got much add'l info about last of Ruarden side in 1884
3	1947	CMM	Ruadean	Penn Martin	RW visit also his brother John Penn and learnt more about F OF D Morris
16	1948	28	Ruardean	Pewtner Isiah	Met his son-in-law, he had been sword bearer
16	1948	28	Ruardean	Roberts Anne	She had made the Morris shirt which CS exhibited. Met Her daughter
16	1947	26	Steeple Bumpstead	Lane Mr	Met Mr L, who mentioned Plough Monday kept up by Tilbrook Jones (70)
15	1947	26	Upton Bishop	Baldwin Stephen	Picked up on loan small hand-bell used to be worn on the fool's behind. Taught team in Micheldean and picked up the Bromsberrow Heath dance
15	1947	26	Upton Bishop	Baldwin Stephen	Played many tunes.in his house. Then taught the Bromsberrow dance
16	1949	30	Upton Bishop	Baldwin Stephen	At Lower Slaughter Mrs Albino gave us the behind-bell given to her by SB
17	1950	31	Upton Bishop	Baldwin Stephen	Played for men in his house. His father (98) said Greensleeves was old tune
18	1954	41	Upton Bishop	Baldwin Stephen	Russell's tapework session in the schoolroom
16	1948	28	Weston Cross	Walder Roy	Danced the Morris at Burgess Hill in 1908
16	1948	28	Weston Cross	Robins Mr	Father & M spoke of Morris on Dancing Green They had a little bell
14	1946	24	Woolaston	Workman Roy	His wife's grandfather danced , Mrs W later told Russell various histories
			OTHER AREAS		
12	1936	17	Redmire (Yorks)	Paycock Chistopher	Over 80 and only survivor of Redmire Sword Team
14	1939	22	Tideswell	x Tideswell Band	Learnt the Tideswell processional then went out and danced it.
12	1934	14	Winster	X Winster M D	Joint procession & Show in village then up to the Miner's Standard
14	1939	22	Winster	X Winster M D	Joint show and W Men also danced Flamborough sword dance

A Seventeenth-Century Shopkeeper's Inventory including 'Morris belles' from Abingdon

Jameson Wooders

The town of Abingdon in Oxfordshire (formerly Berkshire until the county boundary changes of 1974) has one of the longest and best documented traditions of Morris dancing in the country.¹ As early as 1560, the churchwardens' accounts for Abingdon St Helen's record the purchase of 'two dossin of Morres belles'. However, no further documented references to Morris dance performance in the town have been noted until 13th October 1722, when The Daily Post recorded that during a visit to the town by its Member of Parliament on 11th October there was great rejoicing, and 'the Morrice-Dancers and feveral young Maids drefs'd in White with Garlands of Flowers, met them at the Foot of the Bridge, and went before them thro' the Town, to the House of Clement Sexton, Efq; the late Mayor; all the Bells in the Town ringing; where all the Company were handfomely and splendidly entertain'd at Dinner'.² Any possible connection between the participants on these two occasions must obviously be regarded as highly tenuous, separated as they are by over 150 years, though oral tradition ascribes Morris dancing in Abingdon to as early as 1700, that is to the date painted on the pair of horns attached to the bull mask that constitutes part of the regalia of the Mayor of Ock Street.

Although not directly related to actual Morris dance performance as such, a recently discovered reference from the National Archives is suggestive that Morris dancing in Abingdon – or, at the very least, the equipment required for its enactment – might tentatively be traced back earlier into the third quarter of the seventeenth century. This is an entry for 'Morris belles' in the inventory of goods created by John Mayott and Christopher Tesdale upon the death of Robert Lyford, a milliner of Abingdon, referenced in the catalogue indexes as dated '12th February 1675 (1668)'.³ Although probate would appear to have been granted in 1675, the date in brackets suggests that this is the same Robert Lyford whose will was proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) in 1668 and who is mis-indexed as coming from 'Avington' near Hungerford.⁴

Probate inventories in England first date from 1529, when personal capital was subject to strict control.⁵ An inventory, detailing a deceased person's movable household furniture and furnishings, shop goods and farm stock, was required for any man or independent woman dying in possession of goods worth more than five pounds. The idea was that the deceased's possessions could be held against their debts, and the inventory would thereby protect the executor or administrator of the estate from any subsequent personal liability. Given that they contain such a wealth of personal detail, probate inventories have been subject to intensive research by historians. In particular, the inventories of merchants and shopkeepers, like Robert Lyford of Abingdon, reveal the range of consumables that were available to buy at the time.⁶

Like many other probate inventories proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury and now held at the National Archives, Robert Lyford's inventory is faded and difficult to read in places (in particular the personal details contained within the inventory header). However, in addition to being able to discern the household goods located in Robert's bed chambers, hall, kitchen and other work rooms, the inventory provides a detailed list of items in his shop. These items include gloves, stockings, petticoats, waistcoats, caps, hoods, shoes and other items of clothing. Several different sorts of cloth are mentioned, along with haberdashery goods such as thread, lace, buttons, pins and ribbons. Whilst items such as ribbons might certainly have been used to adorn a Morris dancer, this is not explicitly stated. However, the inventory does contain an unusual reference to 'Morris' bells:

It: a pcell of Lace Morris belles Cappes laces [?] hookes & Eyes & other small wares viiL vis

An earlier parallel for this entry would appear to be the probate inventory of Thomas West of Wallingford, who died in the winter of 1573/74, and whose shop goods included a large quantity of lace, a variety of spices, and ‘mories belles, 2½ doz’ worth 3d.⁷ Whilst additional examples no doubt wait to be discovered in the archives, the entry in Robert Lyford’s probate inventory is nonetheless currently the only known direct reference to anything remotely morris-related found during a search of almost 6,000 inventories for the later years 1650-1750 from across the whole of the old county of Berkshire, including all of the inventories from Abingdon, Wallingford, Wantage, Faringdon, and many rural parishes in the Vale of the White Horse, such as Buckland and Stanford-in-the-Vale in the west and Steventon and Blewbury in the east.⁸ Even the inventory of Robert Lyford’s widow Elizabeth in 1691, though it lists shop goods including ribbons, lace and clothing, does not refer to Morris bells or suchlike.⁹

Other references to different types of ‘bells’ without the descriptor ‘morris’ do appear in several Berkshire probate inventories – an early eighteenth-century inventory for an ironmonger from Wallingford, for instance, mentions ‘latten round bells’, whilst a 1668 blacksmith’s inventory from Newbury lists ‘2 peare of crotiells’¹⁰ – but in most instances it is clear that they constitute part of horse harness or plough equipment. Of course, in the particular instance of Robert Lyford too, the items listed in the inventory may have been described as ‘Morris belles’ because they simply resembled such objects rather than actually being intended for use in Morris dancing. Even if we do not have actual concrete evidence for Morris dancing in Abingdon during the later seventeenth century, however, it would be fair to say that there is now some circumstantial evidence for it. Surely it is too much of a coincidence that this reference was found in Abingdon of all places rather than from anywhere else in the county. Unfortunately, neither Robert’s inventory nor that of his widow Elizabeth itemise the debts on their shop books by their customers’ names, making it difficult to learn more about who and where they sold to, though the distribution of their trade tokens as metal detector finds may provide an alternative indication of their customer networks.¹¹

The role of provincial shopkeepers in equipping Morris dancers is certainly deserving of further investigation. Could Thomas West of Wallingford, for instance, have supplied the churchwardens’ of nearby Abingdon with the ‘two dossin of Morres belles’ in 1560? And could Robert Lyford likewise have been supplying the local Morris dancers with bells a century later?

Notes

1 Jonathan Leach, *Mr Hemmings’ Morris Dancers... a team with a long history* (Abingdon: Mr Hemmings’ Morris Dancers, no date); Jonathan Leach, *Morris Dancing in Abingdon to 1914* (Eynsham: Chandler Publications, 1987); Jonathan Leach, ‘The Hemmings Family and Morris dancing in Abingdon’, *Berkshire Family Historian*, 14.3 (1991), 84–88; Keith. Chandler, *Morris Dancing in the English South Midlands, 1660–1900: A Chronological Gazetteer* (London: Hisarlik Press, 1993), pp. 35-42; Keith Chandler, ‘The Abingdon Morris and the Election of the Mayor of Ock Street’, in *The Aspects of British Calendar Customs*, ed. Theresa Buckland and Juliette Wood, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp.119-136.

2 Abingdon, Oct. 11, *Daily Post*, 13 October 1722, p.1..

3 Kew, National Archives, PROB 4/10396, probate inventory of Robert Lyford, milliner of Abingdon, 12th February 1675 (1668).

4 Kew, National Archives, PROB 11/330, will of Robert Lyford, milliner of Avington, 1668.

5 The probate process is described more fully in K. Grannum and N. Taylor, *Wills and Other Probate Records* (Kew, 2004) pp. 91-94; T. Arkell, ‘The Probate Process’, in T. Arkell, N. Evans and N. Goose, eds., *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 8-12; J. Cox, and N. Cox, ‘Probate 1500-1800: A System in Transition’, in T. Arkell, N. Evans and N.

Goose, eds., *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 25-26.

6 See, for example, A.D. Dyer, 'Probate Inventories of Worcester Tradesmen, 1545-1614', in *Miscellany II* (Worcester, 1967), pp. 1-67; P. Bowen, ed., *Shopkeepers and Tradesmen in Cardiff and the Vale 1633-1857: What Could You Buy from Local Shops and Tradesmen, 350, 250 or 150 Years Ago? The Evidence from Old Documents* (Cardiff, 2004); M.C. Harrison, 'The Probate Inventory of an Early Seventeenth Century Northampton Mercer', *Northamptonshire Past & Present* VI, no. 6 (1982-83), pp. 313-318; C. North, 'Merchants and Retailers in Seventeenth-Century Cornwall', in T. Arkell, N. Evans and N. Goose, eds., *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 285-303; and K. Tiller, 'Shopkeeping in Seventeenth-Century Oxfordshire: William Brock of Dorchester', *Oxoniensia* LXII (1998), pp. 269-286.

7 Mary Prior, 'The Accounts of Thomas West of Wallingford, a Sixteenth-Century Trader on the Thames', *Oxoniensia* XLVI (1981), pp. 73-93.

8 Jameson Wooders, *Local Economies and Material Culture: Trends in Early Modern Berkshire, 1650-1750* (University of Reading: unpublished PhD thesis, 2011).

9 Reading, Berkshire Record Office [BRO], D/A1/94/114, probate inventory of Elizabeth Liverd, widow of Abingdon, 1691.

10 Kew, National Archives, PROB 5/3846, probate inventory of John Smith of Wallingford, 1710; Reading, Berkshire Record Office, D/A1/107/85, probate inventory of George Pether, blacksmith of Newbury, 1668.

11 See the online database of the Portable Antiquities Scheme, for example, <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/645118>, accessed 9 February 2019.



Molly Dancing. Cambridge Morris Men, Plough Monday 1989. Photo: George Frampton

A Reply to Julian Whybra

Peter Harrop

Four articles by Julian Whybra have appeared in the last three volumes of this journal.¹ His central purpose, at least as I understand it from reading his work, is a resurrection of the complex of Victorian thought commonly captured in shorthand as ‘survivalism’. The embedding of those ideas in the public imagination has often been ascribed to the multiple editions of James Frazer’s bestselling book *The Golden Bough*.² However, as Professor Ronald Hutton has pointed out, the matter was actually a good deal more complex than that: ‘The scholars concerned had those ideas, and made such a favourable impression, because they were so much part of the spirit of their age, and related to so many of its deepest concerns’.³ This was the very same age that influenced the thinkers, movers and shakers of the original folk revival that would so reconfigure folk performance. By way of example, writing in 1993 on the specific impact of that revival on morris dancing, Keith Chandler suggested this ‘represented the ultimate triumph of ‘antiquity’ over actuality.’⁴ Chandler’s remark is apposite in my grapple with Whybra’s articles.

I focus here on two of those articles ‘The Golden Bough, Mumming and St. George’ and ‘Two Early Representations of Mumming’. The former piece, by way of warm up, included a footnote which misquoted and mis-represented the scholar Allesandro Testa to the extent that Testa felt the need to respond with a repudiation which was subsequently published in a later edition of this journal.⁵ My purpose here is to address a similar instance arising variously in both of Whybra’s papers.

Thomas Pettitt is a leading scholar whose work is widely published in academic journals across Europe. Through his papers he has made substantial contribution to our present understanding of early modern drama, the broadside ballad, and English folk performance more broadly.⁶ Whybra makes highly selective use of Pettitt’s work to prop up the narrative of his 2017 paper and refers to him again in his later work. I’ll focus first on a short quote from Pettitt, used by Whybra in both of his articles. For clarity, the opening clause ‘Social Anthropologist Thomas Pettitt suggests that’ is used only in Whybra’s 2017 article, whereas the remainder of the sentence appears in both his 2017 and 2020 articles. Here it is:

[Social Anthropologist Thomas Pettitt suggests that] the ‘survivalist’ view of Mummers’ Plays “as the ‘detritus’ of primitive ritual reflects folklore’s most decisive inheritance from nineteenth-century anthropology, the notion of cultural evolution”⁷

The title of Pettitt’s article from which Whybra quotes is ‘When the Golden Bough Breaks: Folk Drama and the Theatre Historian’.⁸ The title contains a clue which seems to have eluded Whybra. Secondly, in my reading of Whybra, he implies that Pettitt is espousing cultural evolution, which he is patently not.⁹ Pettitt offers a critique of the 19th and 20th century folklore that has so hindered our understanding of mummers’ plays and which Whybra continues to celebrate. Thirdly, in his 2017 paper, Whybra concludes a lengthy (and separate) quotation from the same Pettitt paper at *precisely* the point where Pettitt’s original continues thus:

“The ritual origins theory is at worst wrong, at best irrelevant, and in either case has had a severely limiting and distorting effect on the study of the folk plays themselves.”¹⁰

In short, I regard Whybra’s usages as an effort to misrepresent Pettitt’s views in order to support his own, and in support of Testa I feel some obligation to point that out.¹¹

Whybra’s determined binary of ‘survivalism’ and ‘revisionism’ is curiously old fashioned and as Testa pointed out the ground has been covered elsewhere, both exhaustively and eloquently, and has long been superseded by an appreciation of the historicity (understanding matters of historical accuracy and authenticity) and historiography (at simplest the study of history writing) implicit in both those

terms. If Whybra continues to seek out shamanic resurrections in the shrubbery that is fine by me, but not if he tries to disguise it as history, and not if he tries to harness scholarly apparatus to casually disparage or misapply serious work. Whybra's published biographical notes – both in this journal and elsewhere online - adumbrate research and teaching at several universities as well as a prize winning historical essay. My first thought must be that he knows exactly what he is doing. But then, if that is the case, why does he fail to make any connection between the evidence he presents under his 2017 sub-heading 'historicity' and his own conclusions?

In his recent 2020 article he wrote:

'Revisionist' folklore writers suggest a late mediæval, non - 'survivalist' origin for mumming for which there is no evidence. In fact the earliest recorded play was by the "mummers of the court" at the 1296 Christmas festivities and marriage of King Edward I's daughter'.¹²

This starts promisingly enough. Historians (presumably relying on more recent evidence than Frazer et al had at their disposal) do indeed suggest a late medieval emergence for mumming and an eighteenth century emergence for mummers' plays.¹³ (For brevity I have to presume that Whybra understands the clear distinction between medieval mumming and the much later mummers' play.) But to what end does Whybra deploy his phrase 'for which there is no evidence'? Does he mean there is no evidence for the survivalist notion? Obviously not, since survivalism is the *raison d'être* of his articles. In 2017 he concluded thus:

'[...]it may be said that there exists a variety of early mediæval, secular north European, folk-dramatic customs which lend support to the 'survivalist' hypothesis. Many of these have their origins in pre-Christian folk-plays which may have involved mimetic, ritual observances designed to promote the fertility of the land".¹⁴

And in 2020:

'There is no written evidence for the 'survivalist' theory although there is a multitude of persuasive social anthropological, historical, literary and linguistic paradigms from across northern Europe where there are precedents in, and parallels with, secular north European folk-dramatic customs dating from the early mediæval period and containing themes and influences from Germanic folk traditions of the pre-Christian era. The abundance of similar early examples would certainly appear to undermine 'revisionist' writers' theories.'¹⁵

Of course, 'it may be said' that there are 'folk-dramatic customs' but are you really sure that 'many of these have their origins in pre-Christian folk plays which may have involved'.... what exactly? Which paradigms, which precedents, which parallels, which customs, which influences, which folk traditions, which early examples, which themes? The only themes I recognise are those of unanswered questions and vague assertion. Whybra suggests the mummers' play was 'originally an expression of religious belief'.¹⁶ In the world of 'may be said' we usually find creative writing.

I can only conclude that when Whybra the historian deploys his usage 'for which there is no evidence' he means that evidence is constraining and he will not be bound by it, that anything is possible in its absence. Whybra is not writing history; Whybra is engaging in a creative, mimetic, ritual observance of his own and enjoying himself so much he has ceased to care about misrepresentation. If he repeats it sufficiently often he may yet become part of the folklore he seeks to explain.

Notes

1 Julian Whybra, (2017) 'The Golden Bough, Mumming and St George', *The Morris Dancer*, 5:5, 103-122; Julian Whybra, (2017) 'Thomas Slye, Kemp's Pipe and Taborer', *The Morris Dancer*, 5:5, 123-125; Julian Whybra,

(2019) 'An Ahistory of Morris', *The Morris Dancer*, 5:6, 179-187; Julian Whybra, (2020) 'Two Early Representations of Mummers', *The Morris Dancer*, 6:1, 39-46.

2 See Alessandro Testa, (2019) 'Mumming in Europe, Frazer(ism) in Italy, and "Survivals" in Historical Anthropology: a response to Julian Whybra', *The Morris Dancer*, 5:6, p134-142. Testa explains the usage 'popular Frazerism' but let me add a further note to support his case by illustrating the scale of that particular 'popular': "The first edition [of *The Golden Bough*] appeared in 1890 in two volumes, the second edition appeared in 1900 in three volumes, and the third edition appeared between 1911 and 1915 in twelve volumes. The single volume abridged version, first published in 1922, ran to 750 pages, and the full set of the third edition to some 4500 pages, all produced, and proof-read, between July 1910 and April 1915. Furthermore, the popularity for a work of this scale was staggering. Between the appearance of the first volume of the third edition in 1911 and the launch of the one volume abridged version in 1922, thirty-six thousand copies of each of the twelve volumes were printed. A further thirty-three thousand copies of the abridged version were printed between 1922 and 1933. Notwithstanding, there remained enough demand for the full set such that each of the twelve volumes of the third edition was reprinted twice, and some volumes three times, during the same period. Ronald Hutton reports a further fifty-one editions between 1922 and 1955 (Hutton, 1999 116) and the full third edition was reprinted as recently as 2012 by Cambridge University Press." Peter Harrop, (2020) *Mummers' Plays Revisited*, Routledge, 179, note 35. The extent to which Frazer's work entered and remained in the public imagination remains astonishing but, as Testa points out, this has been widely discussed by many writers and thinkers. See in particular (although Whybra may disagree with my selection) Robert Ackerman, (1987) *J. G. Frazer His Life and Work*, Cambridge University Press; Robert Ackerman, (2002) *The Myth and Ritual School: J.G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists - Theorists of Myth*, Routledge; (See particularly the sole appendix to the work, '*The Golden Bough and The Medieval Stage*' which considers the Frazerian component of E.K. Chambers text.) Mary Beard, (1992) 'Frazer, Leach, and Virgil: The popularity (and unpopularity) of *The Golden Bough*', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34:2, 203-224. In the context of Whybra's mumming papers see Ronald Hutton, (1996) 'Mummer's Play and Sword Dance' in *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pps 70 – 80. For an outstanding summary of the broader area see the same author's 1999 work: Ronald Hutton (1999) 'Finding a Folklore' in *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pps 112-131.

3 Hutton, (1999) p. 131.

4 Keith Chandler, (1993) *Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles*, (Middlesex: Hisarlik Press) p.219.

5 Although Testa raises wider issues see specifically Whybra, 2017, p117-118, endnote 16. For Testa's response see Testa, 2019, particularly pp139-142.

6 For an overview of Thomas (sometimes cited as Tom) Pettitt's works see the listings at, for example, <https://southerndenmark.academia.edu/ThomasPettitt>.

7 Since Whybra has noted elsewhere in this journal that 'John Forrest is not by profession a historian; he is an anthropologist' and since such things seem to matter to Whybra when he believes they further his argument, I'll just point out that Pettitt is not by profession a 'social anthropologist' as Whybra states. (^{Whybra, 2020, p44.}) Thomas Pettitt, (2005) 'When the Golden Bough Breaks: Folk Drama and the Theatre Historian', *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 4:2, p.2. quoted by Whybra, 2017, 5:5, 104 and Whybra, 2020, 6:1, 44.

8 Pettitt, (2005).

9 Pettitt's '*When the Golden Bough Breaks*' is a measured and unambiguous paper. This single sentence, when extracted from the narrative in which Whybra seeks to encase it, is a straightforward statement of fact. The notion of cultural evolution was indeed nearly definitive for the discipline of folklore during the Edwardian period and persisted for some decades afterwards. It has taken considerable and sustained effort to free ourselves from it and Pettitt, in my view, is something of a leading light.

10 Whybra (2017, p.105.) quotes 175 words from Pettitt, (2005, p.16.) concluding his quote thus: 'So if the mummers' plays have been something other than ritual throughout their recorded history and during a good deal of their prehistory, then— applying the rigorous logic of C. S. Lewis: by identifying the plays, of which we do know quite a lot, with a pagan cult of which we otherwise know little, we have learnt something about the

cult, not about the plays.” Pettitt then moves directly to a new paragraph (Pettitt, 2005, p.17.) which commences: “The ritual origins theory is at worst wrong, at best irrelevant...”Pettitt, (2005), p. 17.

11 I should make clear that although I am familiar with Pettitt’s work, and that Pettitt is a contributor to a work I am presently co-editing, I have not sought his views in this particular matter. My reading of Pettitt’s 2005 paper is just that, and the decision to respond to Whybra mine alone. Similarly, I do not know Alessandro Testa, and have had no correspondence or communication with him. I sincerely hope their contributions are not in any way misrepresented by me here.

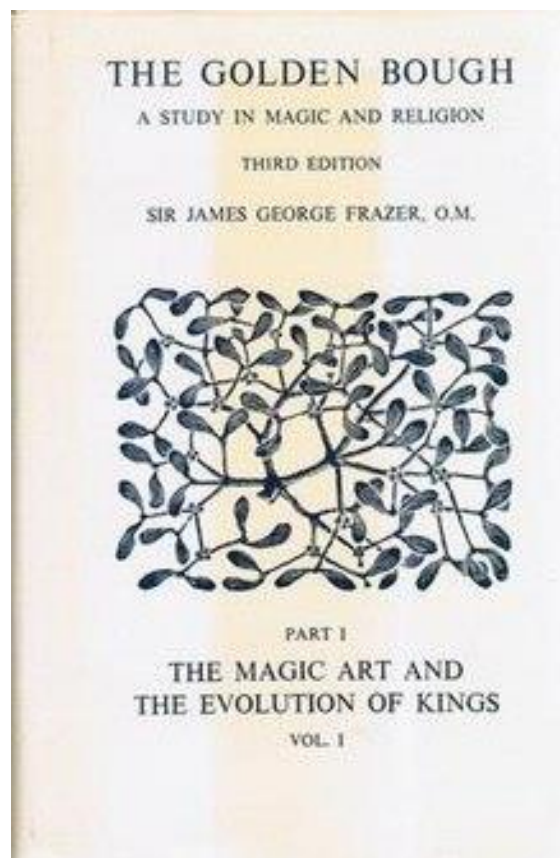
12 Whybra, (2020), p. 43.

13 Far and away the best introduction to medieval mumming remains Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in medieval and Early Tudor England*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002). For a brief comparison of early mumming and mummers’ plays see Harrop (2020) pp. 1 – 16, particularly endnote 8.

14 Whybra, (2017), p.113.

15 Whybra, (2020), p. 44.

16 Whybra, (2017), p.114.



Sir James Frazer 1890, *The Golden Bough: A study in magic and religion*. Quack Folklorist, Shamthropologist or inspired Cultural Theorist? 130 years after first publication and we are still discussing it. [Ed]

The Border Morris – Developments since 1963 ¹

John Swift

It is a common thing in hard winters for frozen-out bricklayers and quarrymen to get up a morris-dancing party and dance in the streets of the neighbouring towns and villages to collect money. The hard winters between 1878 and 1881 brought many such parties into the various towns, ...

“Shropshire Folk-Lore” 1886 ²

In Winter, - with the exception of Boxing Day, when we dance Cotswold morris, - we dance Border morris, in full rag-coats and assorted toppers and bowlers, with blackened or raddled faces.

Leicester Morrismen – Tour List 1986

Introduction

The term “Border Morris” is now in widespread use and is widely understood by the Morris dancing community as the dances which have their origins in the western English counties of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire (three of the counties which form the border with Wales).

This paper aims to provide an overview of the development of Border Morris from 1963, the year of the publication of a seminal paper on the topic in the Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society by Christopher Cawte. ³ It reviews the general progress of Border Morris in the following 30 years and then describes in some detail the development by Leicester Morrismen. This latter element is intended to ensure that there is an enduring record of this specific development whilst the information is still (reasonably) readily available but which, it is also hoped, might help in providing one case study in the more general story of those 30 years.

The paper concludes with a brief consideration of two topics, performance-related aspects and a snapshot of the number of teams currently involved in dancing Border Morris. There are thus three main sections with subsections as follows:

1 How it Happened

1.1 The Background

1.2 The Next Steps after 1963

1.3 Border Morris Comes Alive (Eventually)

2 Leicester Morrismen’s Border Morris Odyssey

2.1 The Early Days

2.2 The Repertoire

2.3 Developments from 1986

3 Some Considerations

3.1 Preamble

3.2 Qualitative Aspects – i.e. Performance

3.3 Quantitative Aspects – i.e. Numbers

3.4 Final Comment

1 How it Happened

1.1 The Background

Cecil Sharp was well aware of the Morris dances from the counties bordering Wales, not least from seeing the dancers from Brimfield, Herefordshire perform on Boxing Day exactly ten years after he had seen the Headington Quarry dancers. ⁴ These dances only however appear to merit the following fleeting reference in the 2nd edition of the “The Morris Book”:

In Worcestershire and Herefordshire, however, where the dance still survives, albeit in a state of decadence, it was performed at Christmas time. ⁵

This view of the Border Morris as a decadent or decayed tradition appears to have persisted. Maud Karpeles records on seeing the Upton-on-Severn dances in 1925 that:

The dancing was very rough and uncertain as most of the dancers were novice. ⁶

Cawte in his 1963 paper also refers to this when he records that:

At Leominster the dance for four men in a square was very poor, and a performance of the four-man version of the Much Wenlock dance, in private, at the Consett meeting of the Morris Ring (1953) ⁷ was taken to be a joke by some of the audience. ⁸

Cawte’s principal focus for research, with Alex Helm and others, had been the geographical index of ceremonial customs in Great Britain, covering ceremonial dance, ritual drama and ritual animal disguise. Before the publication of the index of ceremonial dance in 1960, ⁹ Dr Joseph Needham’s survey, published in 1936, ¹⁰ had been a standard work of reference for folk dance studies. This paper was a hugely impressive piece of work, not least considering that Needham’s main research interests in Cambridge at that time lay in biochemistry but more specifically embryology. Needham’s survey defines various categories of dance, including “Cotswold”, “Derbyshire”, “North-Western” and “East Anglian”. Dances from locations including Brimfield, Broseley, Madeley and Upton-on-Severn are however classified as “Cotswold”, despite this classification giving the dress as “usually white with coloured baldrick or other ribbons” and the time of year as “Whitsun”.

We had to wait until 1960 for a separate classification of Border Morris – actually as “Welsh Border” – allocated the letter “B” and defined as:

Companies of dancers usually eight in number carrying sticks but sometimes handkerchiefs also. In some examples sticks are replaced by percussion instruments of Christy Minstrel type. Costume variable, but basically the ordinary clothes of the performers decorated with ribbons and decorated hats. Some or all of the performers may wear women’s clothes or those of circus clown type. Peculiarities: Dancers have blackened faces and sing during the dance. Appears at Christmas.¹¹

The publication of Cawte’s paper on Border Morris was three years after the publication of the geographical index in 1960 but one has to assume that it was the research for the 1963 paper that informed the geographical classification and of course the definition of “Welsh Border Morris”, for which Cawte is quite correctly credited.

1.2 The Next Steps after 1963

The publication of Cawte’s paper did not seem to lead to any immediate enthusiasm by Morris teams for the Border Morris and indeed there is scant evidence of any take up of the dances at all during the 1960’s. ¹² Christopher Cawte was during those years an active member of Leicester Morrismen and indeed their Squire between 1969 and 1971, so the assumption could be drawn that he saw the dance more in a historical perspective than as material to be developed within the team’s repertoire.

That Border Morris did subsequently develop into a Morris genre in its own right would seem to owe much to the activities and enthusiasm of Roy Dommett.

Roy began his research into Morris dancing in the early 1960’s and access to a microfiche reader gave him the ability to study Cecil Sharp’s manuscripts and then pursue original research, which added to and on occasions contradicted the information in Sharp’s Morris Books. An important element of this enthusiasm culminated in a very significant contribution to Lionel Bacon’s “Handbook of Morris Dances”, ¹³ (widely known as the “Black Book”, first published in 1974) and another was the teaching of the Border Morris dances.

The casual user of the “Black Book”, where the names of the locations of the traditions are arranged in alphabetical order, might be surprised to find nestling between notations for Brackley and Bucknell the notation of the dances from Brimfield and Bromsberrow Heath. This might seem to be a reversion to Needham’s categorisation of 1936 if the reader had missed the paragraph in the Foreword (page v) stating:

This book does not set out to include all the known morris dances of England. My initial intention was to restrict it to the Cotswold dances, together with a few others which were included in Sharp’s books. However, it became apparent that there is quite a wide range of dances in the West Midlands, up to the Welsh Border, of which there is enough information in the MSS to make them danceable, and I have extended the book to include these. I have also included Lichfield, now a well-established part of the morris man’s repertoire, and Winster because the Processional is used at Ring Meetings.

Despite this explanation and the fact that the handbook is intended as a practical guide, the impression remains that the Border Morris dances were perceived to form a continuum with the Cotswold Morris unlike for instance North West or Molly dances. The absence of the term “Welsh Border Morris” in the “Black Book” over ten years after its use was proposed tends to support this view.

1.3 Border Morris Comes Alive (Eventually)

In a paper delivered in 1992 Roy Dommett records in relation to the Border Morris that:

I taught the mss material at the Advanced Morris Weekends at Halsway Manor in the mid to late 1960's, but I am not aware that anyone actually took them away to actually dance out. I was invited to an EFDSS staff weekend to pass on the dances which were seen as a possibility for mixed team performance for which a growing need was perceived that could not be met by the Cotswold Morris, at a time when the NW dances were hardly known. Interest picked up enough to ask me to teach the dances at a first workshop for West Midland teams in Ledbury Town Hall in January 1972 and I went on to teach them at Morris Federation workshops. ¹⁴ It was this workshop which Roy Dommett taught in Ledbury in 1972 that led to the formation of what came to be called the Original Welsh Border Morris Men. This team first danced out in December 1973 and their tour on the last Saturday before Christmas continues to this day. Their website records the following:

Our Foundation

The Welsh Border Morris Men were formed in 1973 at the suggestion of John Barker by John, Dave Jones and John Aston, with the objective of running an occasional side, doing just one tour at the traditional time of Christmas, dancing the Welsh Border dances in Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

The start (From Scrap Book)

A Morris Team was formed with the objective of dancing only dances from the Welsh Border area, principally the counties of Herefordshire and Worcestershire. The procedure that was adopted in 1973 has been followed in subsequent years, namely practices in August and December, culminating with a tour on the Saturday preceding Christmas, this being the traditional time of year for these dances to take place. The side has members who are also members of other sides, principally Silurian (Ledbury) and Faithful City (Worcester), but membership is open to any man who wishes to further the objectives of the club... ¹⁵

Roy also taught Border Morris at the Sidmouth Folk Festival in 1972, as Derek Schofield records:

... on Thursday he [Roy Dommett] taught Border Morris dances from Worcestershire and Herefordshire. At the time there were no Morris teams specialising in these dances and the first ever Border workshop, taught by Roy, had only taken place a few months earlier – as ever Roy was pushing at boundaries. ¹⁶

This pushing of boundaries was starting to have some effect and there are essentially two strands of development.

In 1973 John Kirkpatrick, who had danced in London with Hammersmith Morris Men, moved to Shropshire and two years later started Shropshire Bedlams. He wrote a lively, some might say trenchant, account of the team's formation for *English Dance & Song* in 1979. In this article John acknowledges Christopher Cawte, and Roy Dommett together with the "Black Book" as sources but notes that:

*looking back now at the original material, the way our dances came together seems totally random.*¹⁷ They were to be invited to the Sidmouth Festival in 1977, two years after their formation.

The year before that at Sidmouth Derek Schofield records:

*Another Magic Lantern initiative in 1976 was their Border Morris performance. In spite of Roy Dommett's 1972 workshop there was only one revival Morris side specialising exclusively in Border Morris; they were to make their Sidmouth debut in 1977. Taffy [Thomas¹⁸ had a copy of the 1909 photograph of the Brimfield Morris, and decided to perform the dance round all the venues at the Festival and the pubs in a single evening: it was a one off show but had a lingering impact"*¹⁹ One other event in 1976 deserving of mention is the release of Ashley Hutchings's record "Rattlebone and Ploughjack"²⁰ This recording had actually been made in 1973 and consists of recreated music and speech (with one exception), relating on one side (of the vinyl recording) to Border Morris and on the other to Molly dancing. It created much interest in both traditions, although ultimately was probably more influential in the subsequent development of Molly dancing.²¹

Of the performance of Shropshire Bedlams and their companion women's team, Martha Rhoden's Tuppenny Dish in 1977, Derek Schofield writes:

*They were a sensation at Sidmouth – the appearance, the energy, the flamboyance of the men and the fresh approach of the women. ... Over the following few years, the Bedlams inspired new and existing teams to turn to Border Morris and interpret the dances differently, other teams copied the Bedlams' style rather too slavishly, whilst some teams realised the possibilities of adaption and creation in other styles.*²²

There was however what appeared to be a parallel development taking place which I take to be linked to the workshop Roy Dommett ran in 1972. Silurian Morris's website records the following:

Established in 1969 by the late Dave Jones, Silurian's original repertoire consisted mainly of Cotswold dances with a few Welsh Border dances for variety. A number of people at this time, especially Dave Jones, were researching the Border tradition, and by 1979 Dave felt that there was sufficient material for the side to perform border dances exclusively. Up until that point Border dances had been performed on Boxing Day tours, dancers wearing their Cotswold Kit with blacked up faces.

However, at the Bromyard festival that year, Silurian emerged in a new costume, based on descriptions of what the Upton Morris Men had worn at the turn of the twentieth century. The

first Border Morris revival side, the new kit causing quite a stir amongst traditional Cotswold Morris Ring sides. 23

Silurian's claim to be the first Border Morris revival team might be questioned but their impact within the Morris Ring would not, I suggest, be contested.

In the preface to his book published in 1988 ²⁴ Dave Jones states that he ran instructionals for the West Midlands Folk Federation and then for the Morris Ring of England "over ten years ago". I have not managed to track down the first, but the Logbooks of the Morris Ring provide the following information about the second instructional:

An Instruction Meeting was held at Ledbury, Hereford-shire, from Friday the 19th to Sunday the 21st of October 1979. David Jones, of the Silurian Morris Men, gave instruction in Border Morris. Arrangements for the meeting were by his club; men brought their own bedding and slept in the Youth Centre. Instruction, and all meals except breakfast were in the Royal Oak. Men were given a meal at 8 p.m. on the Friday. From 9.30 until 11.30 p.m. there was instruction in Brimfield. The Saturday went thus: - 9.30 a.m., instruction in White Ladies Aston: 10.30 revision of Brimfield and White Ladies Aston: 11.00, coffee: 11.17 instruction in Pershore; 12.45 p.m., lunch: 2.35 p.m., Upton Stick Dance: 4 p.m., tea: 4.20, Upton Handkerchief Dance: 5.30, discussion on "The Value of Instructionals," and on archival work.

There was a Feast at 7.10; with the loyal toast and that of the Immortal Memory, at 8.30. Five minutes later the Health of the Silurian men was drunk. There was singing until 9.10, when general dancing started and went on until 11 p.m., using the Border dances that had been taught. The men then went to the youth Centre, to dance until Bonny Green Garters at 12.15 a.m.

At 9.35, on Sunday, Bromsberrow Heath and Dilwyn dances were taught; and after coffee at 11 a.m., at 11.20, there was a revision session of all the dances taught during the weekend. At 12.30 there was a discussion on the Border Morris and other topics. Some men stayed to watch, at 2.30 p.m., the filming of the Border Morris as danced by the Silurian club; the rest had left by 2 p.m. Clubs represented at the meeting: - Aber, Chelmsford, Dartington, Datchet, Hereford, Herga, Isca, John o' Gaunt, Kits Coty, Leicester, Mersey, St. Albans, Swindon, Thelwell, Wath-on-Dearne, West Somerset.

It was thought worthwhile quoting this account in full not least to emphasise that this instructional was invested with all the usual ceremony that the Morris Ring traditionally has used for its meetings. An impressive list of Morris Ring teams attended and it might be considered that this was the point at which Border Morris finally escaped from the notion that it should only be categorised as a degenerate form of Cotswold Morris.

This emergence of Border Morris as a separate Morris dance genre in the 1970's may also be seen as part of a wider trend during that decade which recognised the importance of regional identity. Certainly this trend was apparent in the development of the various Morris dance genres including revivals in some of villages where the Cotswold Morris had been collected before the first world war and in the North West where, as Derek Schofield records:

the desire to be distinctive, different and focus on something which was locally based became important features once the North-West Morris revival really got going in the late 60s and the 70s ²⁵

The first Border Morris teams formed in the 1970's were also based in the region where the dances had been collected, although in one strand of the development dances performed by the Shropshire Bedlams, and subsequently the Ironmen and others, were only very loosely based on collected material. In fact this reflected another trend during these years where some of the teams forming at this time were maintaining respect for regional traditions but felt no strong need to be bound by dance notations of previous generations. In the other strand of development identified above, Dave Jones in his teaching closely followed the repertoire which had been collected, although it has to be noted that, given the limited information in some of the Border Morris notations, even in this latter strand some imaginative interpretation was necessary. In fact this reflected another trend during these years where some of the teams forming at this time were maintaining respect for regional traditions but felt no strong need to be bound by dance notations of previous generations. This topic is addressed further in the sections below.

The early 1970's was also the time of the formation of the first women's Morris dance teams and their numbers expanded significantly through this and subsequent decades. Aside from Martha Rhoden's Tuppenny Dish, the companion team to Shropshire Bedlams, there appeared to be no women's teams exclusively dancing Border Morris in those early years. In 1976 the Women's Morris Federation (WMF - formed in 1975) issued a list of 41 dances for which they had notation and this included two Border Morris dances, the Pershore stick dance and White Ladies Aston. Many of the teams at that time performed a mix of dances from the various Morris genres and the records of the WMF ²⁶ show that of 14 sides who had joined in 1975 half of them danced at least one Border Morris dance but as part of a larger repertoire. The dances listed are Brimfield, Pershore, White Ladies Aston and Upton-on-Severn.

2 Leicester Morrismen's Border Morris Odyssey

2.1 The Early Days

As recorded above, Leicester Morrismen were represented at the 1979 instructional led by Dave Jones.

Leicester can claim a long involvement with the Morris, the earliest references being 1599 and 1603²⁷ and following "revivals" in the 1920's and 30's the current team formed in 1953. It was not possible in the course of writing this paper to contact the two men who attended the 1979 workshop, Bill McBean and Colin Seaton, but through the team's scrapbooks ²⁸ it was established that the first public performance of Border Morris was in December 1981 in Great Glen, a village to the south of Leicester (see photographs 1 & 2).



Photograph 1. A team photo at Great Glen – December 1981



Photograph 2. Border Morris at Great Glen – December 1981

The Squire's notes for November 1981 proposed several weeks practice starting 25th November. There is record of a further performance in January 1982 at Groby and Mountsorrel, villages to the north of Leicester, and the records show that Border dances continued in the following winter seasons, for instance an item in the minutes of the team's AGM held on 29th September 1983 which reads:

The Border dancing was to be brushed up and was to include more Lichfield dances. The Border Tours were to be continued."

I joined Leicester Morrismen in the summer of 1984 and recall participating in several rather haphazard Border performances in the winter of 1984/85. The performances the following winter, 1985/86, were however given a focus through an invitation to the Whittlesea Straw Bear event 29 in

January 1986. The Squire at the time, Dick Allsop, can take a lot of the credit for this invitation through a chance meeting with one of the main organisers of the event, Brian Kell. Brian was not very interested in having yet another Cotswold team but a Border Morris team was a different matter and Leicester Morris men in their winter guise as “Red Leicester” (see below) have been proud to receive an invitation every year since then.

Photographs 3 and 4 are a record of Red Leicester’s first year at Whittlesea.



Photograph 3. With the Whittlesea Straw Bear – January 1986



Photograph 4. Part of the Procession, Whittlesea – January 1986

(The author is the dancer on the right and Charlie Corcoran, Leicester Morris men’s current Bagman and past Bagman of the Morris Ring, is on the left)

Dick Allsop not only obtained the invitation but succeeded in getting sufficient focus on a consistent kit and at least a tolerable standard of dancing in those early years.

The issue of “blacking up” is further discussed below but the practice was an early concern for some members of the team, especially given the multicultural nature of the city of Leicester (and indeed its evident success over the years in promoting this). No written records have been found but there was clearly a discussion over which colour should be used for face colouring. Photographs which are not definitively dated but were taken during the winter seasons of either 1984/85 or 1985/6 show the team dancing with a mixture of black and red faces. The recollection is that this mix of different colours was generally agreed to look awful and a decision was taken before the first visit to Whittlesea to use red. Immediately following this decision was the serendipitous discovery that the team for its Border Morris performances could be called “Red Leicester”³⁰ and this undoubtedly became a readily identifiable defining characteristic for the team. My own recollection is that we were subsequently approached by a local historian who congratulated us on using what would traditionally had been a local material – raddle used in sheep farming to identify which ewes had been “served” by the ram. The story was in any case taken up with some enthusiasm by the team and subsequent behaviour was (in the main) acceptable to those in receipt of being “raddled”. As an additional note, I had long thought that using red was an elegant solution to the “blacking up” issue but it has recently been pointed out to me that whilst it works in a European context, red face colouring might give offence to some communities in North America!

Unlike some teams, I am not aware that that the face colouring was seen as providing a disguise or was invested with any deeper ceremonial significance but was worn because that was what many Border Morris teams had been described as wearing and was what the early revival teams had adopted. In the same way, the rest of the Border Morris kit seems to have been taken as a given, consisting of rag coats, top hats or bowlers with feathers and a single row of bells. The only point of consistency I can recall meriting any discussion was the order in which the coloured ribbons were arranged on the hats, although at some point black trousers must have become standard and red sweatshirts under the rag coats (with cooler rugby-style shirts for the summer festivals) became an added refinement.

The concern in Leicester Morrismen over the use of black face colouring predates what became a very high profile topic. Nearly two decades later in 2005 Derek Schofield raised the topic in an article in *English Dance and Song* with the title “a black and white issue?”³¹ which included divergent views from a number of people with an interest in the topic. The discussion continued in the correspondence pages of the next issue³² which included a strong defence of the practice from John Kirkpatrick of Shropshire Bedlams. The debate rumbled on but in 2013³³ an article by Chloe Metcalfe (now Middleton-Metcalfe) gave it fresh impetus. An article in 2016 by Katy Spicer, Chief Executive of the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), gave a useful summary of topic and also the position of the EFDSS:

*‘to no longer engage blackface morris sides for EFDSS events’*³⁴ The article noted that three festivals had also adopted this policy and there have been more since. The debate has resulted in a number of teams adopting different face colouring or, as for instance is the case with Shropshire Bedlams, using masks as an alternative. There seems to be a consensus

amongst those who have researched the topic that there is scant evidence for Morris dancers in the three Welsh Border counties blacking up before minstrel shows become popular in England from the 1830's. Gordon Ashman stated:

I can find no genuine reference to blacking up before the popularity of the minstrel show swept the country in a wave after one of the earliest 'Ethiopian Delineators', Thomas Rice, took London by storm with his Jim Crow act in 1836. ³⁵

Some teams however continue to take the view that blackface is merely a disguise established through traditional use. My own opinion is that regardless of this academic discussion, the use of blackface is now so clearly established as originating in the United States for the purpose of the racist denigration of the black population that its use is no longer justifiable.

In a recent development, the Joint Morris Organisations, comprising The Morris Federation, The Morris Ring, and Open Morris, issued a statement on the matter (July 2020) agreeing that each of them would take action at their respective forthcoming annual general meetings to eliminate the practice from their membership. The first of those meetings, that of The Morris Federation, was held in September 2020 and a resolution passed that no members would wear full face black makeup after the end of the year. The AGM's of Open Morris and The Morris Ring will take place in November 2020 and March 2021 respectively.

2.2 The Repertoire

There are no formal records of which dances were used in the early years of Leicester Morrismen performing Border. My own recollection is that there were only a few so the well-known Upton-on-Severn stick dance ³⁶ and the Lichfield dances which Leicester Morrismen also performed in the summer were danced. In my memory on a least one occasion a stick dance from Adderbury was also danced. I was appointed Squire of the team in the autumn of 1987 and took an interest in trying to control the repertoire – an easier task for the limited Border Morris repertoire than for the extensive range of Cotswold dances performed. I recorded all the dances performed in public over the three years and condensed the information into a paper titled “The Role of Repertoire” presented at a conference on Morris dancing in 1990. ³⁷ My successor as Squire, Charlie Corcoran, did the same, the results being presented at a subsequent conference in 1992. ³⁸ Charlie's successor, Roy Thody, also collected the data on dances performed so it is possible to track in some detail the development of the repertoire, although this paper will only give an outline.

An important comment on the repertoire is that Leicester Morrismen maintain a strong focus on the preservation on the English Morris dances as they have been collected and passed down. As explained in my 1990 paper, the “Black Book” serves as a focus in defining and delimiting the repertoire. This approach has its challenges in relation to the Border Morris dances but might at least have been seen as a guiding principle during the period covered by this paper.

The data show the following:

- Six of the dances taught by Dave Jones at the 1979 workshop were in performance by Leicester Morrismen in the winter of 1988. These were: Brimfield, Bromsberrow Heath, Dilwyn, and White Ladies Aston together with the Upton-on-Severn Stick and Handkerchief dances,

although the stick dance almost certainly differed from that taught at the workshop. The Lichfield dances, The Sheriff's Ride, Milley's Bequest, Ring O'Bells, Vandalls of Hammerwich and The Bower Processional were also danced in Border kit, as was on occasions Brighton Camp from Eynsham.

- The stick dance from Peopleton was introduced that winter, 1988/9. It is not included in the "Black Book" and it was taught by Roy Dommett at a workshop for the (then) Women's Morris Federation in 1978 and included in their notation files. 39
- In 1990 Evesham stick, and Pershore stick and handkerchief dances were introduced.
- In that same year it was decided that the Lichfield dances would not be danced as Border dances. My recollection is that this was the outcome of strenuous lobbying by the then Bagman, Clive Cowx, who as an ex-Stafford man, was firmly of the view that Lichfield was a Cotswold tradition. Personally, I had always inclined more to Roy Dommett's view that it had many similarities with Border Morris but, in any case, the increasing repertoire of dances actually coming from the three Welsh Border counties reduced the need for the Lichfield dances.
- In 1992/3 the Peopleton handkerchief dance was introduced and finally in the winter of 1994/5 Upton Snodsbury came into the repertoire. The notation for Upton Snodsbury in the "Black Book" essentially records that there are heys and sticking but Belchamp Morris Men had taught their version of the dance at the Sidmouth Festival in 1994 and subsequently kindly sent me their notation. Leicester took up the 9-man version and found it especially useful for "show" dances.

I have not been an active member of Leicester Morrismen since 2004 and sight of their list of Border Morris dances for winter 2017/8 proved interesting. Rather in contradiction to what is stated above regarding the team's focus on dances which have been collected, passed down and regarded as "traditional", Red Leicester now has another seven dances in its repertoire only one of which, Much Wenlock, is listed in the "Black Book".

2.3 Developments from 1986

The invitation to the Whittlesea Straw Bear Festival in 1986 provided a focus for Leicester Morrismen to progress from one or two casual local winter events to performances which would be observed by a much larger and more knowledgeable audience. This led to improvements in the consistency of the kit, development of the repertoire and improvements in the standard of the dance performance. This last aspect proved to be the most challenging and it seems unarguable that compromises will always have to be made by a team that spends the majority of its time working on an extensive and challenging repertoire of Cotswold dances to break off for a limited number of Border Morris performances either side of Christmas. The issue was compounded by the team's strong desire to continue performances of Cotswold Morris dances on Boxing Day (although this practice was discontinued once the centenary of Sharp's meeting with the Headington Quarry men had been celebrated in 1999). A number of events became established in the calendar which allowed the Border repertoire to be performed in public before the annual trip to Whittlesea. Before Christmas the team was welcomed to dance in both Leicester city centre and in Market Harborough and on the first Sunday after New Year it became customary to tour through the village of Markfield to the north of Leicester. From 1986 onwards strenuous efforts were made by the various Squires and those leading the teaching of the Border Morris dances to make the styles distinct and, as has recently been eloquently expressed to me, "to stop dancing Border as if it were a different Cotswold tradition". Ensuring that the musicians also understood their vital role in establishing the distinctive nature of Border Morris was a key part of this focus. The first teams reviving the Border Morris appeared to

find the need for large bands and Leicester was no exception in establishing a much larger group of musicians than the one or two usually used for performances of Cotswold Morris. Roy Thody has to be credited for being a major driver of the efforts to create a distinct style of dancing and for the music with the larger band (see Photograph 6 below). Ultimately it would have to be a question for those who saw the performances whether or not the objectives were achieved, although some knowledgeable observers were indeed complimentary. Significantly the team did receive recognition with invitations to dance outside the county, the most notable being at the major folk festivals held at Sidmouth and Towersey.

In 1992, Roy Thody and I were invited to the Sidmouth Festival to teach a Border Morris workshop and we taught White Ladies Aston to what I recall was an enthusiastic and generally competent body of dancers. We were invited again in 1994 this time to teach two workshops, the first as part of a week-long Border Morris series where we taught the two Peopleton dances and the second as one of a series of “taster” workshops where we taught Brimfield and Dilwyn. In 1994 we had the support of the Red Leicester team in the workshops, performed informally in the town and participated in the torchlight procession. This can be presumed to have been well received because the team received an invitation for the following year to participate in a week-long series of workshops intended to allow Border Morris dancers to explore all aspects of the tradition, hone their skills, participate in a performance at the end of the week and also in the torchlight procession.

This ambitious programme formulated by the festival’s Morris advisers, Sue Swift and Sally Wearing, was by their own admission not a great success as these extracts from a letter sent to the team after the festival reveal:

Leicester MM did a good job in guiding those willing to form a team towards a very creditable performance on the Friday evening. We were pleased that Leicester adapted to cope with the situation that arose and worked hard to make the concept work.

and:

We realised afterwards that those attending the workshop series were less experienced as dancers and performers than was expected and our overall plans were much too ambitious.

These quotes are instructive in relation to the wider development of the Border Morris which is considered further in the concluding section of this paper.

My recollection is that one of the workshop teams (I think there were two) which did perform on that Friday evening named themselves “Herbaceous Border”. That name was taken up and continues to this day as a “fringe” Border team which dances on the Esplanade each evening at the Sidmouth Festival and participates in the torchlight procession under the leadership of Kurt Sauter.

Leicester’s next, and in the era covered by this paper last, invitation to a major folk festival as a Border Morris team came from Towersey Festival in 1997 – see the photographic record in Photographs 5, 6, 7 and 8.



Photograph 5. Red Leicester on the Towersey Arena Stage – August 1997



*Photograph 6. --- and their musicians!
On the Towersey Arena Stage – August 1997*



Photograph 7. Red Leicester Dancing in the Ceilidh Tent at Towersey – August 1997



Photograph 8. A team photo at Towersey – August 1997

As well as performing in all the various venues, we ran a workshop where we taught the Peopleton stick dance. My recollection is that many of the participants, some of whom turned up in their Border Morris kit, seemed unable to do either a single step or a double step, certainly weren't able to distinguish between them but didn't appear to think this important!

As a postscript, invitations to events outside of the county continued, for instance as an invited team to the Bromyard Folk Festival in 2005. In general Red Leicester's winter season has continued to follow the pattern established in the late 1980's consisting of performances in Leicester city centre and other towns (Melton Mowbray in 2018) before Christmas, Boxing Day lunchtime at The Griffin Inn, Swithland, to the north of Leicester, a tour shortly after New Year (on the Great Central Railway in 2018) and finishing with the day at the Whittlesea Straw Bear Festival.

3 Some Considerations

3.1 Preamble

Only the following two aspects are approached by way of a conclusion. I have termed these:

- "qualitative"; relating to aspects of the performance of the Border Morris dances, a subject on which I have provided some anecdotal information, and
- "quantitative"; a "snapshot" of how the dance has developed in terms of the number of teams performing it.

3.2 Qualitative Aspects – i.e. Performance

In his entertaining paper on the conversion of the Ironmen from an indifferent Cotswold team to a very good Border Morris team, ⁴⁰ Gordon Ashman makes some interesting points which are relevant to this topic. He expresses the view that members of Ironmen constituted a "somotype", unsuited to Cotswold Morris but right for the characteristics of Border Morris. Whilst I might take issue with the

implied need for a Border Morris dancer to be overweight, an important point is made here regarding the challenges of the very different demands of Cotswold and Border Morris and whether or not teams pursuing a policy of dancing Border only in the winter can ever truly achieve the excellence required. It might be instructive to note that the year Leicester Morrismen made it as Red Leicester on to the list of invited teams at the Sidmouth Festival it was as a “town team”⁴¹ and even then, our principal role was to lead the workshops. The other invited Border Morris teams that year were both focussed fully on Border and were Wild Hunt as a “town team” and Shropshire Bedlams and Martha Rhoden’s Tuppenny Dish as the “arena teams”.

The Border Morris is, as collected, a simple dance, consisting predominately of single stepping, mostly simple stick clashing with the hey as possibly the most complex figure. Of course it can be made more elaborate but the dancer does not, unlike a typical Cotswold dancer, have to master movements such as galleys, hook legs and slow capers. The challenges this gives a team in providing a good public performance were excellently summed up in a paper given at a conference in 1994 by two members of Silurian Morris Men,⁴² who pointed out that because of the simplicity of the Border dances they need to be danced “spectacularly well” and hence the need for more not less practice than for more complex dances. It might be seen that the week-long programme organised for the Sidmouth Festival the following year was an attempt to build on this ethos. Its lack of success, described above, indicated that the majority of the Border Morris dancing world was unready for this approach.

Gordon Ashman mentions an encounter at Whitby in 1986 with:

a very strange side ... who had a vaguely green splotches on their faces and a few strips of ribbon on their shirts ... they had weeny little sticks

On enquiry they told Gordon (who was not known to them):

*We’re Border. We saw a side called the Ironmen, and we thought they were so good we decided to copy them.*⁴³

Gordon, in his paper quoted here, makes no comment on the actual quality of their dancing,⁴⁴ but his account immediately led me to recall the attitude of many of the dancers we encountered in our workshop in Towersey some ten years later.

Any discussion of the quality of Morris dancing is inevitably tricky. Motivations for dancing and the audiences for whom teams perform are many and various, and most commentary however well-informed will have a significant element of subjectivity. There were a number of very polished and highly motivated Border Morris teams which emerged during the 1980’s and indeed there have been more since. There is undoubtedly scope for further study of this interesting but challenging topic.

3.3 Quantitative Aspects – i.e. Numbers

Information on the progressive development in the number of teams dancing Border Morris over time would be interesting and certainly less contentious than the subject of performance. Data from the records of the three Morris dance organisations to provide the analysis does not however appear to be as readily available as might have been expected. What is presented here in the table below is a

snapshot of the immediately available information from these three organisations representing Morris dancers in the UK for the year 2019.

	Total Number of Teams	Teams Dancing only Border Morris	Teams Dancing Border Morris with Other Styles of Morris	Total Number of Teams with Border Morris in their Repertoire
Morris Federation	515	75	71	146
		(15%)	(14%)	(28%)
Morris Ring	190	6	35	41
		(3%)	(18%)	(22%)
Open Morris	137	35	21	56
		(26%)	(15%)	(41%)

Note: the data presented here for the Morris Federation and Open Morris was compiled from the pages on their websites listing the member teams, <https://www.morrisfed.org.uk/resources/morrisfed-sidefinder/#!/directory/map> for the Morris Federation and <https://open-morris.org/member-sides-list/> for Open Morris.

Open Morris do not aggregate data separately from their website. The Morris Federation membership database does not provide the number of teams dancing only Border Morris so I have used my compiled data in the table above which agrees with the aggregate numbers in the Federation's database to within $\pm 4\%$.

What in my view is really significant in these numbers is the small number of teams in the Morris Ring who dance Border Morris to the exclusion of other styles of Morris (these six teams are Alvechurch Morris Men, Belchamp Morris, Datchet Border Morris Men, Helier Morris Men, Silurian Border Morris Men and the Original Welsh Border Morris). This might possibly indicate a continuing undercurrent of antipathy mentioned earlier in the paper to Border Morris within the Morris Ring. On the other hand quite a large number, not overall so disproportionate to the proportion in the Morris Federation, do perform Border Morris dances as part of their repertoire. An assumption might be made that the winter would be the usual season for performances by these latter Morris Ring teams but this would require further investigation beyond the scope of this current paper.

That there are now around 250 Morris teams including Border Morris in their repertoire would, I think, have seemed quite remarkable from the perspective of the early 1970's. But then the existence of a total of around 850 teams would also surely have seemed not just remarkable but quite unbelievable!

3.4 Final Comment

There is undoubtedly much more that could be done to fully understand the development of the dancing of the Border Morris through the whole of the modern era. This paper has aimed to provide some clarification on its development since the term was first used in the early 1960's and has also provided a case study on how one particular team approached the topic. It is hoped that it will lead others to raise questions and to pursue further investigations.

Acknowledgements

I would like to record my thanks to all those listed below for all their valuable help and advice.

Members of Leicester Morrismen:

Especially Pete Johnson and Charlie Corcoran for the deep dive into the scrapbooks and records;

In addition to Dick Allsop, Martin Barstow, John Bentham and Roy Thody who were all there during the period described in section 2. All these contributions have made this section as accurate a record as I think is possible;

And to Matt Simons, who wasn't there at the time, but has made some useful suggestions including reminding me of the significance of the "Rattlebone and Ploughjack" record.

Officers of the Morris Ring particularly Jon Melville and again Charlie Corcoran, in his role as Keeper of the Morris Ring Logbooks, for the extracts which are quoted.

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Beth Neill, editor of *Morris Matters*, for permission to reference an earlier iteration of this paper.

Derek Schofield for the original motivation, for some useful suggestions and for permission to quote from the Sidmouth book.

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1. A shorter version of this paper has earlier been published: Swift John, How Border Morris Developed – a Leicester Perspective, *Morris Matters* Vol. 39, No. 1, (2020), pp 10-14.
2. Charlotte Sophia Burne, *Shropshire Folk-Lore*, (London, 1886), p 477.
3. E. C. Cawte, 'The Morris Dance in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire', *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, Vol. 9, No. 4, (1963), pp 197-212.
4. See for instance Roy Dommett, 'The Brimfield Morris Dance', *English Dance and Song*, Vol. 31, No. 3, (1969), p 98.

5. Cecil J. Sharp and Herbert C. Macllwaine, *The Morris Book Volumes 1-5 1911-1924*, (The Morris Ring, 1991), p 21.

6. Maud Karpeles, Upton-On-Severn Morris Dances, *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (1933), pp 101-103, p 102.

7. The record of this meeting in the Morris Ring Logbooks states that there was “*a performance of the Westwood Morris by the Jockey men*”. Much Wenlock is two miles northeast of Stretton Westwood – see Dave Jones’ book, page 29, reference 24.

Geoffrey Mendham in *English Dance & Song*, Vol. 18, No. 3, (1953-54), pp 100-102 provides a record of a performance by the Westwood Morris Men at Much Wenlock Abbey in August 1949. Mendham was a musician for Jockey Men’s Morris and the Morris Ring Archive of Border Morris material contains a communication from Mendham dated May 1981 (presumed to have been sent to Dave Jones) in which he records in relation to the dance he had witnessed, “*I also introduced the dance to Jockey Men’s Morris ... largely as a comic item for ‘domestic’ occasions, but, while puzzled and amused by it, I think I then regarded it as an authentic but much debased form of traditional morris*”.

8. Cawte, 1963, p 207.

9. E. C. Cawte, Alex Helm, R. J. Marriott and N. Peacock, A Geographical Index of the Ceremonial Dance in Great Britain: Part One, *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1960, pp. ii + 1-41.

10. Joseph Needham, The Geographical Distribution of English Ceremonial Dance Traditions, *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (1936), pp 1-45.

11. Cawte et al, 1960, p 7.

12. Although see John Kirkpatrick’s mention of activities in London in his article, reference. 16

See also Russell Wortley, The Bromsberrow Heath Morris Dances, *English Dance & Song*, Vol. 23, No. 4, (1959), pp 94-95, where he states that the stick dance “*has achieved currency among Morris dancers during recent years*”.

13. Lionel Bacon, *A Handbook of Morris Dances*. First published by the Morris Ring in 1974 with a 2nd edition, incorporating various corrections in 1986.

14. Much of Roy Dommett’s archive material is only available on-line. For the Border Morris material it is available on the Morris Federation Notation website and the link to the Index is : <http://notation.apps.morrisfed.org.uk/document-library/border-morris>

The paper from which this quotation is taken was prepared for a conference hosted by the Morris Federation called “Roots of Border Morris” held in February 1992. The paper is named “Border Morris as collected v1.0” in the index list and may also be accessed directly through the link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B94GzSWSEeV7aXdVZUczQ0VaSlk/view>. These links were accessed on 8th January 2020.

15. From the home page on <http://www.welshbordermorris.co.uk> access the page “History of OWBM” where these quotations can be found or use the direct link <https://welshbordermorris.blogspot.com/p/ears-2013-and-still-counting.html>. These links were accessed on 8th January 2020.

16. Derek Schofield, *The First Week in August, Fifty Years of the Sidmouth Festival*, Sidmouth International Festival Ltd, (2004), p 72.

17. John Kirkpatrick, *Bordering on the Insane*, *English Dance & Song*, Vol. 41, No. 3, (1979), pp 12-14, p 13.
18. “Magic Lantern” were appearing at the Sidmouth Festival that year as a street theatre group and the “Taffy” referred to in this quotation is Taffy Thomas, their leader and a key source of inspiration.
19. Schofield, 2004, pp 92-93. As an observer of that performance and as my first introduction to Border Morris, I can certainly testify to its impact!
20. LP (vinyl) record published by Island Records Limited, reference HELP 24.
21. The revival of Molly dancing started at around this same time and its subsequent development definitely merits further study.
22. Schofield, 2004, pp 99-100.
23. See <http://www.silurianmorris.org.uk/history>. This link was accessed on 8th January 2020.
24. Dave Jones, *The Roots of Welsh Border Morris*, September 1988.
25. Derek Schofield, *Which Past? The Influences of Tradition and Revival on the North-west Morris* in *Morris: The Legacy of the Past: Proceedings of a One-day Conference on Morris Dancing Held on Saturday April 20th 1996* (London: The Morris Federation, The Morris Ring & Open Morris, 1996), pp 94-109, p 102.
26. This record and the list referred to in the previous sentence are not currently (2020) publicly available and I am grateful to Sally Wearing, Past President of the Morris Federation, for the information.
27. William Kelly, *Notices Illustrative of the Drama and other Popular Amusements ... Extracted from the Chamberlain's Accounts and Other Manuscripts of the Borough of Leicester*, London, 1865, pp 100-111.
28. The scrapbooks and various other documents referred to in this section are held privately by members of Leicester Morrismen. In addition I had correspondence with members of the team who were present at the time and who provided their recollections of various events – see the acknowledgements.
29. For general information about Whittlesea see <http://www.strawbear.org.uk/index.html>. This link was accessed on 8th January 2020.
30. The name is a pun since “Red Leicester” is best known as a cheese which was originally made in Leicestershire. It is actually orange in colour.
31. Derek Schofield, a black and white issue? *English Dance and Song*, Vol 67, No. 2, (2005), pp 12-14.
32. *English Dance and Song*, Vol 67, No. 3, 2005, see under “A black and white issue?” in the letters pages, pp 30-32.
33. Chloe Metcalfe, To black up or not to black up?, *The Morris Federation Newsletter*, (Winter 2013), pp 6-9.
34. Katy Spicer, “Facing up to a dancing debate”, *English Dance and Song*, Vol 79, No. 4, (2016), pp 14-15.
35. Gordon Ashman, Custom in Conflict: The Morris Dance in the Shrewsbury and Ironbridge Area of Shropshire, *Traditional Dance*, 5/6, 1988, Crewe and Alsager College of Higher Education, pp 135-158, p 150.
36. This is the version described by Geoff Hughes in *The Morris Dancer* Vol. 2, No. 7, (1988) pp 101-105. Leicester had learnt it from Coventry Morris Men in 1978.

37. John Swift, *The Role of Repertoire* in *The Evolving Morris: Proceedings of a One-day Conference on Morris Dancing held on 20th October 1990* (London: The Morris Federation & The Morris Ring, 1991), pp 71-89.
38. Charles Corcoran and John Swift, *Limiting the Repertoire - the Influence of Publications* in *Influences on the Morris: Proceedings of a One-day Conference on Morris Dancing held on 4th April 1992*, (London: The Morris Federation, The Morris Ring & Open Morris, 1992), pp33-58.
39. An attraction for Leicester Morrismen (who spend much of the year dancing Cotswold Morris) was that the dance alternates double stepping in the figures with single stepping in the sticking and hence present a little more of a technical challenge.
40. Gordon Ashman, *With One Bound They Were Free: From the Cotswolds to the Welsh Border in One Stride*, *Lore and Language*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (1987), pp 105-116, p 114.
41. At that time Morris teams invited to dance at the Sidmouth festival were in two categories. The more elite teams were called "arena teams" because their programme included performing on the festival's arena stage whilst "town teams" principally performed in the town centre.
42. Rob Elliott and Vas Deshmukh, *Silurian – greater than the sum of its parts*, in *Morris, The Good, The Bad, The Ugly*: Proceedings of a One-day Conference on Morris Dancing held on 16th April 1994, (London: The Morris Federation, The Morris Ring & Open Morris, 1994) pp 37-58, p 40.
43. Ashman, 1987, p 114.
44. At the conference "Border Morris - Roots and Revival" in 1992, hosted by the Morris Federation, Gordon was much less circumspect – see the transcript in the American Morris Newsletter http://www.americanmorrisnews.org/pastissues/april2005v25n1/current_issue/gordonashmanv25n1bordermorrisrootsandrevival.html. This link was accessed on 8th January 2020.

Book Review

Mummer's Plays Revisited. By Peter Harrop. Routledge, 2019. Routledge Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies, Abingdon, Oxon, New York. 217 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8153-4837-5 (hbk). ISBN: 978-1-351-16704-8 (ebk). Hardback £120. eBook £40, (Amazon Kindle, Vital Source eBooks); Rental 6/12 months £22.20/£27.00

The Life and Death of the Pagan Mummer

Stephen Rowley

For as long as I can remember Mummers' plays have been survivors of an ancient pagan ritual. Two legendary knights fight each other, one is mortally wounded, but he is revived by a doctor. A miraculous story signifying the cycle of life, death and rebirth. Especially when one considers that it is a drama played out at Christmas, or perhaps we should say, the auspicious winter solstice, when the year itself is reborn. However, a recent book slays this theory in an authoritative and convincing manner.

As a practicing Mummer since the early 70s, I became interested in the history of the Mummers and was directed to the standard work on the subject *The Mummers' Play* by R.J.E. Tiddy (1923). Published after the author's untimely death in the First World War, it is a worthwhile, readable and thought-provoking work. Tiddy was a scholar of the English language with a love for folk poetry. He considered that the Mummers' play "...degenerate and undeveloped though it may be, bears traces of ritual origin...". He was not alone. From the 1880s to the 1960s writers positioned the Mummers play as a remnant life-cycle ritual. Even Thomas Hardy wrote of Mummers' plays as 'ancient survivors'. As late as 1969 Professor Alan Brody, in his book *The English Mummers and Their Plays* (1969), marvelled at the men who still, after a thousand years, move into "...the centre of the magic circle, to re-enact the death and resurrection of their earth, the eternal pattern of their seasons."

However, even at the time Brody was writing, other scholars were chiselling away at the foundations of this theory. Their issue being there was little or no actual evidence for any kind of pagan origins. As Eddie Cass and Steve Roud put it in their 2002 EFDSS publication *Room, Room, Ladies and Gentlemen...* an introduction to the English Mummers' Play:

"As far as the Mummers' play is concerned, these origin theories usually include the following elements:

- It is a survivor of a pre-Christian ritual
- It is a fertility rite
- The death and resurrection part of the play is sympathetic magic to ensure the return of the sun/summer/etc, each year
- The characters thus symbolise light/dark, good/evil, etc."

They argue that the last three elements are predicated on acceptance of the first one. For who would argue that fertility rituals started after the end of the pre-Christian era?

While many commentators have trawled through the archives for early Mummers' play references or texts, they have failed to turn up anything earlier than the distinctly un-pagan eighteenth century.

In comes another professor. This time it is Peter Harrop with his recent book, *Mummers' Plays Revisited*. He tackles the evidence issue head-on from the perspective of one who is both a professor of performing arts and a practicing mummer.

Mummers' Plays Revisited examines the earliest texts and descriptions from a variety of viewpoints. The characters, the plot and the context are all shown to be a product of their time.

You may be familiar with early mumming references dating back to the C14th, including a entertainment for the child Prince Richard on the occasion of his birthday. This comprised of disguise, mimed action and games. Harrop labels this as 'non-play' mumming, a tradition that became a house-visiting 'cadging' custom right into the C19th. He then shows how mummer's plays became an adjunct to this practice in the late C18th.

The origins of the Mummers' plays themselves are found in the development of popular theatre. The key progenitor is the 'heroic drama', a theatre form that developed in the mid-1600s. This had a distinctive structure and style, including the familiar closed couplet verse. Towards the end of that century there was a fashion to parody these heroic dramas. Keeping the form and style, the parodies were humorous and often satirical. My favourite of these is the *The Tragedy of Chrononhotonthologos*: "The most tragical tragedy that ever was tragediz'd by any company of tragedians". Perhaps a forerunner of *Blackadder*. By the middle of the C18th even these parodies were being parodied themselves, with the arrival of the 'mock play'. This not only parodied the parody of the heroic drama, it parodied the nature of dramatic performance itself.

The first Mummers' play text was possibly conceived as a clever marketing ploy by a publisher of chapbooks. *Alexander and the King of Egypt*, a Mock Play as acted by the Mummers every Christmas (1739-71) has all the hallmarks of the mock play – and it was intended to be performed by amateurs. Amateur performance was a new fashion of the time.

The characters themselves are stock characters of the Georgian theatre. The *Alexander* play features not St George, but Prince George, then heir to the throne. The Doctor would have been very recognizable to audiences of the time as the mountebank or quack doctor who had been a stock character of plays for over a hundred years. In many plays we get the Turkish Knight, a regular stage combatant from heroic dramas referring to the Great Turkish War (1693-1699).

Peter Harrop also examines the differences between non-play Mumming and Mummers plays as seen through the way in which they are described in the antiquarian literature, and we can see how the introduction of a play as an additional entertainment would certainly add-value to the mummer's cadging potential.

A significant section of the book considers the impact of the Victorian father of anthropology James Fraser and his fellow scholars. Fraser became famous as the author of *The Golden Bough*, a study of comparative religion. It was a period of great philosophical upheaval. Geologists were challenging the Bible creation story with their interpretation of fossils as evidence of extinct life forms. Darwin had published his theories of evolution. Archaeologists were showing that structures like Stonehenge were built by civilisations that preceded the Romans in Britain. It is in this context that Fraser came to ponder the possibility that there may have been residents of this land before Christianity, by definition these were 'pagan', literally meaning 'without God'.

Explorers were returning from the distant colonies with descriptions of primitive tribesmen and their rituals, and in a flash of brilliance Fraser connected the idea of primitive (also pagan, because they had not yet been converted to Christianity) rituals with our archaeological ancestors and projected it forward. His theory was that "...magical belief and ritual practice was the source of all subsequent religious thought", and our 'ancient' folklore traditions must be remnants of pre-Christian rituals.

This theme was quickly taken up by the early folklorists. Fraser gave them a model in which to contextualise the very customs they were studying. Charlotte Burne in 1886 described a Mummers' play collected in Shropshire as a "...dramatized myth of the strife between Summer and Winter ...taking us back to the very beginnings of dramatic art ...as part of the ceremonial of rustic religious festivals".

Thus was framed the discussion of folklore for nearly a century, not just for Mummers' plays, but Morris dancing and most other customs. They were classified as pagan rituals without any reference to existing evidence of their origins. In many ways this tenet stifled real progress in folklore research for many decades, and not just in England. It is an issue that bedevils folklore studied and anthropology throughout the world. The Golden Bough became a standard text in most, if not all, universities. Even today it is common to stumble on a European folklore display and read in the guide book that you are watching a custom with ancient pagan ritual origins.

Fraser's view still holds sway amongst the general public and also many of the revival folk practitioners. It has spawned the phenomenon of the pagan mummers group and its close relation, the pagan Morris side. Most, if not all of these have been formed well after the debunking of the pagan ritual theory. The impact of The Golden Bough goes much further. Many non-pagan Mummers' play revival groups from the 1920s to the present time have adopted a ritualistic approach to performance.

Today, the fields of anthropology, ethnography and folklore are much more rigorous and the Fraserian view has been resoundingly rebutted. However, one of the bugbears with folklore research is the old adage 'absence of evidence should not be read as evidence of absence'. For many, this absence of evidence represents a kind of proof of the pagan origins theory, i.e. it must be true because you can't show me evidence that it isn't. Studies like Mummers' Plays Revisited and John Forrest's History of Morris Dancing 1458-1750 turn that argument on its head. The evidence for the pagan theory takes you back to James Fraser and no further. If you go back to the actual historical evidence you will find the real origins and a much richer picture of our cultural heritage. These studies blast away the mists of myth created by Fraser and his disciples.

Mummers' Plays Revisited by Peter Harrop is very readable and accessible, and I would recommend it as essential reading for the Morris dancer and mummer with an inquiring mind. However, it is priced as an academic book intended for university libraries and well beyond the pocket of the interested Mummer. There is an electronic edition, which is cheaper, but not cheap. A slightly more affordable option is to buy a six month or one year subscription.

Biographical Note

Stephen Rowley is dancer, musician, mummer and researcher. His mumming career started in the early 1970s with English Folk Packet and continues to the present time. In 2011 he founded and chaired

the Mummers Unconvention which evolved into the International Mummers Festival and Mummers Symposium. He devised a Motley Mummers performance for the Sidmouth Folk Festival on-line this year.

To participate in the 2021 International Mummers Festival online 2/3rd January, visit www.mummersfestival.org

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