

The Morris Dancer

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THE MORRIS DANCER

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The next issue of The Morris Dancer is planned for April 2016

Some of the photos of Longborough reproduced in this issue are printed with the generous permission of the Cambridge Morris Men archives.

Cover photo: Longborough Vicarage Gardens. Travelling Morrice 21 June 1924. L to R: Harry Taylor (seated), George Cooke (Standing), Kenworthy Schofield, Tommy Adkins, Alan Richards (Fiddle), Arthur Heffer, Mr. Joynes, Rolf Gardiner. Photo by Peter Fox

Editorial

Morris Dance as a Metaphor for Traditional Life

WFH Nicolaisen has argued that the early scholars of Folklore limited the scope of their activities to 'salvage'. By this he meant the collection of remnants of the past (Wilhelm Fritz Hermann Nicolaisen 13 June 1927 – 15 February 2016). I'm not sure whether Cecil Sharp considered himself to be a Folklorist, although he carried out a large amount of collection and salvage, particularly of folk song and Morris dance. Sharp was therefore working within the genre, self-identified or not. Sharp's aim was, however, less the collection and preservation of past customs for academic purposes (and although this was not the primary aim, it was certainly a by-product), but more the revival of the customs he collected, providing continuity through praxis not academia. What was initially an interest in English Folk songs soon became an interest in English traditional Morris dance and within a short time this underwent, in his hands, a form of commercialisation. His interest became his living.

What is interesting about this transition from fast-disappearing indigenous folk dance to financial opportunity for Sharp, is the filtering process that the tradition underwent in order to place the dance in a modern, monetised context. The degree of control Sharp exercised in order to commercialise the Morris tradition for his (and selected others) financial benefit effectively placed him in the position of mediator between the traditional past performance and performer and the 'modern' performance and performer.

Whilst Morris dance as a tradition of the 'Folk' in a mainly rural setting was squeezed by class disapproval and contemporary cultural restrictions it was, by the early 1900s, displaced by the entertainments available to the 'Folk'. The rise of the industrial society: theatre, Music Hall and the rise of mass, cheap entertainment resulted, to a large extent, in the demise of the 'homespun'. Sharp's attempt to retain the performance of the Morris dance tradition against a rising tide of industrialism and the rise of Modernist ideas rendered it a symbol of a lost rural idyll, relevant in modern life as a symbol of a past culture of Merrie England serving to remind us of our lost 'wholesome' rural origins. Thus the Morris is out of place in modern life, but is cherished for its perceived continuity with an imagined past.

Sharp intended the Morris to be revived and returned to the 'peasantry', to somehow fortify them against what Sharp perceived to be the ills of modern urban industrial life. However, this process, mediated by Sharp and overlaid with middle-class values did not succeed and his legacy in the revivals of the early and later 20th century turned out very differently indeed.

A parallel which provides a useful comparison is the craft movement in the USA. America retains craft as praxis in modern post-industrial culture as a symbol of a pioneering past. Its founding in the wilderness provides a potent symbol of the strong, independent pioneer doing things for himself. It is a nostalgic link to a past rural idyll. It has come to represent the 'homespun' in an advanced industrial society and is seen as folklore: the voice of the common people (see 'Explaining Traditions: Folk Behaviour in Modern Culture', Simon J Bronner, University Press of Kentucky, 2011). Thus, craft in the USA has a strong and functional social purpose, a building block of 'the American way of life'.

In contrast, the Morris as a tradition in the UK is, I would argue, less relevant than craft in the USA since although it may be perceived to be an activity associated with a pre-industrial past it is danced to preserve the tradition rather than as a commentary on the present. Whereas craft in the USA has a strong symbolic meaning in modern US culture, the Morris has not.

So who dances the Morris in the 21st century and why? What relevance has the tradition in post-industrial Britain? Where is the legacy of Sharp?

Just as the Morris was displaced by the ready entertainments and regimes of industrial Britain, so the 'Folk' performer, the rural and semi-rural working man have been displaced, firstly by the middle-class revivalist (typified by Sharp, Neal, Butterworth, Grainger Kennedy and so on) and then by the post-industrial 'Folk' enthusiast of today. The largely middle-class backgrounds of the modern dancer replacing the working-class origins of the original dancer. And herein lies the Morris' ambiguity – the present-day performers have inherited a cultural identity which is of little relevance in post-modern Britain.

Modern dancers (that is, those dancers not performing invented pseudo-Morris) are generally at pains to present the Morris as a re-enactment of the dance as seen in C1850, through the choice of movements and costume. They thus put into sharp contrast the relevance, or absence of relevance to modern life, deliberately setting the dance as an anachronism. But is this anachronistic context a form of redemption for the dancers? Is this effectively peeling back the vicissitudes of modern life on the part of the performer? Only so long as the context remains true to the siting of the original performances: the village green and the pub forecourt, for example. This context is key to the retention of the link to past performances, a symbolic setting within normative life. And here it can be seen as a foil against the 'corruption' of modern life.

Presenting Morris at a festival or within the context of a visitor attraction in which the visitor 'consumes' the Morris as part of a leisure activity strengthens the content of the dance as a contemporary relevant cultural activity, but weakens the dances' ties to its historic rural origins. The redemptive qualities of the dance for the performers are reduced in inverse proportion to the distance from which the setting is removed from normative life. I would argue, for example, that a Morris Dance performed at the local village fete or the pub forecourt retains a cultural significance for both dancer and consumer that the same dance performed at Black Country Museum or on stage at Shrewsbury Folk Festival does not.

If these arguments have any validity, and if the Morris has a modern social purpose, for both dancer and consumer, it is clear that there is some ambiguity in the performance as a cultural activity. The dancers, particularly those of the sides associated to the Morris Ring, wish to retain a strong performance link to the dances' pre-industrial past, possibly for redemptive reasons. The consumer observes the Morris as a cultural phenomenon, more or less relevant to modern life, depending upon the context in which it is seen. Morris has not acquired the symbolic relevance that craft has in the USA. There is no 'American Way' equivalent in the UK and therefore our icons do not acquire cultural significance directly related to the way in which we perceive our lives should be lived or our attitudes formed, despite Sharp's intention that this would be the purpose of his revival.

Sharp and others (Gardiner, Alford, Kennedy et al.) tried to imbue the Morris with English cultural significance by mediating the Morris back into English life through education in schools and the recording, publishing and teaching of the Morris and other folk traditions as widely as possible. And although his legacy is still visible in the large numbers of dancers and sides dancing today, the Morris has not achieved the grass-roots significance and cultural importance he hoped that it would.

Indeed, vilified by the popular press and the butt of many jokes, Morris dancing, recently voted by the public as a cherished icon of English Life (<http://www.culture24.org.uk/art362437>), it generally holds an ambiguous place in non-dancers' minds. On the one hand it is viewed as a quaint, rather funny anachronism, and yet it is also valued as an enjoyable folk entertainment, particularly within

the context of a festival or visitor attraction. Clearly, the social and cultural context and physical setting of the performance has much to do with how the consumer perceives the dance as relevant to modern life and, I would argue, how the dancer perceives his role.

If there are any conclusions to be drawn from this it is that Sharp's legacy is not that which he intended in terms of reviving a lost cultural pride and this may be due in some measure to the way in which we perceive ourselves as English and how we view our traditions as relevant to the way we live our post-industrial, post-modern lives. I would suggest that we enjoy our traditions, when we think about them at all, not as cultural icons which form part of our national psyche (as is craft in the USA), but as things to be consumed, within specific contexts, places and times.

I would further note that if the above arguments hold any weight then there may be, with further study, some relevance to the way in which people are recruited into Morris sides as dancers. The transition from consumer of tradition to performer is clearly an area which we do not understand and which is largely unexplored.

Mac McCoig

The Longborough Morris

By J W Allen



Harry Taylor 1844 - 1931

The last time the Longborough side danced was in 1887, Queen Victoria's Jubilee year. Charles Benfield of the Bleddington team brought over three dancers from Bould to make up the side. Harry Taylor of Longborough danced No. 1, his usual place. He was about 43 years old at the time. Nearly a quarter of a century later, in May 1910, Cecil Sharp met Harry Taylor on two occasions and collected several dances from him. Half a dozen were published in volume 4 of *The Morris Book* in 1911. A young fiddler from Longborough, Mr Joynes, was able to help in the collecting by playing the tunes from Harry Taylor's whistling, although he was not a Morris man himself. Subsequently Mr Joynes learned more tunes from Harry's eldest son Henry when he visited Longborough and he carefully copied the tunes into a MS music book.

During the first tour of the Travelling Morrice (TM) in June 1924, the TM were greeted in Longborough by Harry Taylor performing a perfect galley in the village street. He was 80 by that time. He watched the TM show with enthusiasm and approval. Afterwards he taught them some Longborough dances which were new to them. Some, like *Old Trunkle*, had been collected by Sharp but not published; others, like *The Cuckoo's Nest* had not been collected before. The TM also met Mr Joynes, who played the fiddle for them and produced his tune-book, from which they copied several tunes.

The following year the TM returned to Longborough on their 3rd Tour, in August 1925. They performed the dances learned from Mr Taylor the previous year and they followed his suggestions for steps and figures, where these differed from what had been published in the *Morris Books*. Kenworthy Schofield took notes of all the information he could find. He published some of this in the *English Folk Dance Society's Journal* for 1930. Other Longborough dancers whom the TM met were Ned Hatherway (then at Stow-on-the-Wold) who used to dance offside foremost (i.e. No. 2) and Henry Hathaway of Lower Swell who danced on the same side as Harry Taylor.

We have here an unusually favourable combination of circumstances in our sources of information of the Longborough dances. Mr Taylor was a keen and skilled dancer and active even in old age. Mr Joynes was a village musician who had the ability to write musical notation and the enthusiasm to collect the Morris tunes. Cecil Sharp collected dances and tunes and published them. The TM learnt them and took them back to Longborough. Harry Taylor was able to see the resultant interpretation of the dances and correct it. Of course, we do not know all we would like, for dances and collectors are only fallible. The written record cannot be taken as Gospel truth, for it contains contradictions and obvious mistakes. However, in most respects the information given by Harry Taylor to the TM in 1924 and 1925 agrees with that which he gave to Cecil Sharp in 1910 and it is a reasonable inference that where this agreement exists, the information is accurate. The only substantial differences are in the descriptions of the skew-corner dances *Old Trunkles* and *Swaggering Boney* (or *Travel by Steam*). These differences may well arise from the fact that there was some flexibility in the manner of dancing the longer and more vigorous dances, so a single unified description is not to be expected.

In writing this article I have not put much weight on the descriptions given in the Morris Books, for these sometimes differ considerably from what Sharp had collected. Neither have I used the notes in Butterworth's MSS on the Gallant Hussar, Staines Morris and Country Gardens. Butterworth has only the notations without tunes and gives no indication where he obtained them. There is no good reason to believe that they are traditional Longborough dances.

The Longborough side, like most of those in the Cotswolds, danced in Whitsun week only. During this week they went to nearby town and villages as well as dancing in Longborough itself. It is sometimes forgotten, in these days when revival Morris sides queue dance every summer Saturday afternoon in Broadway and Bourton-on-the-water, just how special the Morris was. A sense of ceremony was also given to individual shows by the use of Hey Diddle Dis as a Morris-on or Morris-off, making the show a special occasion with a definite beginning and end.

The Longborough dances are particularly active and manly, it is necessary to rise well off the ground in the steps, in the jumps and in the capers. The galley is done with the upper part of the leg horizontal, so the foot is much further from the ground than in a Bleddington hook-leg. To perform say a half-hour show requires vigour, stamina and skill. Longborough dances are not suitable for those few modern sides who consider a show to consist of a couple of quick dances before settling in the pub, nor are the dances of any other Morris tradition.



Harry Taylor June 1924

A distinctive feature of the Longborough dances is that a feet-together jump normally follows a bar of stepping, as in the foot-up and also usually occurs in a galley or a side-step. Harry Taylor said that in jumping you start off with both feet and keep the feet touching side by side. This jump influences many aspects of the dance. The accompanying arm movements are ones in which the hands go up and then descend with the arms out to the side, pausing in a nearly horizontal position. Reaction from the downward momentum of the arms gives an uplift to the body, producing a lightness to the jump and also producing the distinctive poised pause on landing. It follows that the music must be unhurried: some of the Longborough dances like Trunkles or The Cuckoo's Nest, though vigorous, are stately in character. The existence of the jump also requires the odd and even sides to work together, for it is in the moment of the pause that any mistiming in landing is clearly obvious. Any lack of coordination in positioning is also obvious in this instant, for example if, in a half-hey, No. 1 reaches the bottom of the set with a jump which leaves him facing down preparatory to the galley, while No 2 lands facing partly across the set. Coordination between all members of the set is especially important in the heys. The tops and bottoms have only one bar of stepping in which to turn out and move into a position where they can jump cleanly into place, so the middle couple must move smartly so as not to obstruct them. Done correctly, the Longborough hey is a magnificent figure, but done badly or with music that is too fast, it is just a scramble. The contrary requirements of the arm movement on the jump and of the hey determine the size of the set in many of the set dances. There must be room for each dancer to make a wide movement of the arms, yet given this constraint, the set must be as short as possible in order that the heys may be danced properly. In the skew-corner dances the set can cover a larger area, in moderation, to let the corners have room for

their capers, but it is necessary to close up the set just before the whole-hey which normally ends such a dance.

Although a shuffle back-step was sometimes used in Longborough, Harry Taylor seems to have preferred it to be omitted. Certainly when the TM danced without using the shuffle he approved. So once-to-yourself just has to be feet-together and jump. Foot-up and foot-down are a bar of step, feet-together jump and a galley. Half-rounds and hey have the same stepping. In the half-gip, whole gip and back-to-back one has a bar of step, feet-together and jump, with a hop step back to places. Because the back-step is more restrained than the other steps, it is necessary in the back-to-back to move well forward on the initial bar of step so that you can jump into a position from which you can go backwards to your place. Otherwise it would be necessary to move across and back on the quieter hop-step, resulting in too much weaving around in what should be a cleanly executed figure. The dance ends with four ordinary capers facing up, at the end of the last hey. During the bar of ordinary stepping, the hands are kept well up and a little out, with bent elbows, making a circular waving motion of the handkerchiefs above the head with the hands coming back in the middle of the circles and forward on the outside. In the ordinary capers, the hands describe circles in vertical planes in front of the body, first moving up and out, then down and in.

The formula movements in the set dances were once-to-your-self, foot-up and foot-down, half-gip, back-to-back, whole-gip and whole-hey. The back-to-back and whole-gip could have their order interchanged. Often, though not inevitably, the whole-hey was omitted if the B music figure contained a half-hey, Harry Taylor called the half-gip “come and go” and Ned Hatherway described the figure as “go and come back, then go round keeping your faces and go round keeping your backs”. Despite what is said in printed descriptions, it was not the custom to dance half-rounds in the set dances but only in the skew-corner dances. This is a more important point than might appear at first sight. Revival Morris sides usually try to give some variety during a show by performing dances from different traditions. If one is dancing only Longborough dances, as the traditional side would, the variety must come from the contrasting nature of the dances within the tradition. One important element of this in Longborough is the difference between the fairly compact rectangular set dances which are danced very much two and two across the set, and the more open skew-corner dances in which rounds have a natural place. Intruding half-rounds into a set dance weakens this distinction, and although it may produce an element of variety of form within one particular dance, it lessens the variety of the dances performed in a particular show.

As for the figures of the individual dances, it is not necessary to give details here because adequate accounts are given in Lionel Bacon’s ‘Handbook of Morris Dancing’ of all those dances which have been recorded. Only some points which perhaps deserve emphasis will be dealt with here.

There are no stick dances recorded from Longborough. This is a little surprising in view of the fact that one of Chipping Campden’s dances is called The Longborough Stick Dance.

The length of each dance was adaptable according to what was suited to a particular time and place. A set dance with a half-hey in the B music could be shortened by dancing the B music only once each time, so that the formula movements were done with the foreman at alternate ends of the set. The same dance, with the B music repeated each time and an additional whole-hey at the end, is much longer. The skew-corner dances are especially variable in length as the capers for crossing on the corners can be selected from a wide range.

Hey Diddle Dis was used as a processional on or as a Morris-off. For the latter, whole-rounds were danced two or three times before going off. The stepping (three bars of step, galley left without

jump, two forries and four ordinary capers), with the galley always on the left foot, might seem odd until it is danced as a Morris-off, when the galley is always outwards in the rounds. In going off, the dancers should “make their obedience” to the audience.

A side-step dance was performed to several different tunes, including London Pride, Highland Mary and The Old Woman Tossed Up in a Blanket. The side-step ended with feet-together and jump followed by half-hey except that the feet-together and jump did not occur in The Old Woman Tossed Up. Harry Taylor was consistent on this latter point, mentioning it to both Cecil Sharp in 1910 and the TM in 1924. In fact the tune makes a continuation of the side-step a natural thing to do, whereas the tune of London Pride invites a jump. Harry Taylor also told Sharp that British Grenadiers was a side-step dance just like London Pride. It was Ned Hatherway who described it as a “side-step and caper through” dance in 1925: the notation given in the Handbook appears to be a reconstruction.

Shepherds Hey and Constant Billy are the same dance to different tunes. The handclapping, in Lionel Bacon’s notation, is:

| F – R - | F – L - | F – B - | F – P - |

This is followed by a half-hey. In 1924 Harry Taylor said the right feet should strike at the same time as the right hands, and similarly with the left. The statement in Morris Book 5 that Constant Billy is danced in precisely the same way as The Maid of the Mill is incorrect and should be struck from the record. Apparently the TM had followed the Morris Book instruction when they danced in Longborough and were corrected by Harry Taylor, who gave them the handclapping as above, except for the feet striking, this is exactly what he had told Cecil Sharp in 1910. The Maid of the Mill has the last two bars of clapping replaced by four ordinary capers across the set, followed by a half-hey on the wrong side.

Saturday night was taught to the TH after they had taken a meal and some alcohol after the Longborough show in 1924. It can be started by No. 1 by himself, the rest joining in progressively in single file until the galley into the hey. Or No. 1 and No. 2 can begin together in double file, or a third possibility is for all the set dance from the start. The stepping in the first part is two bars of Morris step, galley right with feet-together and jump, two forrie-capers and four ordinary capers (The Handbook has an intrusive step after the jump). The complete sequence is danced to the A music, then to the B music. When No. 1 has progressed to the bottom of the set and back up till he is facing No. 2, the forrie-capers are begun on the left foot and then instead of the ordinary capers, all galley left into a set. From here the dance ends with a whole-hey. It is as well if the foreman calls out “left foot” in good time at the appropriate place. Mr Joynes had not got the tune written down and Harry Taylor could not remember it, but he reckoned Charlie Benfield’s Bledlington tune to be about right.

The two skew-corner dances, Swaggering Boney (or Travel by Steam) and Trunkles (or Old Trunkle), are formidable when not danced in greatly abbreviated form. The proper sequence is a formula figure and a corner figure alternately, just like a set dance. But a complete corner figure consists of corners cross, half rounds, corners cross back, with the addition of the salute in Old Trunkle.

Sharp’s MSS are not completely clear in the description of Swaggering Boney as, although the figure sequence is given, it is not exactly specified in the sequence which corner movement is appropriate at each point in the dance. From the markings in the MSS it is most likely that a complete corner figure consisted of corners across with side-step, fighting right and left and four capers, then half-rounds, then corners back with side-step, two forries and four capers. Just as the corners over mime fisticuffs, the corners back probably mime the shin-kicking fights which were a feature of the games on Dovers Hill. In Morris Book 5 Swaggering Boney is truncated by omitting the formula movements

and re-ordering the corner movements. It was presumably this version which Harry Taylor said was altogether wrong when the TM danced it in 1925. Instead he said that the correct version had ordinary foot-up and rounds, but the corners were quite different. The first corner movement is sidestep, clap, strike right hands and feet, clap, strike left hands and feet, then galley back to places. The second corner movement is similar but with the fight instead of clapping and striking. The third, fourth and fifth corners are side-step, caper through and galley. In the third the capers are fore-capers, in the fourth they are rtb's and in the fifth they are full capers (i.e. uprights). This leaves you on the wrong side so it was supposed that the fore-capers should be repeated (I have taken the information from the log of the Tour: the Handbook gives something different). When danced thus, Swaggering Boney and Old Trunkle overlap in many respects, which is why this version is not popular.

Cecil Sharp had a full sequence of figures for Trunkles from Harry Taylor, with an alternation of formula figures and corner figures, ending with a whole-hey. The corner figure is salute, corners cross, half-rounds, salute, corners cross back. In 1910 Sharp got the salute as a bar of step, feet together and jump, followed by a shuffle-step backwards to place, but in 1924 Harry Taylor described it with a galley to place instead of the shuffle. The crossing steps which Sharp got were:

- 1st. Bar of Morris step, feet together and jump, that again, galley right ending with jump.
- 2nd. Four bars of forrie capers, turn on four ordinary capers.
- 3rd. Rtb's and turn with either galley right and jump or four ordinary capers.
- 4th. Uprights (i.e. rta).

In each corner movement the stepping for crossing and for crossing back are the same. The note in the MSS that the dance "may be still further lengthened by corners with galley" is interpreted in the Handbook as meaning that the corners can be repeated with ordinary capers to finish the first time and galley the second. An alternative interpretation is that the caper movements incorporating a galley, noted in Princess Royal, could be used as extra corners. These capers are rtb, feet together, galley on right foot without feet-together and jump, then ltb and so on, or instead of right toe back one can have right toe across in the preliminary step. When the TM were taught the dance, the first crossing was a side-step instead of stepping and jump. It seems there was flexibility in the choice of steps and also in the exact manner of performing some of the capers, especially the rtb's. In Trunkles, Sharp noted these as right toe back, jump, caper left and right, then left toe back and so on. In Princess Royal it was right toe back, jump, caper right and left, with a feet-together as an alternative to the jump. It is specified that in the jump the feet must touch side by side, and as this is awkward to execute immediately after the preparatory rtb it is customary now to use a feet-together without a jump. If one chooses to dance the steps as right toe back, feet together, caper right, caper left, then in Old Trunkle it is better to start with left toe back in order to avoid an awkward change of step before the galley.

In the jigs, the dancer is free to choose the capers which he wants to do, bearing in mind his responsibility to keep the interest of the onlookers. Longborough was not alone in this respect. In many Morris villages the jigs did not have a strictly defined form but were danced to the taste of the individual dancer.

Harry Taylor died in 1931 at the age of 87. Ned Hathaway died about 1932 and George Joynes died in 1964 aged 77. With their passing the Longborough tradition, in one sense, died, But these men were willing to hand on their knowledge of the Morris so that we have become heirs to their

tradition. We should be grateful to them always and should strive to dance their dances in a manner that would have pleased them.

Editor's Note: I have kept the phrasing and notation exactly as it is in the MSS given to me. I have added only the occasional comma to help the flow of the sentences and added hyphens to make the style of notation consistent throughout the article. John Jenner of the Cambridge Morris Men, who supplied me with the handwritten manuscript, believes it to have been written in the late 1950s. I am grateful to John Allen's son Matthew Allen for permission to publish the notes.

Further Reading:

R. Kenworthy Schofield. 1930. "Morris Dances from Longborough". The Journal of the English Folk Dance Society, no. 3. English Folk Dance + Song Society: 51–57.

CJ Sharp and HC MacIlwaine. 1911. "The Morris book with a description of dances as performed by the Morris-men of England, Part 4". Novello & Co, Ltd, London.

L Bacon. 1974. "A Handbook of Morris Dancing". The Morris Ring. Pp 245 – 265.

John Allen 1928-2015



John came up to Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge in 1946 and soon joined the University Rambling Club, where he was given the number IV to distinguish him from past and present members. He later joined the Round (The C.U. Country Dance Club) and was persuaded to join the Cambridge Morris Men where he retained his well-known "nick name".

John remained a very active member of the CMM, being appointed Squire in 1959 and again in 1963, before moving to St Andrews in 1968. He led tours of the Travelling Morrice to the Cotswolds in 1960 & 1964, each one finishing with a joint show in Chipping Campden with his favourite traditional side. After moving to Scotland, he still often danced with the CMM and almost always joined the T.M. on the June tours.

Whilst he never claimed to be a really good dancer he studied the different traditions and held strong views on the active standard that should be aimed at and always encouraged men to dance with vigour. Longborough was his favourite tradition and he wrote a detailed paper on the dances and contacts with old dancers. (Unpublished and not dated, but maybe 1965/6)

He was at his best in the "folly", with his great white beard, which many a small child discovered was fixed on. In that role he kept one eye on the dancers and also fully reacted with the audience. His tradition of wading across the stream at Lower Slaughter to take the collecting tin to the audience was only one of his fine traditions. He handled difficult situations with academic brilliance, whether they concerned the police and a drunken spectator in Ross-on-Wye or very verbose member of the IRA in Ireland.

On tours his advice and help to younger men was invaluable and in addition his sense of fun and enjoyment of life led to many harmless pranks, particularly one to the annoyance of

Russell Wortley concerning his tent, but all was soon forgotten due to John's good humour and tact.

After obtaining his degree and doctorate in physics at Cambridge, John's highly respected professional and academic life took him, while at the Services Electronic Research Laboratory at Baldock to the discovery and development of what he called a crystal lamp, now known as a LED, to Scotland and St Andrews University in 1968, initially as Research Fellow, lecturer, then as a Professor, where the respect to him shown by his students was reflected in that they bought him a special cushion for his "Chair". He retired but continued working as Emeritus Professor of Physics, and in 2010 was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Science.

However his scientific brilliance never marred his friendship with traditional dancers or their families, audiences and lesser academic men. We in the CMM, the TM and the Morris generally have lost a very fine supporter and friend to all active Morris men.

John Jenner



William Palmer of the TM talking to one of the old Longborough side June 1931

Morris Music – Some Personal Thoughts

By Clive Du'Mont

This two-part article looks at a couple of aspects of Cotswold Morris music that can sometimes prove a bone-of-contention, even in our modern, enlightened times

Part One

Poly-Players

Traditional wisdom tells us that the correct format for a Cotswold Morris dancing Side is as many dancers as the dance demands ... and one musician.

Is this realistic?

There can be no doubt, surely, that a single competent musician who has total empathy with the dance and dancers is not merely “ideal” but, indeed, much to be preferred ...and wherever this can be the case, it should be. There are, however, some practical difficulties that may, sometimes justifiably, serve to divert us from this...

In days of yore (*most of the middle of the twentieth century, that is*) when enthusiasm for the Morris revival was still young and vibrant, there might have gone up a great wailing and gnashing of teeth if more than one musician placed himself* before the set in public performance. Today, though, in the heady days of the early 21st century, attitudes and practices have changed and it's probably more commonplace to see multiple musicians playing together and the lone musician is almost as rare as an empty tankard at a Ring Feast. What's more, as musician gender ponderings are also now officially a thing of the past, we can move forward knowing that there are as many players as are willing who may be called upon to assist the dancers

Why has there been this shift?

That's a tough one. There are probably many reasons that apply, such as:

- standards may have relaxed within the Morris Ring
- “tradition” may now, for some, come second to just having fun
- more musicians playing means more sound
- there may simply be more musicians about these days and they need something to do
- more musicians than dances could mean someone not getting to play at all
- many musicians may not feel confident enough to play solo
- some musicians may prefer to play second to someone else
- there may not be just one musician who's good enough to play alone
- some clubs might actually prefer to field a collection of players

So what's wrong with having multiple musicians?

Apart from personal preferences and a desire to uphold a long-standing tradition, probably nothing.

But whether it's right or wrong might actually be the wrong question to ask.

Perhaps we should ask ...

Is the effect good enough?

You only have to listen to some of the collective efforts of so many bodies of musicians battling with each other to play the same, let alone the “right”, tune, at the correct pace and with the most appropriate dynamics, to answer that question for yourself. Whilst many do succeed very well indeed, all too often the effect is an over-loud, unyielding cacophony. All too many Morris players seem unable to play in concert with others. So no, sadly it’s not always good enough, and that means a poor performance all round leading to injury to the reputation of the Morris itself and of the Ring that was formed to maintain its wonder. But...

Can it be made to be better?

Surely so. But first we need to be a little clearer as to what it is that might need to be improved, so let’s explore some of the potentially offending factors and try to identify things that can be done in practical terms to make for better Morris music from multiple musicians ...

- **Leading** In sympathy with the customary expectation, there always needs to be just *one* player who determines how the music should be played to meet the needs of the dance and the dancers. This person has to be competent and confident enough to be able to do the job alone. If other musicians are to play too, then the leader needs to be identified and followed.
- **Following** If all players watch the dancers and apply their own judgement as to what the music needs to do, musical mayhem and mixed signals can easily result. Interpretation of the dancer’s needs is the leader’s job. Others should follow the leader.

This doesn’t mean playing a split-second behind, of course, but they should follow in terms of playing in concert with the leader – and definitely not trying to play *louder* than the leader (with rare exceptions, perhaps, as indicated in “Volume” below).

Of course, if the leader goes wrong - or drops his instrument, say - it’s handy to have someone who can immediately pick-up-the-traces and maintain the musical flow, so keeping an eye on the dance is obviously a good thing, so long as an alternative interpretation isn’t permitted to interfere whilst the leader is, erm, leading.

- **The tune** Each dance has its own tune. Each club will determine what that tune should be - and it may not be the one that everyone else thinks it should be. The Morris is, after all, a living tradition and choice, variation and invention are all part and parcel of its natural evolutionary progress, carrying as much validity as those long established standards that some will doubtless prefer to prevail.

Whatever the chosen tune, as collected or as allocated, the one important point must be that all the musicians play *it* and not variations from other Traditions or versions of their own devising. If no-one wants to play it your way, be forthright and ask to be let play for the dancers solo so that you can do your own thing (if they’ll tolerate it).

This doesn't mean that harmony and other embellishments are excluded, just that the basic version of the tune that's played needs to be known and focussed-upon by all players.

- Pace

Dancer No.1 generally calls the dance and it's his choice as to the pace required. The lead musician's job is to understand that and provide what's needed. All accompanying musicians must follow the leader in this, or havoc will result.

Trying to push forward or pull back the pace by playing louder or stuffing your instrument up the leader's nose rarely helps. Much better to leave it to the No.1 dancer to get that message across and, if necessary, educate the lead musician after the performance. There's no cure, sadly, for a bad lead musician combined with a poor No. 1 dancer as far as pace control goes, so that's a situation perhaps best left well alone anyway, at least until the dance is over.

- Volume

Playing for the Morris is not a competitive sport. It's the leader that the dancers need to hear most, so all other players should control their loudness accordingly.

If the leader can provide a dominant percussive effect, such as with a tabor, say, then the fact that he may be playing a quiet pipe would likely prove of less consequence, so, with the leader's approval, other instruments might usefully inject a little more volume into the proceedings, but generally speaking it isn't helpful for the leader to be drowned out by others. He might just as well walk away if he can't be heard above the rest of the music.

A useful rule of thumb might be that if you can more than just about hear yourself, you're probably playing too loudly ... and if you can't hear the leader, then other players are likely to be too loud too

- Dynamics

The dancers need to hear clear musical signals. Dynamics is the term used to describe the wide range of "light and shade", swell and accent that help turn a tune into "music". Crescendo and diminuendo are two of the better known aspects of dynamics used in classical music, whilst many other techniques can be applied to give texture and variety to the sound.

From the dancers point of view much of this is irrelevant as they are seeking mostly a beat or pulse to guide them, but there are notable advantages to be gained from being able to vary the quality of the sound produced that can lead the dancers onward, draw them back, lift them up or drive them down. How a bar of music is played dynamically can make all the difference to a galley, for instance, being expertly delivered with grace and elegance, or resulting in an ugly twisted stumble.

- **Accentuation**

Music naturally includes accents, i.e. louder single notes, to define its rhythm - generally strongest at the beginning of each bar (a-k-a downbeats) - but additional accents can be usefully added elsewhere in support of the dance. There are also numerous ways of playing an accented note that can assist in making it more or less effective.

Of all the dynamic expressions, accents send clear signals to the dancers that something specific is supposed to be happening in the dance. A listening dancer may depend upon that accent to ensure that he makes his move at the right point in time. An accent in the wrong place, therefore, can serve to mislead the dancers and so damage the dance.

Sometimes tunes don't fit the dances so very well and a natural musical accent may occur at quite the wrong moment. A canny musician might well choose to force out the natural accent and play instead with extra expression when it's best suited to the dancers' needs.

Accompanying players can contribute usefully with accentuation, but it mustn't be overdone and must always be right for the dance.
- **Anacrusis**

In poetry, an anacrusis is defined as one or more extra and unstressed syllables at the beginning of a line of verse, leading up to the first stressed one. This term is useful in dance music to describe the note or notes sometimes found written before the first bar (first downbeat) or immediately prior to subsequent downbeats where the dancers need to be ready to execute a particular step or movement. More than just a 'lead in', a well-executed anacrusis signals the dancers to 'get ready' or even 'make your preparatory movement now'. (If the note is lengthened somewhat it can also serve to call distracted dancers to pay attention!)

Not all traditions call for anacruses, so they shouldn't be introduced will-nilly as this might cause the dancers to introduce steps or movements that shouldn't be there. Where one is needed at the start of a dance this would normally be delivered by the lead musician as part of the 'once to yourself'. They can also be found to be useful elsewhere to prompt the dancers, so when and by which of several instruments they might best be played is worth considering as part of the performance planning.
- **Rhythm**

As noted above, rhythm is primarily established by the use of accentuation, but there is more to it than that. Because the dance involves movement, there is a need for the dancers to use their momentum to keep themselves moving, or to rein-in their drive so as to hold themselves back. The natural timing this generates doesn't necessarily follow an even beat pattern. Indeed, a dance performed in strict tempo is rarely a pleasurable sight and it's the rhythm of the music as it blends with the vagaries of movement of

the heavy and essentially unstable human body that help turn a mechanical, wooden performance into a delightful and, seemingly, effortless one.

Rhythm is perhaps the single most valuable aspect of the music to which accompanying musicians can contribute to best effect, though great care is needed for an inherently dominant instrument not to overwhelm the music by injecting too much additional volume or drive through the hands of an over-zealous player.

- Embellishment

Cotswold Morris music is quintessentially English. Unlike that of our “Celtic” cousins, English traditional music is not generally over laden with triplets, turns, grace notes and such like, so playing for the Morris in the style of an Irish jig, say, would possibly not be considered by most to be appropriate.

That said, of course, if it’s helpful to the dancers and suited to the tune, a little embellishment applied sparingly and with taste can help players vary the sound a little and so also make it more interesting to listen to. Whilst the dance is the focal point of the Morris, we shouldn’t forget that those watching are also listening to the music and seeking entertainment from *it* too.

Once again, if every poly-player introduces his own embellishments, the result may well be just awful, so this is another aspect perhaps best left for the leader to control.

- Harmony

This is a difficult one. Because the Morris has traditionally required only a solo musician, and as the instruments used in times past were likely to be mostly the monophonic pipe or fiddle rather than the polyphonic free-reed instruments that are so ubiquitous today, harmony has not been a particularly evident feature in Morris music in times past.

Where more than one musician is playing, however, a choice evolves that calls for either unison or harmony (assuming discord is not desired) or, possibly, counter-melody. Unison can prove most beautiful when well-matched instruments are played sympathetically, and the effective doubling-or-more of the loudness produced can certainly be much welcomed in noisy environments. Contrast and variation, though, can be equally effective and, arguably, of more interest to the listener, so perhaps there is a place for *fitting* harmony and related complementary renditions to be introduced into Morris playing.

A cardinal point to always remember, however, is that Morris musicians are not seeking to bring a tear of joy to a listener’s eye by way of beautiful music anywhere near as much as they are there to embrace and support the dance with their musical creations. So, maybe a little harmony judiciously applied where it can either help reinforce other dance signals or would add some colour to the music

where the dance is unlikely to suffer, might be justified, but too much would be, well, just too much.

- Space

Pace aside, if there's one thing that dancers notice maybe more than anything else in the music it's when they feel they are not being given time to breathe or take stock of what's going on. This means having "space" in the music. Not pausing or stopping for them to catch their breath, but simply letting there be sound and no sound, each in apt quantities and in the right places to suit the phrasing of the dance and lighten-up the overall musical effect. A relentless rendering of a fast jig tune can kill a dance as easily as if the dancers were to trip over their sticks.

The most obvious technique for giving the impression of space is to play staccato. By cutting notes short, the tune can be transformed to produce a light tripping feel, though this is clearly not what's wanted throughout an entire dance. It is, however, what the Morris Ring has long asked of musicians playing en masse for dance displays at Morris Ring meetings, though this is primarily to limit the amount of "mush" that's produced by hoards of ill-matched and barely controllable players, all of whom want to be in on the act and won't be dissuaded.

A second approach is to use phrasing intelligently and in particular to cut a note short slightly at the end of a phrase, or to speed up or slow down the pace a little to help the dancers execute a tricky manoeuvre with optimum grace or deftness. It's been said that good music is defined as much by its space as by its notes.

- Synergy

Where more than one instrument is being played, it's the collective effect produced by combinations of the foregoing in varying degrees that turns a simple tune into good and delightful dance music. Whilst the core and most vital signals can be provided via a number of different instruments when played solo, the opportunity to enhance the required signals and add interest for dancers, players and listeners alike that's afforded by the playing of various instruments together for the same dance is an exciting and challenging one that's well worth embracing.

This same opportunity can also, if carelessly employed, serve to detract from the needs of the dance and make for a somewhat less than wonderful sound, so every player needs to be sympathetic and vigilant throughout the dance to ensure that that doesn't happen.

Clive Du'Mont

In the next edition, Part Two will offer a closer look at the range of instruments available to our musicians and seek to identify their most telling pros and cons.

Meanwhile, for those keen to explore playing for the dance a little further, articles by the late Jim Catterall and also the American musician Jeff Bigler are well-worth studying. Details available from the Editor.

Any other recommendations...?

(January 2016)

*Note: Reference to the male gender applies equally and without prejudice or favour to all gender variants, unless the context suggests otherwise.



Thomas Pitts, dancer at Sherbourne and Longborough and musician for Sherbourne

The Hinkley Bullockers
A Potted History and Voyage of Discovery
By Tony Ashley

Hinckley is a market town in south-west Leicestershire, not far from Nuneaton. The Hinckley area is fairly rural which, in the early nineteen eighties when interest in this subject started, had no obvious traditional folk events. A search was therefore carried out to ascertain if there was any evidence of folk events or Morris in past times. No-one could remember any such events in their lifetime.

After fruitless searches of old newspapers and seeking information from known Morris researchers, local libraries were checked for any reference to a 'Hinckley Tradition'.

A book describing old Midland customs was located in Nuneaton library which yielded very interesting information. Following an item on May Day customs there were references to Morris dancing:

1. MORRIS DANCERS

"On Plow [sic] Monday I have taken notice of an annual display of Morris-dancers at Claybrook who came from the neighbouring villages of Sapcote and Sharnford."

'The History and Antiquities of Claybrook in the county of Leicester' by Rev. A. Macaulay MA (London: printed for the author by J. Nichols MDCCZCL 1791) page 128

2. PLOUGH MONDAY

"On Plough Monday it was the custom for some of the villagers to dress in grotesque masquerade and perform Morris dances before all the houses where they were likely to get money or drink. Sometimes they were accompanied by a gang of lads with raddled faces, half hidden under paper masks, who dragged a plough, but this was unusual. Some of the performers, generally four, had on white women's dresses and tall hats. One of these was called Maid Marion, of the other performers, one was the fool who always carried the money box, and generally a bladder with peas in it on the end of a stick with which he laid lustily about him. Another was Beelzebub, in a dress made up of narrow strips of flannel, cloth etc. with the ends hanging loose - yellow, red, black and white being the predominant colours. The rest were simply grotesque. The dance they performed was merely a travesty of a quadrille with ad lib stamping and shuffling of the feet. On one occasion when I was very little, the fool came up and asked me to "remember the fool" adding in case I might not have remembered him through his disguise "I'm Curly". "Yes" I said "I see you are, and I shall remember you Curly as long as I live". "a' don't knoo what yo mean". "Tell him the bullocks is thirsty an' wants some beer" said one of the performers, From that Plough Monday I date my knowledge of what 'remembrance' means in the mouth of a son of the soil."

EVANS p 215

See Nichols. N. 896 (Sapcote) and Mary Kirby's 'Leaflets from my life' London 1887 for Plough Mondays in Thurlaston 1839.

3. A book in Hinckley library by a local historian, Henry James Francis, 'The History of Hinckley' published in 1930 contains a section 'Pastimes and amusements of the people of Hinckley 1800 to 1850'. In this section he refers to Morris dancers coming to town on Plough Monday and quotes from 'Leicestershire words and Phrases', by Sebastian Evans.

This is a very similar quotation to the previously mentioned, which is not surprising as Evans was being quoted in both.

“A number of men or youths (generally six or eight in number) dressed themselves in grotesque fashion - half their number being in female costume and half in male. One of the former as supposed to represent Maid Marion. The men wore top hats and were thoroughly bedecked with ribbons. One of the party portrayed Beelzebub; he carried a cow’s horn, on which he blew, and with it afterwards collected. He also had a tail and wore tight fitting stocks formed of coloured patchwork squares. He had a bell on a spring at his back, fastened to his body by means of a belt round his waist - hence, to the popular minds, the reason for his being called ‘bells e bub’. Sometimes he also carried a large rattle. Another performer impersonated the fool; he always carried the money box and had a bladder with peas in it fastened by a string to the end of a stick.

They danced a sort of country dance to the music of a fiddle and hautboy. Sometimes the dance was very well done, and sometimes very badly. The object of all this of course was to collect money for beer. If the money was not forthcoming, at some places, such as Sapcote, the causeway in front of the house of the person who refused to subscribe was ploughed up. In Sapcote, and possibly other villages a plough was always taken round and the men pulling it were known as ‘Bullockers’ a word reminiscent of the days when our English ploughs used to be drawn by bullocks.

As to the purpose of the collection, the Sebastian Evans whose boyhood was spent in Market Bosworth, records that on the occasion of one of these Plough Monday Morris dances the fool went up to him and asked him to remember the fool - adding, in case little Evans might not have recognised him through the disguise, “I’m Curly”, “Yes I see you are” said the boy, “and I’ll remember you, Curly, as long as I live.” “A’ don’t knoo what yo mean.” “Tell him the bullocks is thirsty and wants some beer,” said one of the performers. Mr. Evans states that it was from that Plough Monday that he dates his knowledge of what ‘remembrance’ means in the mouth of a ‘son of the soil’.”

Evans is also quoted in a book on ‘Leicester Customs’ and in ‘The Legends and Lore of Leicestershire’ is another passage referring to Plough Monday.

4. A reference to another local village, Elmesthorpe was found:

ELMESTHORPE - Richard Fowkes ‘Extremesis’ 1811

Jan 7 Plow Monday

The old custom of Plough Monday still prevails
Like a great many old popular tales
Plough bullocks dressed in ribbon, a gaudy show
In a long procession, shouting as they go -
Higham on the Hill
Stoke in the Vale
Wykin for buttermilk
Hinckley for Ale

Richard Fowkes was a Leicestershire farmer and amateur historian.

5. Evans is also quoted in a book on 'Leicester Customs' and in 'The Legends and Lore of Leicestershire' is a passage referring to Plough Monday.

Arthur B Evans 'Leicester Words and Phrases' published in 1848 writes-

"PLOUGH BULLOCKS

A name given in this county to persons who like the Morris dancers (or dancers of the Morisco or Moorish dance) come round on Plough Monday dressed up in ribbons and womens gear, and dance with UNTIRING AGILITY before the houses of the more opulent to obtain plough money for the evening dance or festivity."

6. WILLIAM SPENCER LETTER APRIL 26TH 1813

Further investigation found the extract quoted below taken from a letter by a steward in Sapcote.

William Spencer was a steward from Sapcote working for the village squire, John Frewen Turner. He managed Turner's property in Sapcote and wrote regular letters to Turner with news of village life. Turner lived 35 miles away in Cold Overton.

Turner's documents are held by Lewes Record Office, Sussex where he spent his last days. Keith Hextall of Sapcote Historical Society obtained copies of the letters and transcribed them.

The entry in Spencer's letters for 26th April 1813 reads:

"Our Sapcote people have been feasting the greater part of last week; three Club-Feasts and a feast of Plough-Bullocks have exhausted most of the Ale in the public houses, and most of the tobacco in the Parish, and there have been some bloody noses."

Previous references to the 'Club' were noted to be the Sick and Benefit Club. It may be that this was the Club that put on the three Club-feasts.

Some earlier references to Plough Bullocks were found:

7. RITES AND RIOTS

FOLK CUTOMS OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE - BOB PEGG

Writing under the pseudonym of T. Row, the Derbyshire antiquary, Samuel Pegge, described what went on, in the pages of The Gentleman's Magazine for 1762.

"Plough Monday - is when the labour of the Plough and other rustic toils begin. On this day the young men yoke themselves and draw a PLOUGH about with Musick, and one or two persons, in antic dresses like Jack-Puddings, go from house to house, to gather money to drink. If you refuse them, they plough up your dunghill. We call them here the Plough Bullocks"

There are references attributed to two Mr. Evans, Sebastian and Arthur B Evans which caused some confusion to the current researcher.

So, what happened on Plough Monday in Hinckley? This was unlikely to be Plough Plays (mummers), since these are mainly from East Leicestershire. Sword Dancing (Plough Stots or Plough Jags) or Sword Dancing combined with Plough Plays tended to be limited to South Yorkshire (Goathland Plough Stots). Molly Dancing is found mainly, but not limited to the East Anglia area, so could the dancing in the Hinckley area be a form of Molly?

All the information that had been obtained had referred to the following:

- a. Plough Bullocks pulling ploughs, dancing, stopping at large houses and farms collecting money and sometimes being met with hostility.
- b. Men 'raddled up' and sometimes wearing half face masks.
- c. Music provided by hautboy and fiddle.
- d. Apart from unspecific remarks from commentators such as 'a travesty of a quadrille', 'country dance style dances with ad lib stamping and shuffling', there were no specific descriptions of the dances performed.

This left several questions: What is raddle and what is a hautboy? Soon it was found that raddle is red ochre that farmers marked the chest of their rams in order to identify which ewes had been 'served' and was rubbed on the faces of the Plough Bullocks as a form of disguise. A hautboy is a type of oboe.

But what were the dances? And here the search for information stalled. There was no description of the dances. So what were they and what type of dancing was it?

Here there was a halt in efforts to ascertain what form the dances took. However, a year or two later there was a Eureka moment. In 1986 at the Forest of Dean Family Weekend there was a chance meeting with an elderly gentleman, who at that time was musician to Thaxted Morris. He described his experience of dancing Molly on Plough Monday and this description of events fitted perfectly with the information previously collected. Now it was believed that the dancing referred to in previously collected information was in fact Molly Dancing. References to Molly dancing were located in Folk magazines. Some evidence referred to Molly Dancing extending north into Leicestershire and even to Winster in Derbyshire.

8. Journal of the EFDSS Vol 1. No2, December 1933. Molly Dancing in East Anglia by Joseph Needham and Arthur I Peck plus in English Dance and Song Vol 36, No1 Spring 1974 Plough Monday 1933 at Little Downham by William Palmer, then

English Dance and Song Vol XL No2, Summer 1978 Molly Dancing in South West Cambridgeshire by Russell Wortley and Cyril Papworth.

It was from these articles that I learned of the Plough Light in a quote from Bloomfield which went some way to explaining the reason for the tradition. A plough light was kept burning in the local church emphasising nature's calendar and ensuring continuity from one year to the next. Plough Bullocks collected money to pay for the candles.

Many references of the Molly men and the Ploughboys indicated that in some locations they did not go out together but used to meet up later in the evening on Plough Monday.

In the Hinckley area the references are mainly of the Plough Bullocks pulling the plough and dancing whilst others referred to groups who had a separate number of men, usually 4 who pulled the plough, but did not dance.

The various sources of information also indicated that at the end of the day the men returned to their starting point for a meal and drinks and the festivities continued with social country dancing often dancing the same dances performed during the day as country dances.

If the tradition was to be revived a decision was needed on what dances to perform. The Anker Morris men from Nuneaton were used as guinea pigs to test drive a dance noted by Wortley and Papworth -

a dance from Comberton near Cambridge called The Comberton Molly, The Special Molly or Bob Ridley-O after the tune used. This proved to be successful and a few men declared an interest in pursuing the matter further.

Letters were sent to most local 'youth' organisations - Morris Sides, Scouts, Young Farmers etc. plus the two local papers.

In addition to the positive responses from a few of the Anker Morris, there was interest from the men of Anstey Morris, a member of Knighton Morris and a member of Plum Jerkum. There was also interest from a group of men from Stoney Stanton and Sapcote who were not connected to any Morris side but had seen letters in the local paper expressed themselves keen to be involved. These men were invited to attend a meeting to discuss a possible revival of the Plough Bullocks and approximately twenty men met at the Trinity Church Youth Centre in Hinckley in October 1986. The men attending the meeting all expressed enthusiasm in being involved in an attempt to revive the tradition of Plough Bullocks.

In the absence of notations of dances performed by the original Plough Bullocks a decision was made to dance interpretations of three of the dances noted in the article by Needham and Peck, one as collected by Wortley and Papworth (Bob Ridley-O), a travesty of a quadrille to the tune of Speed The Plough and a processional dance to use when moving from venue to venue.

The next problem was that all of the men interested in being involved in the revival were all in full time employment so a decision was made to hold the Plough Monday celebration on the Saturday preceding Plough Monday.

The date for our first, and possibly last, venture was set for Saturday 10th January 1987.

We used the Holy Trinity Church Centre as our practice venue and the Prince of Wales on Coventry Road, Hinkley as our social centre. We recruited three musicians, a concertina player and a melodeon player from Anstey Morris and a local fiddler who had seen the articles in the local papers.

Letters were sent to Shirley Elsby, the Hinckley reporter for the Leicester Mercury and Mitch Irving of the Hinckley Times informing them of the event and enlisting their support.

Over the following weeks four dances were taught and, though some would dispute it, learned, ready for the first revival.

Descriptions of dress gleaned from the various sources found during the information gathering process were used to identify our kit. The men dressed in dark clothes with sashes, rosettes, arm ribbons, lallygags¹ and high hats with ribbons. There was even a very authentic Beelzebub in his rag coat and wearing his bell and tail. The one thing missing was a plough. This was simply because the first Tour was very much a case of suck it and see and it was not known if the revival would continue.

As five of the locations noted in the various references found during research were Hinckley, Sharnford, Sapcote, Stoney Stanton and Elmhurst it was decided that the Bullockers would visit all five locations. The stops were The Falconer (now The Sharnford Arms), Sharnford; The Red Lion, Sapcote; Castle Street, Hinckley; The Prince of Wales and The Lime Kilns, Hinckley, The Wentworth Arms, Elmhurst and The Star, Stoney Stanton. In the evening The Hinckley Bullockers Country Dance was held in a Stoney Stanton school with over 100 people attending.

Through the revival being reported in the two local newspapers we made contact with Mr. Owen Brown, a Sapcote resident, and local historian. Mr. Brown was able to provide us with much additional information on Plough Monday celebrations in the area but especially in Sapcote. This information

was actually obtained from his mother who told him of her childhood memories of Plough Bullocks. In 1987 Mr. Brown was in his early 70's and by extrapolation would take his mother's memories back to the late 1890's. We were delighted to learn that The Red Lion in Sapcote was the pub where, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the Sapcote Plough Bullocks, or Bullockers started and ended their Plough Monday celebrations.

These Bullockers blacked up rather than used raddle. They wore white shirts with cut outs of the plough sewn to the shirts, horse ribbons and rosettes, bells and brasses adorned their legs, arms and shoulders. Molly Dancers accompanied them with country music played on fiddles, such as The Farmer's Boy etc. The leading fiddler was Puntty Garratt and Old Chuter was the Fool who whacked everyone with his pig's bladder. Their ceremonial plough was known as the White Plough and was pulled around the village by a length of rope encased in leather which was kept from year to year. They met at The Red Lion in the morning, toured the farms, large houses and pubs in the area before returning to The Red Lion where in the evening they dined and then held a "Country Dance". At this event they danced the dances that had been performed during the day by the men as social dances. Mr. Brown also confirmed that the habit of ploughing up the land in front of a 'stingy' householder was still in vogue. Owen Brown also informed us of the success of previous Sapcote Bullockers who in 1798 collected enough money to put on three feasts for the needy of the village. This was at a time during the Napoleonic wars when southern ports were blockaded which had led to food shortages.

So once again new details were provided by Mr. Brown but still no new information on the dances! Frustration all round.

On Tuesday 13th. January 1987 a "post mortem" was held to discuss the event and decide if it should continue. As the day had been a success it was unanimously agreed that we would meet again in October to prepare for the 1988 Tour. Encouraged by Shirley Elsby, the Hinckley reporter for the Leicester Mercury, and with the kind permission of the late Harry Bevins we borrowed a plough from the Peckleton Rural Museum. An additional two dances were introduced, The Boneshaker and The Old Sixty-nine. In keeping with the other dances in the Molly tradition, the team's own dances are based on country dance figures and patterns. An important decision was also made at this time which was that we did not wish to start yet another regular Morris side but wanted to retain the unique nature of the event and dance only on the Saturday before Plough Monday. The introduction of the plough caused us to vary the tour slightly as it is quite dangerous pulling a decorated plough along main roads in Hinckley.

Over the last thirty years various changes have occurred causing us to continue to vary our Tour and practice venue. We were worried that we might one day damage the plough borrowed from the museum so in 1994 we purchased our own plough.

In 2003, in a major change to what had been the norm for sixteen years, we successfully moved the Country Dance to November prior to the practice season. Regretfully due to various factors, but mainly the huge increase in the cost of hire of the hall and changes to legislation, the Bullockers Country Dance is currently in abeyance.

The Tour however did not change too much and remained fairly constant for a number of years. Changes occurred when we could no longer dance in the centre of Hinckley, replacing that venue with The Lord Bassett Arms in Sapcote. The Francis Arms in Stoney Stanton and two local residential homes for the elderly were also added. For a number of years the tour ended with a music and song session at The Francis Arms. Due to the parlous state of the pub trade we subsequently lost Lord Bassett Arms and Francis Arms and also, for different reasons, lost the two residential homes. The O'Briens who ran

the Red Lion in Sapcote were replaced by other licencees who also treated the Bullockers well and the evening session continues at The Red Lion. The O'Briens opened a guest house in the village, so we added their residence to our tour itinerary, probably the promise of mulled wine and nibbles influenced our decision to stop off there. A splendid revival of an old custom! Occasionally special events were added to the tour, notably when we danced at the home of a resident of Stoney Stanton on his 90th birthday and then on his 100th birthday.

A major welcome change has been the increase in the number of musicians providing the music for our dancing. The main change occurred when a local family of brass players asked if they could join the 'band'. This offer was accepted which encouraged others to join. Luckily we have a musician skilled in musical arrangement who provided suitable arrangements for brass and other wind instruments. In 2016 we had three melodeons, one piano accordion, a fiddle, a concertina, flute, two trombones, two tubas, a helycon, a guitar, ukelele, banjo, two drums and whistle.

We now run four practice sessions on the first three Tuesdays in December and the Tuesday before the tour in January. In recognition of our three "traditional" villages the Sharnford Shuffle, Sapcote Salute and Stoney Stanton Stomp were introduced about fifteen years ago bringing our dance repertoire up to nine. In 2006 for our 20th Tour the Owen Brown Polka was introduced in honour of our Sapcote informant and supporter¹. Mr. Ashley's Long Set Molly was introduced in 2009 and Obriren's Reel in honour of Bob and Joyce Obrien in 2012.

Membership has also changed with the passing years but we retain a hard core of founder members and in 2016, we had 36 men out on Saturday 9th January. Men came from as far afield as Lincolnshire, Nottingham, South Derbyshire, Southamton, Ipswich and more locally Nuneaton and Leicestershire. We are particularly pleased that the dancers still include a small number of local men who do not dance Morris other than with the Bullockers at our annual event.

In 2010 the tour was notable both for the freezing temperature and snow and for the unexpected arrival of a team of academics from Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina, San Michele all'Adige, Italy who were adding to their collection of midwinter European traditions.²

The 2016 Tour marked our 30th Anniversary which is surprising because we never envisaged that we would be so successful in reviving a local tradition. The 2010 tour was notable both for the freezing cold and snow and for the unexpected arrival of a team of academics from Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina, San Michele all'Adige, Italy who were adding to their collection of midwinter European traditions.

And remember!

*The old custom of Plough Monday still prevails
Like a great many other popular tales,
Plough Bullocks dressed in ribbons, a gaudy show
In a long procession shouting as they go----
'Higham on the Hill,
Stoke in the Vale,
Wykin for buttermilk
Hinckley for ale!'*

(Richard Fowlkes, Elmesthorpe, 1811)⁴

Notes:

1 lallygags or up catchers - ribbons tied below the knees.

2 Sadly Owen Brown never saw the Owen Brown Polka due to illness and a spell in sheltered accommodation away from the village and he passed away on 22nd January 2008. His funeral was attended by a number of Bullockers in kit.

3 see www.carnivalkingofeurope.it, Filmography, A good day in Sharnford, God Speed the Plough.

4 This rhyme is used at the start of the Hinckley Quadrille



Roy Dommett's death sent me scurrying into our (Thames Valley) archives, and the result is an article which I asked Phil Underwood to write for the Circular about Dommett's development of the Oddington tradition with Thames Valley in the 1960s.

The article mentions Jim Brooks, who was in at the beginning of Thames Valley in the early 1950s. At Jim's funeral Dommett suggested and talked us through an Oddington-style dance which we still dance as "Jimmy Brooks". We now think it would be a good idea to come up with a new Oddington-style dance to be named in Dommett's honour. We've started to think about steps and a tune and will let the Morris world know what we come up with.

In the meantime here's the article, which we would like to submit for publication,

John Elkins

Bagman, Thames Valley MM

Roy Dommett, Oddington and Thames Valley

A personal recollection by Phil Underwood, sometime squire of Thames Valley, November 2015

I have a recording of Roy Dommett from the early 80's when he came to the Isle of Wight to teach Stanton Harcourt to the Men of Wight. (Incidentally my father, John Underwood, as well as being the then Foreman of MoW, had been a colleague of Roy's on the Black Knight/Black Arrow rocket programmes).

I recorded the workshop and my father and I used to enjoy listening back to Roy teaching Brighton Camp to the rather overawed men, haranguing them with yells of "You hit him, you hit him, you hit him and he hits YOU! - HALF HEY!!"

Given his famous body shape we marvelled at what a superb dancer he was. My own cherished memory of this wonderful event is of the admittedly inaccurate but enjoyable image of an almost spherical body, topped with a great bearded head, levitating serenely above furiously whirling legs.

Dommett became a major influence on Thames Valley Morris Men in 1963 when he presented the side with the fruits of his research into the Oddington Tradition, which had died out in the early 20th Century. Dommett had come across Clive Carey's notes in the Cambridge University Library and was looking for a side to revive the tradition. Thames Valley was known as a prominent Ring side with a long pedigree: several members of the side having been dancing since the 1930's, including with the early Ring side the Curfews, from Chertsey.

In his log for February 13th 1963 Jim Brooks wrote: "*Pat Paterson brings Roy Dommett, Squire of the Border Men and member of the Ring Advisory Council, also a keen collector. He has collected information at Oddington from Gloucestershire, traditional dances which have not been performed since the 16th century. He wishes to come here and sort his notes out and to practice his interpretation of these dances. I agree to co-operate and ask our side to support me. We go down to the basement and the three of us get going, full of fun and noise*"

The side under the then squire, the late Siward Glaister, interpreted the set dances and Jim Brooks the jigs. John Glaister interpreted the music with his own subtle and restrained style of melodeon playing, eventually recording the tunes for the Morris Ring.

After many evenings in Jim Brooks' cellar, studying the notes, they danced it for the first time. Later in the 1960s, as a mark of respect, TVMM proposed Roy Dommett for Squire of the Morris Ring. It was also fitting when in 1968 Clive Carey himself was laid to rest in Claygate, Surrey, Thames Valley's home village.

Meanwhile Dommett was also teaching his own looser and more flamboyant interpretations to other sides. However, a purely personal view is that Thames Valley's interpretation of Oddington is the most satisfying form, restrained and disciplined, with an underlying passion and energy which took the side forward as one of the great post war Morris sides.

Jim Brooks used to say that the way you really learn to dance the Morris is through the jigs - and for me the most satisfying are the Oddington jigs. For Thames Valley Morris Men Dommett's memory will forever live on through his gift of the Oddington.



Editor's Note: After consultation with the Editor of The Circular, it was decided to reproduce Phil Underwood's article in The Morris Dancer, due to its historical content, which may be of interest to future researchers.

The Oxford University Morris Men 1899 – 1914

By Roy Judge (1970)

Part Two

The Oxford Society for the Revival of the Folk-Dance published a 'Programme for Selection' (copy in VWL):

"Any of the following Dances, with appropriate Action and Singing at intervals, are taught by the Lady Teacher. The songs are all in print already, and it is highly desirable to become familiar with these in advance by the use of Mr. Cecil Sharp's and Mr McIlwaine's published collection, to be had of Mr. Taphouse, 3 Magdalen Street, Oxford, and others."

The local organisers were Charlotte S> Sidgwick of 64 Woodstock Road and Constance M Leicester of 17 Staverton Road. M.S. (probably Marjorie Sidgwick, daughter of Charlotte) had a delightfully allusive article in the EFDS News No. 22 Jan 1930. Presumably referring to Rosina Mallet she writes "The first Oxford teacher was an East London club girl, looking about fourteen, almost a slum girl, probably a gypsy, a brown-eyed goblin with feet trained by London barrel organs, taking a class of forty middle-aged schoolmistresses with expert calm."

The notes on the 'Programme for Selection' say "The Dances are also genuine Folk Music, for the most part they were collected from two peasants in Oxfordshire in whose family they had been handed down from father to son for five generations. These men were brought to London, and taught the members of the Esperance Club to dance with such success, that they are in their turn to-



Lady Ottoline Morrell (1873 – 1938) by Augustus John c 1926

day teaching the dances from one end of England to the other. Everywhere the same interest has been aroused. That there is life and joy in the movement is proved beyond doubt by the daily growing demand for their services. It does not seem too much to hope that the Merrie England of our tradition and of our dream may be before long the Merrie England of the present."

So far only two further references to the activities of the Society in Oxford have been discovered:

[On] 26 June 1909 The Esperance Club gave a concert in the garden of Black Hall by kind permission of Mrs. F Morrell. Kimber danced Jockey to the Fair and Bacca Pipes. Theo Chaundy's account of Kimber refers to the latter's memory of dancing at Black Hall for Lady Ottoline Morrell: presumably this was the same occasion.

The other reference is indirect, deriving from an article by Mary Neal in the Observer of 5 November 1911 in which she mentions that boys and girls of the Esperance Guild of Morris Dancers had been invited to join a revival Headington side in a display in Oxford "last year".

The Oxford Journal for 20 March 1909 refers to a lecture given by Sharp on "English Folk Music" at the Municipal Assembly Rooms during which Kimber danced. The meeting was full to overflowing.

Meanwhile in London and elsewhere the revival continued apace.

The Morning Post for 14 January 1909 reported on Mary Neal's activities under the heading "Dancing and Social Reform: What London Working Girls Are Doing.

Two bricklayers.....willingly allowed their melodies to be harmonised and their dances which were given on the 'High' every Whit Monday, to be taught to the girls.

From Redditch, near Stratford-on-Avon came the idea of using tall hats as part of the costume for the dances, and the Head Master of Eaton was good enough to provide several of these articles of headgear for the purpose."

4 March 1909 Sharp gave a lecture at the Steinway Hall on the Morris Dance, and Kimber and R. Doddridge performed. This was the occasion on which Kimber broke his concertina. An appeal for a subscription raised £7 and he was later presented by Sharp with a concertina inscribed "from all the audience at the Steinway Hall March 4 1909".

11 June 1909 Sharp and Kimber performed at a Fete in the grounds of Chelsea Hospital before King Edward and Queen Alexandra. "When the performance was over their Majesties graciously intimated the pleasure they had received from it." Also appearing at the Fete were "Young ladies from Chelsea Physical Training College".

Sharp had been instructing at Chelsea since 1908. It was during the summer of 1909 that the Board of Education agreed to recognise the dances as part of its course of physical exercise.

27 September 1909 A school of Morris Dancing was established in connection with the Physical Training Department of the SW Polytechnic Institute, Chelsea, with Cecil Sharp as the Director. Its purpose was "primarily to conserve the Morris dance in all its traditional purity; and secondly to teach it as accurately as possible to those who desire to become teachers themselves or professed teacher of it".

In March 1910 Mary Neal established the Esperance Guild of Morris Dancers in place of the Association for the Revival and Practice of Folk Music.

At this point the differences of opinion between Sharp and Neal came clearly into the open.

Sharp wrote to the Morning Post (1 April 1910) to disassociate himself from Esperance Activities. "It is however obvious that if our folk dances are to be revived among the lettered classes it is of supreme importance that they should be taught by accredited instructors, and that only those dances should be disseminated which are the survivals of a genuine and unbroken tradition." On 23 April 1910 in a further letter, "the new society to be effective should include in its executive the expert as well as the philanthropist."

Maud Karpeles, in Mary Neal's obituary (EDS VIII 6 July/Aug 1944) discusses the reasons for this breach, seeing it as the "clash of two dominant personalities". On the one hand Mary Neal saw it as "the age-long controversy, the difference between the form and the life, the pedant and those in touch with life itself." On the other, Sharp saw "the danger of enthusiasm that is uninformed". "Philanthropy and art have nothing in common, and to unite them spells disaster."

"Mary Neal was essentially a philanthropist. She had a burning desire to bring happiness into the lives of others, and particularly those whose lot had fallen in drab and impoverished surroundings. Cecil Sharp was also a lover of his fellow-men for into their lives the forms of artistic expression which were their birthright. What Mary Neal mistook in him for pedantry was his reverence for tradition. Mary Neal believed that to acquire a technique was to take away from the enjoyment of

the dances. Cecil Sharp believed that technique and artistry are body and soul, matter and spirit and that nearly all the troubles in the world come from the attempt to divorce the one from the other."

The future in Oxford as elsewhere lay with Sharp, but the work of Mary Neal and the Esperance Morris should by no means be forgotten.

Part 3 will appear in the next full issue of The Morris Dancer.