



Morris Ring Meeting: Thaxted

Dubbed 'The Great Northern' because it was the most northerly of the Morris Ring Meetings arranged for 2009 and included a large contingent from the north-including Redcar, Saddleworth, Britannia Coconut Dancers, Castleford Sword and Monkseaton. This was the first of five Morris Ring Meetings scheduled for 2009 celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the Morris Ring. Reports and colour photos of all the Morris Ring Meetings feature in this special 60th edition of the Morris Ring Circular.



Hartley feature on pages 8-10; Bathampton pages 16-17; Isle of Wight on pages 20-22 and Exeter on pages 22-24. Thaxted report continues on pages 2 and 3.



Photos: 1. above, two processions meet in Thaxted; 2. above left, Britannia Coconut Dancers in Thaxted; 3. left: Thaxted Morris Men and 4. below, Saddleworth

Full contents list on page 5, after The Squire of The Morris Ring's report on pages 4-5.

Photo credits: 1 Jon Wimhurst;
2 & 3, Geoff Jerram; 4, Harry
Stevenson





Redcar left & Headington above right (HS); the cake and Roger Comely above and North Wood Right (JW)



Left: Chalice; Winster below (GJ) & below right, Westminster (GJ)



The Feast in Thaxted Church; Thelwell right (JW); Moulton below right; East Surrey below left and Greensleeves, left, in Thaxted Church, procession above left on Sunday morning (HS)



Photos: JW=Jon Wimhurst, GJ=Geoff Jerram HS= Harry Stevenson)



75th Anniversary Morris Ring Meeting 2009 Thaxted: The 'Great Northern'

by Paul Reece

The Father and Mother of all Ring Meetings, the first and best upheld its reputation by providing us with a not so dry dummy run for our centenary meeting in 2011. Over a year in the making through personal invites and working on sides rarely if ever seen this far south we were going to make the most of this being the 'Great Northern' the most northerly and consequently the most centrally located of this country's anniversary meetings.

Over 400 men were squeezed into Thaxted and then on to eight tours across North Essex in perfect weather before performing their procession into Town Street, double the usual number, a record, before an extended air traffic free evening of Morris and Mumming. 33 clubs took part, including Great Yorkshire Morris, Winster and the Britannia Coconut Dancers who officially danced in as full members of the Morris Ring and were publicly presented with their staffs and Ed Worrall danced in as the Morris Ring Treasurer.

Ironically all the traditions including Mumming were covered at the Thaxted meeting except for our East Anglian Molly tradition, which turned up as if by magic at the Bathampton meeting thanks to Mersey Morris Men.

The 1949 recast Fellowship Bell decorated with Morris Dancers rang 75 times to signal the start of the processions.

The special and unique nature of such a large Winster processional including Winster had to be specially choreographed to fit into

Town Street. It was followed by Saddleworth processing from both ends of the town and then by the Nutters.

This set the level of expectancy for the show which included in front of the Cutlers Guildhall one of the largest contingent of sword sides that Thaxted has ever seen.

Amongst these were the ever spectacular Monkseaton, Redcar, Castleford and Stevenage sword teams.

Fifteen barrels of beer donated by Simon Oughton from 'The Pheasant', Great Chishill and the Nethergate Brewery ensured that the cross between the 'Last Supper' and the 'Angels and Demons'-like film set of the Church provided a most memorable and historically apt location for the feast. Complete with a 75th anniversary candle-lit cake at the entrance extinguished by the youngest dancer, Thaxted's nine year old Tim Jossaume ensured a powerful and meaningful start to a remarkable two hour feast before the second show in Town Street culminating in the ever haunting Horn Dance.

All the founder sides were represented except for Oxford and of the traditional sides the attendance of Headington Quarry, Winster and the unique Nutters made up for the disappointment in Abingdon and Bampton being absent.

Sunday saw us back in the church where founder Ring members Greensleeves performed the offertory dance.

After the service a dedication was

made to Alec Hunter, Thaxted Squire, Thaxted Church Warden and first Squire of the Morris Ring in the form of a plaque at the east end of the church and at the gravestone to Jim Catterall who died at the 2007 meeting. Extensive dancing and mumming proceeded in the churchyard from the remaining sides. After a sumptuous buffet lunch in The Swan it was off to Margaret Gardens to entertain the town's folk with Morris and Country Dancing for Thaxted and those still left and standing.

Thanks should go Bob Russell MP, son of Ewart Russell the former much loved Bagman of the Morris Ring, who was our guest of honour for the meeting and who raised a parliamentary early day motion in praise of the Morris Ring's anniversary and for the necessary support for our native dances.

Also to a very inventive film made by students at the Royal College of Art, BBC Scotland who produced an hour long Panorama programme for Scotland and a half hour one for the rest of Britain featuring some of the attending sides. And last, but by no means least, AA Gill who wrote an extensive and powerful article for the Sunday Times Magazine about the Thaxted meeting.

In all this media exposure Saddleworth starred as the unleashed beasts of the Morris world and the Nutters as their accompanying exotics from the Bacup underworld. The lengths we go to get copy and to deny our extinction. Thanks lads.

Paul Reece of Thaxted Morris Men, is Chairman of the Advisory Council

The Squire's Report

We have come to the end of a summer of Morris Ring meetings which have been a wonderful testimony to the strength of the Morris Ring in its 75th year. This special edition of the Circular contains many pictures and reports covering all five meetings. In this report I shall include all the events I have attended, not just the Morris Ring meetings.

The Thaxted meeting took place at the end of May. This was our show piece event with thirty three sides and over four hundred men enjoying a very special weekend together in the warm sunshine. The massed show was inevitably long with the number of sides to be fitted in but we managed it. I was particularly pleased to present staffs of office to the Great Yorkshire Morris Men, the Bacup Britannia Coconut Dancers and the Winster Morris Men. The latter two have been members for a considerable time but had not formally danced in at a Morris Ring Meeting. The feast was held in the church, an unusual experience for most of those present, but an excellent use for an old building.

The following weekend I attended the Ravensbourne day of dance in Tunbridge Wells, just a short bus ride away from where I live. The guests were the Blackheath Morris Men from London, who in my younger days were known as the Blackheath Foot and Death! No tour of Tunbridge Wells is complete without a trip on the Spa Valley steam railway. We alighted at Groombridge to dance at the Junction Inn and surprised Dave Green, the Squire of Winchester, who was out for a quiet day's walking with his wife. Amazing who you meet when you are out and about!



*Brian Tasker at Bramble Bank at the
Men of Wight Ring Meeting in August
2009*

Next came the Hartley meeting in the middle of June. It was attended by ten sides and one hundred and twenty men, so it was a much smaller meeting than Thaxted. Again we were lucky with the weather and we enjoyed a warm sunny weekend. The guest of honour was Bob Tatman who joined Hartley in 1965 and guided the side through the formative years of the early 1970's. As Squire and foreman he established the Hartley style of dancing and directly or indirectly taught most of the present side to dance. Instead of a church service the men were taken to Ightham Mote, a beautiful National Trust property nearby, for a massed display in front of the house followed by the harmony singing in the courtyard which has become a feature of Hartley ales in recent years.

Before June was out I spent evenings with Wadard and Wantsum, a pleasant Sunday afternoon with the North Wood men, dancing at a Lion's Club charity gala, and a splendid

evening by the Thames dancing at Richmond and Twickenham as a guest of Spring Grove. They call this event "Midsummer Morris" as it takes place on mid summer day. The guest sides were Thames Valley, Yateley, Greensleeves and Ewell St Mary.

July started with a weekend in Northumberland to celebrate Sallyport's 40th anniversary. I just had time to fit in an evening with Ashdown Forest before it was time for the annual Hartley Shepherd Neame tour of East Kent. This has been a regular feature of the Hartley calendar for many years and seems to grow in strength year by year. Nowadays we stay at the Gate Inn at Marshside, the home of the Boyden Gate Mummers. We were joined this year by the Woodchurch men on the Saturday and the Wantsum men on the Sunday.

Later in July my wife's side, Kettle Bridge Clogs, were dancing out with North Wood and Greenwich, so I tagged along. Greenwich had a young man in the side and I asked him if his dad was a member. The answer was "yes". He added that his dad had recruited him when he was eleven and paid for his driving lessons when he reached seventeen so that he could drive him home from the pub after performances!

The next event in July was the Exeter meeting. Sixteen sides and one hundred and eighty men attended this meeting which was based in Topsham, the old port of Exeter. It was at this meeting that I discovered that "Trunkles" is a corruption of "trunk hose", which is an Elizabethan term for the type of short puffed out breeches worn with long white stockings by men such as Sir Walter Raleigh.

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The Squire's Report continued

Not everyone knows that. I also remember the Exeter men trying to confuse me by changing their show dance on the Saturday evening to the same one scheduled for the next massed dance! Another wonderful weekend which included a Sunday morning service in Exeter Cathedral.

At the end of the month I spent an evening with the Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men. Hartley and Chanctonbury used to tour together back in the 1970's, but as sometimes happens ties weaken for one reason or another and sides move on. The blame on this occasion being attributed to the accommodation we offered them in the railway cottages at Bodiam which had to be fumigated before use.

And so on to Sidmouth! There was an excellent turnout of Morris Ring sides on the Sunday morning on the sea front: Bourne River, Exeter, Dartington, Bathampton, Hexham, Kennet, Faithful City, Plymouth and Uplyme. The weather was good on the Sunday morning and there must have been well over twenty sides dancing. After Sidmouth I went to the Broadstairs Festival for a day to attend the dedication

of a park bench to the memory of Jack Hamilton who founded the festival. For many years Jack was a member of the Beaux of London City and although they have called it a day as a side, four of them gave a short dance display.

The fourth meeting of the year was in the Isle of Wight, hosted by the Men of Wight. Unfortunately this meeting clashed with Saddleworth Rushcart, but there was a good reason for that. The lowest tide of the season occurred on the Saturday and a hovercraft was arranged to take us out to dance on the Bramble Bank in the middle of the Solent. It was the highlight of the weekend and the men had great fun dancing on the sand and when they tired of that they danced in the puddles. The wonderful weather over the weekend was enjoyed by the eight sides and one hundred men who attended.

The Isle of Wight meeting was followed by the Whitby Festival. I attended the longsword workshop where the Redcar men taught their own Eston and California dance. Anyone who thinks longsword is a boring tradition should see Redcar dance.

That brings me on to Bathampton,

the fifth and final meeting of the summer. Bathampton were celebrating their own seventy-fifth anniversary as well as that of the Morris Ring. For that reason they called it the "Double Diamond Ring Meeting". All the tours were walking tours which enabled us to get a good look around the city. The Sunday massed display was held in Green Park Station, a converted railway station, and I shall always remember the spectacle of the massed "William and Nancy" and "Bonny Green", where we filled the entire dancing area and gave truly wonderful displays rich in vitality and colour. We were again lucky with the weather and the ten sides and one hundred men who attended were able to fully appreciate the beauty of the City.

I would like to express my thanks to all those who have been involved in organising Morris Ring meetings and other events during the summer. Organising an event takes a lot of time and effort and many problems have to be overcome. Events which run smoothly and without much apparent organisation are often those into which the greatest amount of thought and effort has been put.

Brian Tasker

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Fools and Beasts Unconvention

Yateley Morris Men: Day of Dance 19th September 2009

by Mike Musgrove

Despite a forlorn weather forecast, it didn't rain! What more can you ask for a day of dance.....ah, perhaps a coach that doesn't need a last minute purchase of Gaffer tape to hold the luggage doors on!

Yateley managed to squeeze out two dancing sides thanks to badgering a couple of their musicians and sent coach tours to Guildford and Reading.

The Guildford tour vied for the crowd's attention and successfully fought off the ladies manning a NHS display and a contingent of South Americans doing North American music and dances.

The tour finished at a colourful canal boat rally in Fleet before driving back to Yateley for tea and a massed display.

The Reading tour enjoyed a packed town centre, a trip round a deserted rural museum and a road-blocking riverside pub venue with a captive audience.

Each dance was akin to shutting lock gates for three minutes as cyclists, walkers and families waited patiently for each dance to



YateleyMM at Dog and Partridge, above and a special entertainment from Yateley MM was the "Dance of the Fat Santas" (below) and which can be seen on Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggwDkgJc4sY&feature=related>



finish before they were allowed to go on their way.

Back to the Yateley village to entertain a large, appreciative crowd for an hour, with a massed display on the green outside the pub and Medieval church.

The evening feast lacked a bit of ambience as it was moved to the large school hall due to the school caretaker deciding to hold his birthday party in the cosy little hall. It does not pay to challenge the power of the caretaker .

Lots of scrummy hot pies, potatoes and salad followed by cheese and port and a round of songs from the assembled company.

Big thanks to the Ring Squire, Brian Tasker (he caught the train at 6:15am to be there) and friends from Kennet, Mendip, Moulton, Thames Valley and Spring Grove. Brian Tasker jig at top and Moulton off the ground!

Photos from the writer.

Shakespeare Morris Men 50th Anniversary Dinner

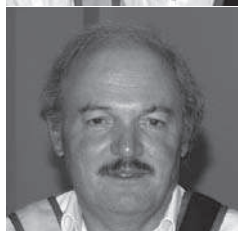


Invited guests joined hosts Shakespeare MM to celebrate their 50th Anniversary dinner in food, drink, dance, song, 'instant Mumming' and reminiscences

Photos: H. Stevenson



A selection of guests and Shakespeare MM past and present



2009 Meeting of the Morris Ring: Hartley



Top left the Goacher's Tour; top right massed display at Sissinghurst Castle; left, above and below left; The Pride of all Hampshire in Winchester Morris Men, Yateley Morris Men and Victory Morris Men respectively; right, Lincoln and Micklebarrow jig; and the hosts Hartley performing at Ightham Moat



Photos on pages 8 & 9
Harry Stevenson



2009 Meeting of the Morris Ring: Hartley



Top left, Etcetera; top right, Long Man and Hartley below them; above left, Winchester, and a massed dance above them; above, Hartley Fool; far left Long Man Fool; left John Whelan; below, Broadwood Morris Men, at Wrotham; right, singing at Ightham Moat, above this, Kennet and below right the Host club Hartley also at Ightham Moat



2009 Meeting of the Morris Ring: Hartley

Hartley MM have been holding annual weekend Ales for over 35 years. This year we decided to turn our Ale into a Ring Meeting and enlarge it slightly to accommodate extra guests.

Based as usual in our village hall, additional dormitories had to be provided by erecting two marquees in the 'big house' garden normally reserved for the hardy campers. Winchester MM were allocated the playgroup garden as they had agreed to assist with Kennet MM's breakfasts who, as regular attendees, have squatters rights in the cricket pavilion where the showers are situated. Victory MM, who also come every year regardless, took over the stage as usual whilst everyone else had the choice of either the indoor and outdoor accommodation provided or camping in our secure 'garden'. As usual at Hartley events, beer in the hall was free from 7pm Friday until it ran out on Sunday. Nevertheless on both Friday and Saturday evenings everyone decanted to the Rose & Crown where singers, dancers and musicians each found areas where they could perform to their hearts content whilst others drank, socialised or circulated according to taste.

It is traditional for Hartley Ale tours to start at a brewery, by choice, as the only alternative at 10am on a Saturday is to dance in a shopping centre which is not our style. This year we had three tours, the first stands of which being Millis, Larkins and Goachers breweries all of which provided free samples plus the beers for our Feast. (120 Morris Men all drinking simultaneously in three separate

breweries at 10am on a Saturday morning – is this a record?) At Goachers the Mayor of Maidstone compared his regalia with that of the Morris Ring Squire and then joined the men singing, appropriately, songs in praise of ale in the brewery.

The tours were by vintage coach (except for one modern replacement due to a breakdown) visiting country pubs and during the afternoon respectively at Sissinghurst Castle, the Spa Valley Railway and Gravesend riverfront. All then combined for a massed display at 6pm outside our regular venue the Swan at West Peckham, a home brew pub facing a typical village green.

Returning to our base at Wrotham a superb Feast awaited everyone, provided by the outstanding Greensleeves catering team. Festivities were presided over by Brian Tasker and as many old Hartley Squires as we could accommodate on the top table to add authority as neither Charlie nor Ed were able to attend. Speeches were short and the singing harmonious leaving sufficient time to conclude the evening in the Rose & Crown, our spiritual home.

Sunday mornings at our Ales are spent in the glorious surroundings of Ightham Mote courtesy of the National Trust and the Ring Meeting was no exception. This location was reached by double deck bus, temporarily requisitioned from schools' service, which, duly filled to capacity, took us on a journey that included the added excitement of a blazing telegraph pole en route. The massed dancing display was followed by a harmonious singing session in the courtyard, in

the centre of which was placed an ample draught supply of melody inspiring liquid.

A final massed display took place in Wrotham Village Square after which lunch was served in St Georges Hall, our HQ, where the remaining beer barrels were duly emptied leaving little, if any, for those of us left to clear up.

Despite dancing at breweries and rural inns, the close relationships we have developed with the National Trust and other local attractions resulted in total collections during the weekend exceeding £670 proving that, in the eyes of our audiences, the Morris is not only alive but also very much appreciated. Furthermore, at £52 a head, which included substantial meals, free beer at the hall throughout the weekend and a Sunday tour, we feel proud to have provided our guests with a value for money Ring Meeting.

Terry Heaslip



Terry singing at Ightham Moat

Photo Harry Stevenson

East and West Morris is Best: The Spectacular Dancing Tent

Dinosaurs Not Allowed and Chinese Morris.

by Paul Reece

Two large scale Morris events were the latest innovations in providing opportunities for school and youth participation. The first was a travelling circus style 'Spectacular Dancing Tent' through East Anglia during the summer sponsored by DanceEast. The second was 'Dinosaurs Not Allowed' a Youth Morris Showcase at Weymouth on the Jurassic Coast for the South



West Cultural Olympiad's first annual 'Count Me In' weekend at the end of September sponsored by the Arts Council.

The Spectacular Dancing Tent provided a magical space for teaching children the Morris. It is one of several period portable, circular dancehalls from Belgium called Spiegeltents, highly decorated mirror tents complete with central dance floor, surrounded by seating, a stage and a bar. The use of the tent came about through the work of the Constant Billy Trust formed earlier this year to promote and deliver traditional dance and to engage with other agencies such as the Eastern Region Cultural Olympiad and DanceEast to further the exposure of traditional dance and engage the young to participate. DanceEast, whose new Ipswich Dance Centre had East Suffolk Morris Men perform at their opening, is the eastern region dance delivery

agency funded directly from the Arts Council.

Constant Billy's consultation with DanceEast resulted in us being able to organise time in the Spectacular Dancing Tent at its various locations in Suffolk and Essex for sides to demonstrate and teach the Morris. The tent was located in larger centres for several weeks and in smaller ones for several days. Although many sides were invited from all the Morris Organisations it was largely Ring sides that signed up to deliver the Morris. These included East Suffolk Morris Men, Colchester, Harwich, Hageneth and Devils Dyke.

East Suffolk Morris Men used the tent over three days in Christchurch Park, Ipswich, to deliver the teaching of the Morris to school groups as part of their highly successful and growing Children's Festival, this year incorporated into the Ipswich Ip-art Festival. Over 400 children took part in the Morris-in-the-tent sessions and a similar number in the country dancing sessions at the Ipswich Corn Exchange. Follow up sessions have been requested from Suffolk schools for East Suffolk Morris Men to work directly with them in their schools during this academic year.

'Dinosaurs Not Allowed' was a one day invitation for youth and school Morris sides from the South West to perform in Weymouth, the chosen Olympic sailing centre,



as part of that region's Cultural Olympiad following the successful campaign to have the Morris as part of their arts exposure. Although put together at great speed it was successfully granted the London 2012 'Inspire Mark' status, which gave it additional widespread exposure in the media, and also received an Arts Council grant towards transport costs. Put together by John Clifford of the Open Morris it was able to tap into the work already done by the Great Caper project in schools in the South West. Put together as a JMO supported event it is hoped



that this region's Olympic Morris Showcase for the last weekend in September next year will attract wider support from Ring and Federation sides and EFDSS in the form of an educational initiative.

In October Thaxted Morris Men assisted in a Morris workshop for English and visiting Chinese students at Burnt Mill Performing Arts College in Harlow, Essex. The Harlow students had visited a school in China and had taken part in a Chinese Opera and this was the turn of the Harlow school to teach the Chinese something of the English Morris tradition to take back to China.

Paul Reece is a member of Thaxted Morris Men and Chairman of the Advisory Council



The Morris Ring Circular

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Issue No 60

Letters To The Editor



*From John Jenner, Cambridge
Morris Men*

Dear Harry

In this 75th Anniversary year of the founding of the Morris Ring it should be recorded that Robert Saunders died on 9th June 2009 aged 101 and 10 months. He was the last surviving man to have been at the Cambridge Morris Men's week of morris instruction at Ringstead Mill, in Norfolk in April 1934, when the final pre-arrangements were discussed relating to the founding of the Morris Ring on 14th April that year. It was during one of the informal discussions that Walter Abson fell asleep and on awaking found that his name had been suggested for Bagman of the Ring, although not recorded in writing, Robert told me that if Walter did not agree then he himself would take on that job. He also said that Alec Hunter was well known and liked by everyone and was the obvious choice as Squire. Robert (I think originally introduced through the Scouts) was active in country dance circles through the EFDS, and before he came up to Cambridge in 1926 he had been with a team to Holland to the well known home, De Meihof in Oosterbeek, of Dr. Elise van der Ven-ten Bensele a centre of English country dancing and later also of morris dancing between the wars. His only vivid memory of this trip as a nineteen year old was the large barrels of tulip petals and the subsequent fights using the petals as missiles. He was later given a copy of Elise's book on Dutch and English traditions as a prize for photography.

Robert did not join the Cambridge Morris Men until his third year and was admitted as a full member in April 1930. After taking a teacher training course he went to London to teach and for many years was active with London Pride both in country and morris dancing. He regularly attended Travelling Morrice tours both before and after the war, and attended some Ring Meetings with Cambridge or London Pride..

He joined the RAF at the outbreak of the war and remained in the service as an Education Officer until retirement. He was Squire of London Pride in 1958, but was soon moved to Brampton near Cambridge and again became an active dancer with the CMM. In October 1960 he was elected Squire and in the following June he arranged the June Travelling Morrice tour centred on Rolf Gardiner's Gore Farm near Springhead in Dorset. During the week Rolf gave us a talk on the founding of the TM by Arthur Heffer and himself in 1924 and on the Saturday we took part in a great torch light procession and activity in the garden at Springhead. Robert persuaded Rolf to attend the Annual Feast of the CMM, (which he had not attended since before the war) and it was on that occasion that Rolf made the long speech which he subsequently published.

Robert although not dancing much after his marriage in 1962, maintained an interest in morris matters and put forward strong ideas when the CMM were proposing the formation of the Advisory Council of the Morris Ring and he also had various letters on morris matters

published in the Times.

Regards
John Jenner

*From Martin Trewinnard, Coventry
Morris Men*

Dear Harry

A brief note (no photos I am afraid unless there are some through Rotary International) to report that Coventry Morris Men danced at an international Rotarian Convention in Birmingham in June.

Performances included a 90 second slot(!) as part of a show sequence that also included a Scottish country dance display and a "Riverdance" sequence on the stage in the NEC Arena with full lights, giant TV screens, etc. It is quite disconcerting to look up and see yourself in close-up at that scale! The Arena holds 9,000 people at a time and was at least half-full for the two shows so possibly up to 12,000 people from all over the world got a brief taste of the Morris.

We also danced for a full house (2,000 people) at Symphony Hall in Birmingham and were able, with a 10 minute(ish) slot, to both relax and entertain the audience after the formal Scottish dancers thanks to some great fooling from Pete Grassby our Squire and Fool. After that show we went down into the City Centre for an informal pub show where we met an American delegate who had seen one of the Arena shows. When he described what he had seen ("some guys with bells on their legs and a flute player") we were happy to confirmLetters continued page 13

that that was indeed Coventry MM. He was amazed both at what we did generally and also that, having done the Arena shows, we were also happy to be busking outside a pub.

Dancing both formally and

informally around the NEC enabled many more people to see the Morris in a slightly more normal format than the Arena displays allowed and there was much photo taking and explanation of what we were all about. Apart from this we now

have contacts with local Rotarian groups and are looking forward to taking those up next year.

Martin



The Morris Ring Circular Editorial

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The celebrations of the Morris Ring's 75th Anniversary through the past year's Morris Ring Meetings are recorded in this the 60th edition of the Morris Ring Circular. It has been a pleasure to prepare this and because of the wish to incorporate a full 24 page

Special Edition I feel an editorial must be of short duration, in order to do justice to the real content of the dancing and entertainment that member clubs of the Morris Ring have brought to our streets in 2009.

I thank all the contributors,

the Bagmen for their efforts in organising the Morris Ring Meetings, and the readers and additional subscribers for your patience, as this publication took a little longer than planned. For that I apologise. Happy New Year

75 years of Morris Ring Officers

One particularly pleasant thing in life is the memories we have of past events. It is unsurprising that as The Morris Ring celebrates 75 years many of the past highlights and old memories are shared by those who have been around a long time. I was speaking to a past Squire at a recent event and was amazed that he had known 42 of the past officers on the Ring's list out of a total of some 47 names I believe. It certainly made me stop and think. That's a lot of knowledge about our history in his memory. He had met with Douglas Kennedy of EFDSS renown, who was Ring Squire from 1938 right through the war years up until 1947. He could recall many of the old boys attending Advisory Council meetings including people like Geoff Metcalf (Squire 1952 – 54), Walter Abson (first Ring Bagman) of course, Bob Ross (Second Ring Bagman), Russell Wortley (our third Ring Bagman), as well as

Lionel Bacon, Alan Brown, Leslie Nichols and many of the other very worthy gentlemen who have served us as officers.

He attended the Advisory Councils where all the preparations were made to publish Lionel Bacon's Black Book, and could recall the plans for the Letchworth Tapes, the decision to start our Archives, and much more. I have no doubt there are many of the past Squires and Bagman still around that could equal his contribution of knowledge and I have it on good authority a certain well respected editor of a certain circular has begun to record some of these reminiscences from the 'old boys'.

We should be proud of our history and of those who have faithfully guided The Morris Ring as it has striven to provide services for its member clubs all over the years. We should keep in the forefront of our memories their enduring work to maintain the important feature

that distinguishes our organisation. It has always been the emphasis that the strength of The Morris Ring actually lays with its individual clubs. Any club wishing to join us has to apply for membership and our member clubs decide whether or not to admit them. Other than the original six clubs we have all faced that moment of judgment about our standards of performance and ideals. Joining also brought us responsibilities: the need to maintain high levels of performance so our dancing standards can be seen to be good, and to uphold Morris in our own communities. We should celebrate this anniversary as an opportunity to renew our commitment to this aim. Also give a brief moment to thank those past officers of The Ring who gave up their time and Expertise to guide us through those 75 years!

Dicky

Care in the air



Stefan Care in the air at Dobb Cross, Saddleworth Rushcart 2009

Photo : Courtesy Moulton Morris Men

Bathampton ‘Diamond Jubilee’: Cozy Nooks and Candles Ablaze...

by Gavin Bayfield

A Personal Account

Friday 4th (eve.) – Sunday 6th (midday) September.

75 Years of ‘Mrs Oakey’s Boys’, and yet two of them were at the heart of the action during the celebratory weekend.

In a city where Georgian architecture has taken centre stage in ‘World Heritage Status’, it must be true to say that the TA Centre (Our Venue) in juxtaposition to this status was in fine company standing as it does between the city’s recycling centre and the slothly phallic Gas Towers.

As a returning visitor to the team I reluctantly left in 2006, it was a great comfort to find many good friends busy at work in ‘host team’ duties. A number of faces in the kitchen including Geoff Jerram wielding a tea towel, more familiar to the Rings Jigs weekends, I suspected that Winchester fractions would

be applying their culinary talents, and indeed they did not disappoint as before my face there appeared two ‘gonads’ on a plate. ‘They’re faggots’ I heard from deep within the kitchen...

Venturing further into the building I found it to be alive with jovial banter and a lively selection of team colours. I enjoyed my first meal of the weekend with members of my own team who had huddled together for safety and were discussing the comparative virtues of custard and sex. Shortly, as I had arrived quite late, there was a distinct atmosphere of something ‘about to happen’. Sure enough ‘something’ did—I could hear alarm bells ringing, and when it became apparent that the din was not going to stop voluntarily, I and all other men reluctantly made their way to the ‘muster point’, the smoke of their sceptical murmurings about the drill were extinguished and the importance of Health & Safety was

highlighted to the Men by the TA rep. who gained a classroom ‘yes’ from all present to acknowledge acceptance.

The talent assembled could not be contained and spilled out to the nearby Park Tavern and Hop Pole, which had clearly been prepared by our hosts for what was to follow. A variety of dances followed before Men dispersed to ‘cosy nooks’ to sing and rejoice the event until late in the evening.

Saturday 5th Sept.

In the morning the beauty of the City and its suitability for walking tours was explored, following Winchester’s platefuls of ‘English Fuel’ and proved, what good fortune that Mrs Oakey didn’t consider living in ‘say’ Swindon.

The separate tours I cannot account for entirely but the ‘William Beckford’ tour with Chanctonbury Ring, Helmond and Wath-upon-Dearne Men was a resounding

.....Bathampton continued..... with Muesli in my Tankard

success, with stands in fabulous public spaces and well timed refreshment stops, allowing singers and musicians to perform.

To describe all the dancing would be to defeat the purpose - the atmosphere was upbeat and teams rose to the occasion with 'Show Dances' being performed 'Live' and before seemingly vast crowds of intrigued locals and tourists alike within view of the Pump Rooms, in the true heart of the City.

I should expect that visitors unfamiliar with the landscape would be utterly lost in describing where they were at any point during the weekend. For all to see the 'classic' tourist experience, the Men were invited aboard chartered open-top sightseeing buses which made a whistle-stop tour of the new and old, with chirpy commentary along-the-way from (on our bus certainly) a very enthusiastic young historian whilst heavy drizzle, conveniently culminating within vomiting distance of the feast entrance doors (and not a moment too soon for some who hadn't seen a WC for a critical time).

... The Evening

The Feast commenced with pyro-maniacal activity from Brian Tasker, setting all candles before him ablaze whilst uttering obscenities under his breath about his "men in white" *or something. Fortunately order was restored with an address from Bill Holt (89), who gave an eloquent, graceful, non-denomination Grace.

The Feast.**

Further speechifying from honourable members punctuated the post feast glow with remembrance of Mrs Oakey by John Helsdon, Antony Heywood gratifying the visitors to the hard work of Bathampton Men before

our Ring Squire's own toast to 'The Morris Ring'. An honourable mention must be made of the Mayor of Bath who finally had his opportunity, having sat stony-faced throughout, to laud the efforts of all involved before making a hasty exit to an awaiting unnecessarily elongated car.

When all structured festivity wound down, the most sensible of the men were seen drifting toothpaste-in-hand in corridors, whilst others prepared to continue their socialising beyond the walls. I being one of these, enjoyed hearing many fine songs and melodies which illuminated the atmosphere, until the chime of the house bell was heard - ushering most to return to the overnight venue to sleep. From the returning men, some out-and-out snorting continued despite flitting lights and general disturbance - too much for delicate sleepers, some of whom retired to the main hall to escape.

*Men of Wight RM.

** Saturday night had fizzed. The Morris 'catering elite' had brought before the lucky guests that evening a steady flow of platters, ales and other beverages, being served to the 100 or so seated.

Sunday 6th Sept.

Personally, my Sunday morning may have commenced with a degree of finesse, had it not been for some roguish man's humorous folly of filling my trusty tankard with 'muesli', whilst I'd slept. It seems I was too late for the English alternative that had been on offer... and collecting my things rushed to join the procession to the church and an excruciating tediously long service (for my state of readiness). The highlights of the service were: the gloriously

pagan Border dance performed by Wath with tambourines, blackened faces and vitality, lifting the almost 'smog' of holy smoke; the inspired 'shake hands with a stranger', of which I was complimented on my ill appearance by an elegantly dressed octogenarian lady of minute stature, 'it was my pleasure' I could only find, in response.

At last, my personal torture ended and departing the service, found asleep on the step outside one of our musicians who, sensing our presence arose as though pulled on strings to erectile function 'Ready for anything'. We were off to the final public display of the weekend at Green Park Station.

Whilst Bathampton have on their doorstep many great venues at which to display, few are more spacious (whilst benefitting from a shield from the elements) than Green Park Station, a magnificent Victorian structure with wooden stage over its now-defunct end-of-the-line tracks, at which we congregated for this finale.

Seeing together the diversity and talent of the teams present in Bath for this weekend, our Tradition has quite a journey before it can call itself an endangered species.

Mrs Oakey's Boys could scarcely have imagined the future their team would enjoy up until this point, in those early days when the Morris Ring and Bathampton (as they would come to be known) were cutting their teeth. With all that has come with the modern age I am glad to say my impression is that ordinary people of all ages and cultures remain fascinated by and are drawn to the spectacle and marvel that is 'The Morris'.

Gavin Bayfield is a member of Chanctonbury Ring MM

2009 Meeting of the Morris Ring: Bathampton



*Top left, Gloucester Morris Men; Ravensbourne Morris Men above (photos Brian Tasker-BT)
below, Mersey Morris (photo Bathampton MM-BMM)*



*Above, Chancetonbury Ring Morris Men, and
below, Wath-on-Deerne Morris Men
(photos BT)*



*Above, Helmond Morris Men
(photo, BT)*



*Above, Mersey, below left the Host side, Bathampton Morris Men
and group photo below (photos BMM)*



2009 Meeting of the Morris Ring: Bathampton



White Horse Morris Men



Mersey Morris Men



Above, Helmond Morris Men at Stonehenge, on route to Bathampton (Photo, Joseph Gruyters, Helmond Morris Men)

Trigg Morris Men, far right; below, Ravensbourne enjoying ice cream (photos BT) and Mersey right (photo BMM)



Right, Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men,

(Photo BMM; top two photos , BT)



Sun, Sea and Ladybirds... Travelling Morrice Tour 2009

by Ollie King and Matt Simons

The first thoughts of a Travelling Morrice (TM) tour around North Norfolk were brought up around December 2008 when we two fools were discussing the possibility of a day trip to the North Norfolk area (around Sheringham and District). The conversation followed:

“That’d be a brilliant day of dance.”

“Yes, it would.”

“Hmmm... no one is organising this year’s second TM tour.... fancy giving it a go?”

“..... yeah, go on then!”

And the rest, they say, is history!

Many, many months of planning went into the tour, including a whole week of planning up in the area during April to check with possible dance venues and eateries. Ideas came and ideas went, and a fair amount of arguing was also involved, until eventually we had a final programme of dancing, which wasn’t completely confirmed until about 3 days before the tour! We were based in Weybourne, a small village not far from Sheringham on the North Norfolk coast, in a field round to the rear of a B&B complex. The owner, Charlie, had mentioned that it was used by the naturist community, but we still didn’t expect to be greeted by a sign that stated “Clothes are optional beyond this point. Nudity may be encountered”. The campsite was perfectly situated out of the way, and was only a short walk to the local pub; this would prove *very* useful later in the week.

We both took on the role of joint Foreman of the tour. This involved choosing dances, calling as many of them as we could, and organising (bossing) men, which



The Travelling Morrice with Luke

is much harder than it sounds! Although the tour was organised by a duo with an average age of 15 and a half, thanks must also go to the men who helped us out during the week who took on the more boring roles. These were; John Colbert – Swagman; David Easton – breakfast and lunch organiser, John Jenner – transport manager, and Peter Copley – evening food organiser.

The first day went very smoothly, without any hitches at all. All the pubs and venues were welcoming and the sun shone all day. We toured the Wells area of the coast, including a fine show at Holkham Hall. The men danced well and a good day was had by all. It was at the last spot, in Wiveton, where we first met young Luke from Plymouth; and certainly wasn’t the last time we saw him over the week.

Most of Tuesday was spent messing around in boats on the Broads. We took three hire boats from Wroxham down to Horning, danced at the two pubs, and boated off again. This was the only time it rained during dancing over the week, and even so - it was only a little drizzle. On the way back to Wroxham, we were told off by the ‘river police’ for speeding... at 6mph. Our next spot was at Woodfordes Brewery,

which seemed to go down very well, even though the pub had no idea we were coming. The next pub (Red Hart at Bodham) was extremely welcoming and had even set up a gazebo for us to dance under in case of inclement weather. Our last spot of the day was the Wheatsheaf at West

Beckham, where we met up with young Luke again.

This time he was equipped with a hat, hankies and half a baldric which we were told he’d spent his holiday money on. We taught him Bean Setting (Headington) and Bonny Green Garters, and he loved every minute of it. After a great show, we returned to Bodham for an evening of great food and amusing singing.

Wednesday was carnival Day in Sheringham, so we chose this day to go up and down the railway as originally planned. Matt managed to get us all discounted tickets and got lunch thrown in too (The perks of being a railway volunteer). We danced at each of the stations, despite having a run-in with the “fat controller” mid-



Travelling Morrice at Weybourne

... Travelling Morrice Tour 2009 continued

dance at Sheringham. Once back in Sheringham town, the original intention was to dance on the seafront, but unfortunately it had been over-run with a plague of ladybirds, which, together with wasps, we were battling with all week. So we decided to leave the ladybird population undisrupted and performed in the high street to very large audiences. Following a short show at the Lobster pub, we assembled to take part in the carnival procession, which was around 2 miles in length. We were once again joined by Luke, who flew the TM flag and also joined in on the Winster Processional. The day was rounded off with a fish and chip supper followed by a pint in The Lobster.

Thursday was another reasonably uneventful day with morning shows taking place inland around the market town of Holt. It was fairly evident from the standard of dancing that we'd passed the half way point in the week! Luke watched on from the sidelines at the Holt shows, claiming a sprained wrist was a good enough excuse to not dance today. We let him off this time... Men enjoyed their visit to the Real Ale shop at Branthill Farm (near Wells), which we found by accident on the testing week after getting lost on the Holkham Estate! Many different local ales were sampled (of course, us two didn't touch a drop all week...) and everyone enjoyed a well earned rest in the sunshine. We did three more shows that day, including the Three Horseshoes at Wareham, a wonderful olde-worlde pub with an early 20th century interiors. They also do fantastic pies, which even the most 'robust' of men struggled to finish off.

We had a lazy start to Friday, taking

our time to travel over to the other side of Norfolk. Our first show was after a brewery tour of the Fox Brewery at Heacham. Later in the day, we put on a good show at Sandringham, although some men were disappointed that we had not organised an audience with the Queen; apparently discounted tea and cakes weren't good enough! Following Sandringham, we took a slight detour on the way to our next location, which proved to be one of the most memorable occasions on the tour. Back in 1934, as some of you will know, CMM held a week long practise at Ringstead Mill and of course this was where the Morris Ring was instigated. In 2009, we danced on the same spot that the Cambridge Men had danced 75 years before hand (as recorded in Lionel Bacon's film). What was meant to be a five minute gratuitous show turned into a 2 hour stay after the family who owned the mill turned up. Luckily, they knew of the relationship between the mill and Morris, and were extremely welcoming, allowing us to have our picnic in their garden and giving a tour of the mill for those that would. We rounded off the day with two extremely successful shows (one of which included a dragon fight!) with the Kings' Men of Kings Lynn.

So, to the final day. Saturday was spent in Cromer and the surrounding area in the blistering heat. A pleasant mid-morning show was given at Felbrigg Hall, followed by lunch at Overstrand. We did one and a half

shows on Cromer Pier to a very large audience before we were stopped by a very officious and official looking lady, who said we were getting in the way of people getting to a show at 7:30... we left at 3:30. It would have been nice to finish the show, but we didn't want to make a scene and possibly spoil it as a dance location for local sides. Needless to say, the audience were very disappointed with our premature departure. After a show on West Runton beach, and then at the village pub, we came to our final show at our "home pub" in Weybourne. We were again joined by Luke, in kit, who joined in on the dances he knew. We concluded the show with a double jig by Mat and I - the infamous Wheatley Tray Dance - which was of course followed by Bonny Green Garters. To officially end the week, a suitable feast entailed in the pub's back room where food was good and liquid refreshment readily flowing – the port seeming to flow very well with Matt!

So after an enjoyable evening we returned to the campsite to officially end proceedings. What a week!

Travelling Morrice dancing at Ringstead Mill for the first time in 75 years

All Photos courtesy Travelling Morrice



2009 Meeting of the Morris Ring: Isle of Wight



*Top-West Somerset, Bristol
Above: Dartington,
Rutland
Left: Colchester
Right: King John's*



*Left: the Hosts, Men of
Wight;
Right, and below:
Rutland;*

*Bottom left: King
John's;
Bottom right: Martlet*

All photos:
Harry Stevenson
except Bramble Bank,
courtesy Men of Wight



2009 Meeting of the Morris Ring: Isle of Wight



*Clockwise, from top left:
West Somerset,
Colchester, Bristol,
King John's, Men of
Wight, massed display at
Sandown, Men of Wight
on Bramble Bank, King
John's musicians,
Martlet & Dartington.*



2009 Meeting of the Morris Ring: Men of Wight

by Harry Stevenson

I travelled with Albert Wilkins and Carole (Albert's wife) and my youngest son Jonathan across the Solent on a glorious hot and sunny day and met up with a tour starting at Heavenstreet Station. We were entertained by Dartington, Bristol, Colchester and West Somerset. There was a reasonable crowd, made up mostly of the Morris Men, but an excellent spot none-the-less. There was no train journey for us but the tour sides enjoyed a

journey to Wooten.

We left to meet the other tour at The Buddle Inn, Niton Undercliffe. The host side, Men of Wight performed along with King John's, Rutland and Martlet, making up the full complement of this small but glorious Morris Ring Meeting. After some refreshment we moved on with the same Morris sides to Ventnor Winter Gardens for more dancing and lunch break. Another excellent display after which we found a hostelry for lunch on the sea front.

After lunch we met the first tour at the Old Smithy for dancing and ice creams and then on to Sandown for the massed display. An excellent and well balanced display with each side giving one show dance plus a couple of massed dances. The tour then moved on to Bramble Bank, in the Solent, which we saw from a great distance from the car ferry back to Southampton: there was a tannoy announcement about the dancing on the bank and the crowds on board rushed to get a view. A superb day out.

2009 Meeting of the Morris Ring: Exeter

by Colin Andrews

At the end of more than two year's planning, a task force of EMM gathered at Topsham Primary School on Friday, 24th July to make the final preparations for the arrival of some 170 Men, representing 20 sides. Jobs like clearing the classrooms (all carefully photographed to ensure eventual restoration to their original state), signposting, collating information packs and vouchers, erecting a waterproof marquee over the outside bar, and sorting last minute problems in getting the portable showers working.

Even with some unusually early arrivals, the registration and allocation of dormitories, camping and caravanning spots seemed to go smoothly, and, through voluntary restraint, the queue at the nearby chippie for supper never got completely out of hand. Apart from the impressive range of on-site beers from Exeter Brewery, the Topsham pubs had also been primed to expect an influx of thirsty morris men, and some were

offering their own discounts. Many gathered in the malthouse at the Bridge for music and song.

The Saturday tours were always likely to be affected by the unpredictable and unsettled nature of July's weather, but all were fortunate enough to experience no more than the occasional shower. Some sides began the day with a massed display on Topsham quay, while the others returned there in the late afternoon to dance together. The tours focussed on some of the many attractive dance venues available within easy reach of Exeter, and took in North Dartmoor, the Exe Valley, Dawlish and Teignmouth and East Devon. No Ring Meeting would be complete without its feast, and Exeter innovatively laid on a hog roast, with accompanying salads and sweets, all washed down with copious quantities of real ale. And, of course, the evening continued with fine singing, music and informal dancing till the small hours.

Sunday definitely looked overcast from the start, but the rain held

off for procession down the High Street to the Cathedral, where, despite best laid plans there was a short delay while the earlier communion service finished. There's something quite inspiring about a service with a hundred plus lusty male voices singing, and bells jingling – at least when the Exeter Men performed their display dance.

Outside, despite impending dampness, a reasonable audience had gathered to see the massed display and bravely, most stayed to the end by which time brollies were fully deployed. Amongst many fine performances by individual sides, the Stafford Morris Men certainly bridged a generation gap or two, with a couple of young lads dancing in the same set as veteran member, Jack Brown.

Soon it was all over, and our guests, munching their Oggy Oggy soggy soggy pasty in the rain, were free to make their way home – and the task force to return to the school.

Colin Andrews is Lead musician, Exeter Morris Men

2009 Meeting of the Morris Ring: Exeter



Ripley, left; Shakespeare, below; and Thaxted, right: photos Exeter MM



Dartington, above; Stafford, above right; the hosts, Exeter, right; below right, Ripley jig; Westminster Morris Men, bottom right; Below middle, the hosts again, all photos courtesy Exeter Morris Men; Below, Stafford's horse in discussion with Brian Tasker and Eddie Worrall; and bottom another beast. Bottom middle, massed Bonny Green.



2009 Meeting of the Morris Ring: Exeter



Top centre: Thames Valley; top right, Stafford youngsters; top left, two beasts; above left, Exeter in Cathedral; above, Wessex; left St Albans; right, a fool with his beer; below right, and below left a massed 'Bonny Green'; below right, Taunton Deane

All photos Jon Wimhurst of North Wood Morris Men, except St Albans from Exeter Morris Men

