

THE MORRIS DANCER

No. SIX***** MARCH 1980

No-one can say, just now, what The Morris Dancer may become - in size, frequency, or content; but these early issues are being used to put into print information that may not be on record elsewhere. This issue has pieces on two former clubs.

Many clubs have Squire's Insignia; Staffs of Association in the Ring are mostly embellished; their descriptions could be two interesting series.

The by now many trips abroad could be brought together (many Logs must have been kept). The extraordinary encounter (in the course of the Morris) can fill the odd corner in the booklet; please write.

There is nothing yet from the pre-Ring dancers - see Issue Five.

Past Squire of the Ring Morris Sunderland says that the price of A Handbook of Morris Dancing is V7, plus £1 postage (at the present time.)

Write to Ewart Russell, 50, Mile End Road, Colchester, C04 5BX

JONATHAN HOOTON on Kemp's 'Nine Daies Wonder.' (cont.)

The final two days took him 20 miles and 15 miles respectively in two, full, 12 hour days. In all, his 125 miles took just over nine days, and there is nothing in his account to lead us to doubt its validity.

When planning the 1977 'Nine Daies Wonder' we allowed a speed of three miles per hour for clubs dancing five miles (all except for East Saxon Sword, on asphalt) and it worked very well, although some sides were slower and some faster; it averaged out at three miles per hour. Therefore it only took about four days to complete with the longest section on Friday - 53 miles from Romford to Halstead. Kemp did not have traffic to cope with but he did have to nut up with ruts in the road; being waist deep in water; dancing over heath; and with inclement weather such as the 'grat Snoe' that fell at Bury. It was and probably will remain the most spectacular Morris event to take place, and since it is still remembered 379 years later, it most definitely was not a nine day wonder.

NOTES ABOUT THE SHERBORNE MORRIS

The major source of information about the Sherborne Morris was George Simpson, aged 60 about 1908, and living then in the village of Upton, near Didcot in Berkshire. George died about the first World War from cancer. George's younger brother James was visited by the Travelling Morrice on 26th June, 1938, when he was living in retirement at Battledown, Cheltenham. He and his brother had both danced in the village, but both left and joined the police force in Cheltenham; Fred Hamer said that they changed their name for this, for some reason now forgotten. George had done land measuring and carpentering.

George Simpson said that William Harper of Sherborne used to play whittle and dub (pipe and tabor). Someone else told Cecil Sharp that "Jim the Laddy" (J. Hopkins) was pipe and taborer. Richard Pitts (not a morris dancer) told Clive Carey about 1913 that he remembered a Simpson as whittle and Dub player. As Pitts, then aged 89, also talked of 'young' Simpson, the player was probably of an older generation.

Pitts talked of dancers named Hedges, Hawker, Lambert and two brothers Kent, one called John, as well as Simpson the player.

Before Sharp met Simpson, Mrs. Hobbs, who did a lot of exploratory work in the Cotswolds, went to see Mrs. James, widow of the man who taught Simpson. Mrs. James regarded Fieldtown as Sherborne's greatest rivals. Sharp also saw Taylor, a pupil of Simpson's, but they all agreed in Sherborne that Simpson was the best, and that he could whistle the tunes.

The Travelling Morrice in June 1924 met Albert Townsend and collected the tune and some words for a dance for four men to Highland Mary. Mr. Charles Taylor of the Oddington side danced some of this to the Travelling Morrice using the Sherborne step, and both he and Townsend said that it was danced very much as I'll Go and Enlist For A Sailor.

Russell Wortley and H. Albino met Thomas Pitts, an old Sherborne dancer, then aged about 80, at Eastleach before the last war and obtained some tunes. His photo is on the cover of Old Cotswold Photographs by Viner of the Cirencester Museum.

Sharp was told that the morris was given up about 1863 - this is a little early for George Simpson's age and the dancers that were met between the wars. Richard Pitts told Carey it was given up about 1883, which for the same reason appears a little late. A date like 1873 would be consistent with George Simpson having a pupil. The Sherborne side danced on and off for three weeks at Whitsuntide, going out all day for miles around. Places like Shipton under Wychwood and Milton were mentioned. That was the regular outing for the year except for special fetes. They were always in Sherborne on Whit Tuesday.

DRESS Billy Cock hat trimmed all over with ribbons (square high hat). White pleated shirts - pleated all over. As said to be "slashed with coloured ribbons" ribbons must have been inserted into the pleats so that the colours showed when the pleats opened during dancing. Diagonal sash said Simpson, but, Mrs. James spoke of baldrick ribbons. White knee breeches, which were later discarded for white trousers. They attached the bells to one of the knee buckles. Bell pads had 25 bells on each leg - in five straps with five

bells on each strap. The large bells were put at the corners (even then 3d each) and smaller ones in between of different sizes and mixed together. Straps of red braid crossed at the back of the leg. Mrs. Hobbs borrowed a set for Sharp to copy. Originally blue stockings and later white. Handkerchiefs were tied with a reeving knot to the little fingers to leave hands free to clap. Some attached them to their shirt cuffs. Fool: he wore a round jacket with tassels. He had the letters "T.F." on his back, standing for Tom Fool. He wore a brewer's cap with long tassel hanging down his arm.

William Hathaway told Sharp at Cheltenham at Easter 1908 that Sherborne was a desperate morris place!

George Simpson said that they always had a cake and sword borne in front.

Sticks: eighteen inches long, rather less than one inch in diameter and painted red, white and blue in spiral bands half inch wide like a barber's pole.

They danced onto ground in single file, then round the enclosure, finally forming up for dance. In going off they did the same, but in a serpentine fashion. In both coming and going they made their obedience "by pulling the forelock". Made rather slowly and ceremonially by a wide circular movement forwards of the arm - when the hand reaches the forehead, the head is ducked down upon it.

R. L. DOMMETT © 1979

See RLD, Issue 2, Nov.1978

Issue 4, Aug.1979

Issue 5, Nov.1979

DOUGLAS KENNEDY, O.B.E., Squire of the Ring 1938 to 1947, wrote on the third day of the New Year, "...a New Year message to the Ringto express our hopes to the clubs for a successful year." His own past year included "two super holidays, both of them 'out of the blue'. The First, in early April, was sailing in a flotilla holiday - four of us in a small yacht in the seas around Greece, following in the wake of the Argonauts. The second was in early October when we joined Kenneth Savory, himself a morris man, some dancers will remember, at a lovely house he had inherited in the Algarve

in Portugal. There we could enjoy surf bathing in the sunshine."

The Past Squire is 87 on the 17th of May.

66, Dale Street,
Lancaster, Lancs.
27.9.79

Dear Sir,

Jonathan Hooton does a succinct job of summing up Raphael Samuel's material on Headington Quarry in your third issue, although I would disagree with his comments on the photograph of the team reproduced in the volume. He suggests that the rather dishevelled side shown there 'must have been more the sight Sharp saw on Boxing Day 1899, rather than the immaculately turned out side that posed for photographs taken for the Morris Book.' Why? It seems more likely that the men who danced at Sandfield Cottage on that occasion would be wearing the kit that Percy Manning had so recently 'helped' them to purchase, for their appearance at his lecture at the Oxford Corn Exchange on March 13th of that year (see Jackson's Oxford Journal, dated 19.3.1899 for an account of that event), and as worn for the pictures taken by Henry Taunt about the same time (see 'Henry Taunt's Oxford'.)

A close examination of the photograph in question reveals that, in fact, all six of the dancers are wearing baldricks - numbers one, two and three have dark coloured baldricks, while four, five and six wear lighter coloured ones. This is in keeping with the 1899 photos, where four in the set wear the darker and the other two (including the foreman 'Gran' Hedges) and the odd man, the lighter.

Comparing the line-ups on the two sets of photos, we find that only G. Coppock (no.1), 'Old Mac' Massey (no.3) and 'Sip' Washington (no.6) are to be seen in the more recent one. Neither Hedges nor William limber are in evidence. Washington is now dancing (he was previously the fool), while Mark Cox is musician. Massey looks considerably older than in the 1899 photos, as does Washington. Could this photo, taken 'circa 1900' according to the caption, actually be one of the team which, according to Mary Neal, danced after 1910 (but before

1914, of course), at which time Cox was musician and Kimber had a junior team (the first of many)?

Yours faithfully,

KEITH CHANDLER

(I understand that Keith and Headington Quarry are in correspondence about this close examination of the pictures of the Quarry dancers at the turn of the century; and that material for The Morris Dancer may come of that. Ed.)

GEOFF OATES, piper and taborer to the Boars Head Morris Men, of Yorkshire, a club of which he was a founder member, died in February, 1978. The club decided to set up an investment fund for his eighteen-month-old daughter, Andrea; and achieved a sum of £1,114. The Club asks that the Newsletter should convey its thanks to everyone who contributed to the fund.

NOTES ON TWO DEFUNCT CLUBS, written by Past Squire of The Ring Geoff Metcalf, in 1979.

MORLEY COLLEGE Morley College is in Lambeth just south of Westminster Bridge, and runs evening adult classes in every conceivable subject. In the 1920s the principal instructor in folk dancing was Richard Callender (how a sergeant-major became interested in folk dancing is another story) who was elected Squire of the Ring in 1949 but died before he could take office. Selected members of the folk dancing classes were invited to join the "team class", which in accordance with the custom at that time gave folk dance "demonstrations", mostly indoors. These consisted of country dancing of all kinds, morris (men's and women's sides) and sword.

Prior to the formation of the Ring both men and women from the team had been in the habit of attending the Thaxted weekends, and it was therefore natural that the men's morris team should be at the first Thaxted Ring Meeting in 1935 when they were admitted to association. Although the side continued as part of the "team class" it did begin to have a slightly independent existence by 1939.

Amongst the members of the team in the thirties were

Cecil Capp, Edward Nicol, Bob Ash, Walter Faires, Eddie Jenkinson, Wally Newall and Geoff Metcalf.

In the changed climate after the war the team class was not revived, although folk dancing and the folk dance club still carry on at Morley College. I am not aware that any attempt was ever made to revive the morris side.

BALGOWAN Walter Faires (see above) was, during the thirties, teaching at the Balgowan School in Beckenham. He began instructing some of the older boys in morris and sword and they reached a standard that enabled them to give displays on their own and act as an independent morris club. They attended Ring Meetings at C.S.H. and Thaxted, and were admitted to association in the Ring in 1938.

GREENSLEEVES MORRIS MEN

1926

A HISTORY OF THE CLUB

Printed on the occasion of the Club's fiftieth anniversary and prepared by Terry Rees to whom we gratefully acknowledge our thanks.

S Q U I R E S

N.O.M.Cameron (Founder)	Jan.13th 1926
J.W.G.Heaven	July 26th 1929
W.G.Neil	May 17th 1940
L.H.F.Nichols	June 21st 1957
B.J.Beecher	September 1964
W.H.Cleaver	October 1968
B.J.Beecher	October 1970
L.H.F.Nichols	October 1971
W.H.Cleaver	October 1972
B.L.Gilbert	October 1974

It is not quite clear how the club came to be called Greensleeves, but the name must have been chosen either by Cameron himself or by him in consultation with the other four original members before the side started meeting for

regular practice. The Constitution of "The Greensleeves" as given in the Log is unorthodox, but the club could then be described briefly as consisting of men, members of the E.F.D.S., who met regularly and danced English Morris and Sword dances. "They are amateurs and have no coach, the motto being 'Destruction not Inscription' (a Spoonerism for 'Description not Instruction')."

This Constitution was amplified in a letter written by Cameron on June 8th, 1926, to a potential member: ".....the idea is to have a private club consisting of men who do not habitually demonstrate for Headquarters, but do know their business up to a decent standard. The theory is that a really good team can be made up of unpretentious individuals if they practice constantly and regularly together... we do not teach technique to individuals; that is done in the Society's classes. We train teams. At present, anyone who has progressed through all the grades but is not constantly performing in shows for H.Q. finds himself at rather a loose end. A private club such as ours ought therefore to be a godsend. The team will find plenty of outlets for its energies, but the idea is that practices are the main thing, shows and competitions merely incidents."

The first active meeting was held on January 15th, 1926, when G. Green, W. Green, J. Heaven and Radcliffe met at Cameron's flat from whence they adjourned to St. John's Mission to practise Sleights. After this they went to Reeve Hall for Country Dance practice with the Lumps of Plum Pudding. This first tentative link with the ladies' team was to develop into a close association lasting for more than thirty years. Each team preserved its independence but joined the other for Country Dancing. Both names have connections with the Morris. Wyresdale 'Greensleeves' is a dance for three men, nearly always 'guyed' for show purposes, while 'Lumps of Plum Pudding' is a name given to several Morris Dances, and well known to most Morris Men as a Morris Jig.

Club costume originally comprised bell pads and baldrics in colours of own choice, white flannels, white plimsolls and no hats. Green armllets were worn for the first time at a demonstration in Bethnal Green on November 27th, 1926. For sword

dances, bells and baldrics were taken off and leather shoes substituted for plimsolls. Incidentally, bells were always worn at the weekly practices because it seemed to be of use to the musicians.

During 1927 the Club began to study a sword dance from the small island of Papa Stour in the Shetlands. Cameron, whose family estate was the Isle of Bressay, 'found' the dance, collected all the information about it and brought it south, first of all to Greensleeves. The unusual, perhaps unique, characteristics of the dance are the long and flexible swords, the presence of seven dancers, the fascinating seven-pointed star made by the double locking of the swords, and the unusual tune to which the dance is done. It is performed to this day at the annual Shetland festival of Norse origin, called Up-helly-aa.

The last practice before the summer break of 1929 brought something of a shock in the form of a statement from Cameron who "...confessed that he was about to leave London and live at home in Shetland, and as that was seven hundred miles away, regular attendance on Fridays would be difficult. It would obviously be a pity - to put it mildly - if this, the only club of its kind in London, were to cease to exist, but the scarcity of men and the difficulties in the way of such as there are make its maintenance difficult." But the Club did continue, and at the first meeting of the Autumn term the leadership devolved upon Jack Heaven. A benedictory telegram from Cameron was then opened and read:

Foot it featly and keep it up.
(signed) Old 'un.

Subsequently, a long-sword, bright and shining, was engraved with the names of all those who were members at the time, including that of the Club's honorary member, Mrs. Matthews, and at the practice on January 10th, 1930, it was presented with suitable ceremony to Cameron in recognition of his services.

During these pre-war years the public side of Morris had a very different character indeed. There was little by way of 'tours' as we now understand them, but instead an

enormous number of formal demonstrations was given in a wide variety of circumstances at fetes, schools, churches, Women's Institutes and all manner of public events. Some were not without their humorous moments, as for example at a function in aid of the London Hospital (1934) when the men danced before a small audience in a marquee, on grass, sloping ground, with a tent-pole in the way.

Breakdown in transport both public and private occurred from time to time, while problems of music amplification were encountered as early as 1932 in Oxford "from a Mullard van". Even keeping the Log was not without risk: on one occasion the 'chronicler' found it difficult to give an accurate account of the meeting on Friday June 15th 1934 owing to his late arrival in a state of inebriation.

Competitions and shows were very popular at this time, some of the dancing being conducted on a scale sufficiently large to require the use of the Albert Hall. The frequency with which the Club entered competitions is matched only by the frequency with which they obtained high marks, and some of the mark sheets together with the judges' comments have survived to be included in the Log. At the Lilford competition in 1927, Greensleeves carried off the prize in the sword section with Escrick, and later that afternoon decided to make a last minute entry for the Country Dance section in collaboration with the Lumps of Plum Pudding, which called for a hasty rehearsal in an empty marquee some four minutes before going on. Their subsequent performance drew from Douglas Kennedy the remark that he was "pleased to see that the team was not over-drilled."

It was in 1927 that someone in the Club coined the word 'preliminating' to describe the competitive selection of teams aspiring to be chosen for the Society's Annual Festival, or even for the Albert Hall. One of these preliminating events was held in the Parry Theatre of the Royal College of Music, where dancers were required to perform on a stage more suited to opera, in front of a sky-blue back-drop and with a piano in the wings. Such surroundings tended to make the Greensleeves side self-conscious, but they were nevertheless selected to appear at the Albert Hall by the judges (Roland Heath

and Douglas Kennedy) one of whom observed of the Queen's Delight that "the split jump has an arm movement which I notice they avoided tonight." The Albert Hall meetings were themselves grand affairs, and if the programmes are to be believed the Club is likely to have danced to music directed by Ralph Vaughan-Williams or Imogen Holst.

Problems of attendance at practice were in evidence from the start. In 1930-1 they seem to have been particularly acute when the average attendance was six and two-thirds men. The Log does not tell us whether the two-thirds man danced or played music, but it must have been interesting.

In April of 1934, Joseph Needham of Caius College, and Squire of Cambridge Morris Men, sent to William Ganiford a copy of a circular letter which had already been distributed to morris clubs at Oxford, Thaxted, Letchworth and East Surrey. Needham apologised for the letter's late arrival:

"By an unfortunate oversight, it was forgotten that 'Greensleeves' should have received a copy at the same time, and I sincerely trust that you and the members of your club will forgive this error."

This was the letter which proposed the foundation of the Morris Ring! The error was duly forgiven and after some discussion within the Club it was agreed that Greensleeves should become one of the founder members: though in his summary of the year's activities, the Squire expressed the misgivings felt in some quarters about this move:

"It is believed and hoped that this will not in any way... curtail the Club's independence."

The association between Greensleeves and East Surrey has been a long one, the first outing taking place on May Day 1937. This was entirely successful, thanks to Greensleeves member Len Bardwell who happened also to be the East Surrey Bagman! The Log comments "May it be the first of many at which the Club is represented."

A Ring Meeting of the same year at Thaxted was the first of its kind attended by the Club. In those days meetings were devoted to formal instruction in a selected tradition or traditions on Saturday mornings followed by the public dancing of them during the remainder of the day. On this

occasion study was made of the Bampton tradition "of which", the Log records laconically, "yet another variety - hopefully put forward by the Squire as final - has now appeared." Collections made during public dancing through the entire event amounted to ten pounds. During the speeches (which were too long) at the ensuing feast, there was remark on the "constant itch to improve dances which need no improvement."

The following year the club was again represented at Thaxted, though only two members managed to attend the later meeting at Stow-on-the-Wold, and they returned with the news that "the speeches were more numerous and deadly than ever." But this did not deter Greensleeves from attending the Spring meeting of the Ring at Cecil Sharp House in March of 1939, where "...instruction in Headington...under William Kimber... was, as usual nowadays, a matter of telling us what we had learnt and danced hitherto was all wrong; for instance, in the keys we were told that the middles must always go up, which means that they never dance the figure-of-eight of the hey at all."

Later that year there was another tour (May 13th) with East Surrey, again the work of Bardwell, and a little under four weeks after this came the annual visit to Thaxted. It was by all accounts a good meeting, and "In consequence of a strong rumour of free beer at Castle Hedingham all Greensleeves members allocated themselves to this tour."

At this point we come to the outbreak of war. The first meeting of the new session was cancelled owing to so many members being involved in the evacuation of school children. Subsequent practices became less frequent and the Club found it impossible to present a full side at the Ring meeting. However, those present at the Feast decided that arrangements for the ensuing Thaxted Ring should go ahead, but all other proposed meetings should be dropped. Practice was resumed in May of 1940 and continued through the summer, but entries in the Log become increasingly brief until the record is brought to an abrupt end by a short dramatic statement which seems also to mark the end of Greensleeves: "Forced to abandon meetings owing to enemy action etc."

The Squire now found it necessary to leave with his firm

for the West country, and at a melancholy meeting over a beer he handed over the Club's swords and sticks contained in a golf bag to Gordon Neil, who was to carry on as Squire for the duration. But when the cessation of hostilities finally arrived, Jack Heaven remained permanently in Somerset and it fell to Gordon to reorganise the weekly practices.

A small nucleus of members either remained in London or were about to return there. These and other Morris men responded enthusiastically to an invitation to 'come along' to the first post-war meeting on June 14th, 1946. Despite extensive bomb damage, permission was obtained for the use of Trefusis Room at Cecil Sharp House, when the following men were present: William Ganiford, Spencer Ranger, Simon Freedman, Gordon Neil (these four being pre-war members), Joe Whiddett, John Bremer, Harry Cowsill, Cedric Furnivall, John Strange, Igor Jones, and Mr. Hayes as pianist. Within two months of this event, Greensleeves were able to send a team to the Festival at Stratford-on-Avon during the week ending August 10th. The last days of this Festival were intended to constitute a Ring Meeting, but, to quote from the Log, it "...had not the same atmosphere that previous Ring meetings have had. At the feast, beer was limited..." which explains a great deal. It was not surprisingly a time of shortages, though the following Christmas meeting went off well enough. The appearance of Geoff Metcalf bearing sherry and biscuits met with a very favourable reception when the toast was "The future of the Club and absent members."

That was a severe winter, with some of the lowest temperatures on record, and a demonstration at Hendon had to be cancelled because the heating system in the hall was frozen solid. So it went on. No pianist turned up for the practice on February 7th. When Joe Whiddett came to the rescue with his concertina, a power cut put out the lights, compelling the dancers to leave for the "York and Albany" where drinks were served by candlelight. Nobody seemed to care.

Preparations were now put in hand for the celebration of the Club's twenty-first anniversary with a visit to the theatre ("Under The Counter") followed by supper in Soho, at Chez Auguste. Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Kennedy were there; so too were

Miss Sinclair and the Club's founder, Cameron. Frank Masters sent his regrets from B.A.O.R. in Germany: Kenneth Loveless was back at Chichester Theological College, and not allowed out. But the evening showed, if it needed showing, that the Club had lost little if anything of its vitality during the enforced idleness of the war years. Regular practices were well attended and there was again a call for public demonstrations.

At some time during 1948, Greensleeves danced in a convent. After the performance, the Mother Superior commented that she had met Cecil Sharp when he was collecting the dances and trained a team, and we danced our morris as he intended it should be done. (Flattery will get you anywhere!)

The following year saw the arrival of a new recruit named Leslie Nichols, and the temporary departure of Jack Snelgrove for a confrontation with his surgeon. Members offered sympathy and good wishes, coupled with warnings about nurses in general and those at the Temperance (!) Hospital in particular. In a short while rumours were circulating about the success of the operation and Jack's satisfactory progress with or because of some pretty Irish nurses; it has never been made clear which.

1949 also saw a Day of Dancing at Headington Quarry to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Cecil Sharp's first meeting with William Kimber. It was by all accounts a memorable and moving occasion. Meanwhile, the dance repertoire of the Club was constantly being modified. The revival in 1950 of Papa Stour, which had not been practised since its introduction by Cameron in 1927, seems to have created a more general interest in 'sword' because North Skelton appeared regularly among dances practised during the following June. Alas, the repairs and restoration of bomb damage at Cecil Sharp House made life intolerable there, and the venue of weekly practices was altered with regret to St. Charles' School, Ladbrooke Grove.

Throughout the early fifties the Club undertook an increasing number of away fixtures which meant the resident musician abandoning his piano in favour of the piano-accordion. One such demonstration took place in March, 1952, at Willesden County School during the interval of a pupils' dance, when the boys showed an abundant energy and wild enthusiasm for the

Morris, but none more than one of the prefects, by the name of Bert Cleaver.

Another regular function at this period in Club history was the annual Ross-on-Wye tour. Accompanied by the Lumps of Plum Pudding, Greensleeves travelled widely under the guidance of Frank Hollins who knew that part of the country intimately. By dint of careful management, he always managed to arrive the week to precede or follow the Society's annual Festival at Stratford-on-Avon. For the last night of the 1952 tour, dancing took place at Ross in the old covered market at the top of the town. It was raining heavily and the downpour increased in severity as the evening progressed, space for dancing becoming more crowded as spectators pressed in to escape the torrential rain. But it was the best show of the week, the circumstances combining to bring out the close comradeship and mutual enjoyment of dancers and onlookers. This was the evening of the Lynmouth disaster.

Unique in the Club's experience was their first trip abroad, which took the form of a visit in July, 1953, to the Festival du Folklore International involving demonstrations in Nice and Rome. This was another joint venture in the company of the Lumps of Plum Pudding, one of whom was smitten in France by that well known disease of travellers, 'Egyptian stomach'. But the dancing went down well (even if the food didn't) and the writer of the Log records that he had never before heard such applause.

With the advent of the Morris Ring's twenty first birthday in 1955, the Club was one of the host sides involved in the organisation of the July meeting in London, and leaders were provided for two of the nineteen tours, one through Pinner, Harrow and Kenton, the other covering Finchley, Swiss Cottage and Golder's Green. The meeting ended on the Sunday with massed dancing at Tower Hill.

Apart from frequent attendance at Ring Meetings, Greensleeves visited a number of outside functions for more formal demonstration of the Morris, such as the Isle of Wight Festival in 1961, though outings of this sort were now becoming less frequent. More popular with the Club at this time was the annual meeting at Thaxted, Patronised by us in 1956, '58, '61,

'62 and '64. And in 1961 we held the first of our own annual feasts at Chipperfield.

In 1963, London was again host to the Morris Ring, but tours through Soho and St .Giles' under the guidance of Greensleeves were cancelled by order of the Police. The weather was bad, and the amount of rain which fell was by all accounts in the nature of a rehearsal for the London meeting of 1972 when it fell with small remission until shortly before the feast on Saturday night. Meanwhile, back in the sixties, things of consequence were happening within the Morris Ring which were to come to a head in the course of the 96th meeting, held at Winchester during September, 1964. And the outcome of this was the inauguration of Leslie Nichols as Squire of the Ring on Saturday, 12th.

Keeness and hard work have always been characteristic of the men of Greensleeves, and if anyone doubts this, let them consider the Club visit to the 1966 Folkshow at Broadstairs. In agreeing to attend, they undertook to appear in a formal demonstration twice daily every day from 6th to 12th August, inclusive, though one wonders whether the programme had been seen in advance. There were eighteen items listed in the show and the Club was down for nine of them, including Abram Circle, Winster, Flamborough, Abbot's Bromley, Royton, North Skelton and Rapper. Details of the hilarious and frenetic rushes to change costume can still be got from those members who were present.

We now reach the most recent decade of Club history, marked as in other decades by important events punctuated with heavy rainfall. The downpour which greeted the 126th meeting of the Ring, held at Coventry in 1970, conformed with tradition by easing off shortly before the Feast at which Bert Cleaver was inaugurated as Squire of the Ring exactly six years to the day after Leslie Nichols. And if history can be said to repeat itself, then the Club's experience at the Festival du Folklore in 1953 has been more than equalled at the Preston Guild of 1972 where, as guests of the Garstang Morris Men, we took part in an enormous torchlight procession over a three-mile route and before (how many) thousands of responsive and highly articulate spectators. It was an

unforgettable experience!

1973 saw the first meeting of a committee composed of representatives of Morris clubs located in the area of greater London, designed to promote communication between the associated clubs and to avoid, for example, potentially stressful incidents such as the unauthorised dancing of one club on another's 'patch'. The Committee also opened discussion with the London Tourist Board, the result of which was a scheme to present Morris dancing at the main door of Westminster Abbey every Wednesday evening throughout the tourist season; and when this came to fruition in 1974, the inaugural performance on the evening of May 8th was given by Greensleeves.

Our long association with East Surrey Morris Men has continued since the war through the medium of their Whitsun subsequently Spring Bank Holiday meetings at Peasmarsh, and from time to time they have in turn been guests at our own annual weekend at Chipperfield. It has also been the policy of the Club to invite recently established sides of good standard to these meetings by way of encouragement, among which were Barnsley Longsword and the Garstang Morris Men, both of whom have since been elected to membership of the Ring.

If, during the last fifty years, Club practices have departed from the original intention that they should be "Description not Instruction", our efforts are still to see that members "know their business up to a decent standard." We look forward with confidence to our second half-century, and to the maintenance of that "decent standard".

 RUSSELL WORTLEY, Bagman of the Ring from 1950 to 1959, wrote on the 7th of August last, "...have received a copy of the American Morris Newsletter for July, 1979. I was much struck with the Editorial which takes up the problem of 'over-dancing' and relates it to the importance of the seasonal character of the morris. I feel it would be well worthwhile reprinting this Editorial in the next (or a future) issue of the Morris Dancer."

Fred Breunig's Editorial follows: and correspondence about it will be very welcome.

EDITORIAL

Can We Avoid "Overdancing?"

Several recent publications from England have addressed the problem of "overdancing." A Ring circular (January, 1979) states, "This problem is not a simple one and is getting increasingly complicated. Let me begin by stating quite clearly the size of the problem: we are in danger of having ALL Morris taken off the streets in many areas and in some this has happened already. By 'overdancing' of course, we mean that a site has more dancing than the local population or Town Council will tolerate and this may be two visits a year or a hundred." Apparently, there were some incidents where a visiting club neglected to obtain proper permission and failed to contact local sides about dancing in their community. The problem is indeed serious and is one result of having vast numbers of morris clubs (over 300) in an area the size of New England.

We, of course, do not have a problem of overdancing in North America; hut the roots of the issue are something worth thinking about. As I perceive the situation, another large part of the problem is not only needing places for over 300 teams to dance, but also needing to find places for those clubs to dance every week from April through September or October! Indeed, many English clubs have a touring schedule which literally lasts for months. To me, that is overdancing.

I have come to feel strongly about the seasonal nature of these favorite rituals of ours. Cotswold morris really feels right danced in the springtime (May, principally). In my club, longsword has adopted Halloween for its annual outing. Certainly the earth is dying by late October and needs to be encouraged to come back by our death-and-resurrection play (Winter Solstice and Plough Monday are not sensible times to dance out in Vermont).

But more important than it feeling right for the performer, a seasonal calendar makes more sense to the spectators, one's neighbors, the people for whom you are dancing. They can understand a celebration of spring which happens in spring or a plea to the dying earth as leaves fall from the

trees. They are willing to Prepare cakes and ale or offer "coin of the realm" if the visitation is special to them. Gradually, they begin to look forward to the tay the morris dancers come" and then you have a tradition in the making. If they miss your dancing, they have to wait till next year when you return to the same place on the same day or weekend.

Then, in the end, the cycle comes round to where you started: the whole thing becomes special for the performer. Certain months take on a new significance and require extra involvement. In between, there is time for other aspects of one's life. l'articipation in the Morris takes on a longer range perspective, one thinks in terms of years and even decades and becomes more relaxed about the dancing because "there is always next year."

The Ring circular says, "...the reason for dancing morris (is that) it is a ritual, and many clubs hold that our prime objective must be to perform this ritual on our home territory, irrespective of the site's audience potential. If we only dance in areas where we can be sure of a good 'bag', we are debasing the Morris to the status of a side-show." Its advice: stay at home and develop your own "traditions." Surely, this is the way to avoid "overdancing."

Two very fine books, illustrated, have come in:- .

HANDSWORTH TRADITIONAL SWORD RACERS

Copies may be had from Geoff Lester, 84, Grove Road, Sheffield, 2GZ, for 42p each, including postage.

And

WINSTER MORRIS DANCERS

This is 25p, plus postage, from Dr.Ian Russell, Bridge House, Unstone, Sheffield 18. The easiest way may be to send a self-addressed envelope, 6iins x 94ins, with appropriate postage (10p or 12p at the present time): the booklet is the same size as this Newsletter.

(Winster) "Nowhere is the individuality of the village more in evidence than in its cultural heritage. Until the turn of the century a most unusual and spectacular mumming tradition existed, whilst the annual Shrovetide pancake race is very

much ongoing. However, among these and other traditional customs, the local morris dancing stands pre-eminent. Not only is it the sole surviving example of men's morris in Derbyshire but also it is among the most colourful to be seen anywhere in England."

That's a fine Pride in a tradition; a Handsworth man expressed it in verse, sixty years ago

"By the badge ye shall know them, for they wear it with
pride,
These dancers of Handsworth who are famed far and wide;
For that badge is the symbol that they have stood the
test
For many long years, and still are the best..."

Ring's Log Book 2; at Cecil Sharp house, 26/3/49

"it was also agreed to discuss at Thaxted the question of whether the Ring should have an official fool."

At Thaxted, 27th - 29th May, 1949,

"At a fairly late hour the meeting broke up with all men in fine condition. Morris Sunderland thought his was even more elevated than he had expected when, on his way to his bed, he saw elephants in a field he was passing. Investigation in the morning showed, however, that there really were elephants there, although the elephants were not real, being imitation ones in course of manufacture for some sideshow."

At St. Albans, 9th - 11th September, 1949

"The following motion, formulated at Thaxted, was then considered:- 'Sword dances shall be acceptable as display dances by Clubs at Meetings of the Morris Ring.' This motion was carried, with the addition of the words 'subject to the discretion of the organisers of the Meeting concerned', the added words being designed to safeguard the proportion of the programme."

Old Hammersmith MM: contact Ray Tomey 51 Mountfield Rd. Finch ley, N3 3NR about re-union and completion of records.