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Uttoxeter Morris Men  
and **Mike Stevens**,  
Peterborough Morris and  
Eastern Representative of  
the Morris Ring

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## Plymouth Morris Men Rise to the Challenge for Sport Relief

by Andy King

We 'danced' the Plymouth Mile, on Plymouth Hoe, at 11am on Sunday 21st March 2010!

The weather was fine and sunny and the spectacular views over Plymouth Sound could not have been a better setting for this auspicious occasion. Beginning with a warm up session, in full kit, with the rest of the entrants, the TV cameras were quickly on to us and our place on 'BBC Spotlight' was guaranteed!

We then danced 'Beaux of London City' (Shooting), Adderbury, on the race start line, in front of Plymouth's very own World Diving Champion, Tom Daley, before the race started.

Having let most of the eager runners past, we then proceeded on our way with the 'Winsters Processional', along the Hoe Promenade.

Once out on the road we quickly came upon a young Policewoman on traffic duty, helping to enforce the local road closures. 'Rose Tree', Bampton, was unavoidable and the



*Plymouth on the Hoe: Winsters Processional*

young lady was very sporting and remained dignified at all times, even when hoisted six feet in the air.

It was with much will power that, a few minutes later, we processed past the Yard Arm Public House, promising to return once the race was finished.

A little further on and we came upon another unsuspecting Policewoman, with a young Police Cadet; again manning a road closure point.

No sooner had we given her a pair of wavers, and formed up for another rendition of the 'Rose Tree', when there was traffic chaos all around! Attempts to sort the traffic by helpful members of

Plymouth Morris Men only served to exacerbate the problem and the Policewoman was forced to return to duty.

Once the road was empty again and all was calm, we managed a very brief version of the 'Rose Tree' and headed back towards the Hoe Promenade and the finish line.

The crowds lining the route along the Promenade up to the finish line warmly received 'Winsters Processional' and, once again, the BBC cameraman was there to capture another snippet for 'Spotlight'.

Once over the finish line there was an opportunity to perform another dance and 'Skirmish', Bledington, ...was

(...continued on back page)

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## Squire's Report – Winter 2009/10

In September I attended the annual Hop Hoodening festival in Canterbury. The Wantsum men are now responsible for organising this annual event which celebrates the hop harvest. The highlight of the day is the service in Canterbury Cathedral where the hops are blessed and thanks given for all the beer which will be produced.

The festival takes its name from the Kentish hooden horse which some local sides have adopted as their beast. Ravensbourne were among the guest sides who enjoyed a day dancing in this beautiful city.

I spent a very pleasant Sunday afternoon dancing with London Pride at the Ecology Park beside the Arsenal Football ground in London. This is a great local attraction created out of some disused railway sidings. Later in September I attended the Yateley day of dance and feast which featured walking tours of Guildford and Reading.

At the end of the month I was able to fit in three events in one weekend: the Morris Federation AGM, the Shakespeare 50th anniversary feast and the unveiling of a blue plaque at Le Hall Place in Adderbury to the memory of Janet Blunt who collected the Adderbury songs and dances between 1907



*Dave Stephens, Squire of Wantsum and Brian Tasker at the Christmas Market in Reims.*

Photo, courtesy Dawn Winskill

and 1931. The two Adderbury sides danced before Malcolm Taylor of the EFDSS unveiled the plaque. This was followed by beer and cakes in the garden and more dancing. A truly memorable occasion.

In October I joined the North Wood Men from Croydon for their end of season tour which took place very near to my home. They like touring in the Kent countryside. We danced at one pub where we were horrified to discover that the price of Harveys best bitter had reached £3.95 a pint! The following weekend I attended the Rutland weekend of dance and toured around the county dancing at some great pubs in the warm autumn sunshine. The Rutland men are convinced that their dances were collected by Cyril Sharp, Cecil's younger brother and I didn't like to disillusion them. Mind you, they are a bit inward looking up there. One of

their members said that his mother had married outside the family and that she was the person to do so in twenty generations. On the Sunday we visited Rutland's own maze at Wing. It's not very large; roughly in proportion to the size of the county. They lost a third of their land area when Rutland Water was created. Later in the month I was a judge at the Sword Dance Union's annual Longsword Tournament in Sheffield which was hosted by Handsworth and won for the fourth year running by Redcar with a superb performance of the Greatham dance. The following weekend I attended the Fools and Beasts weekend in Utrecht.

In November I attended the Headington Quarry Ale for the first time and saw Dave Townsend dance in as their new Squire. Sometimes I take time off from dancing Cotswold and spend a weekend dancing sword.

At the end of November North British had a practice weekend in Moulton and we invited the sword dancers from the Moulton side to join us on the Sunday morning. We taught them our

Elgin longsword dance which they seemed to enjoy so I hope to see them dancing it out this summer.

The Wantsum Morris Men have for many years danced in Reims in the summer and before Christmas as a result of the twinning of that city with their home city of Canterbury. There is even talk of them being given the freedom of Reims in return for their efforts. With the price of beer over there freedom of the pubs would be even more useful. They invited me to go with them and I had a wonderful time dancing around the Christmas market and enjoying the hospitality of the twinning association and the market traders. The annual Mendip Christmas Ale was as brilliant as ever. I almost didn't get there as it was held on the day after the heaviest snowfall in West Kent for many years. The snow had gone by Boxing Day and I went to Keston in Kent

to join Ravensbourne. By the time I arrived a huge crowd had gathered in anticipation of their performance. When our events are part of the local calendar, as they are on Boxing Day and May Day for example and at the Thaxted Morris Ring Meeting, people still come out in their hundreds to watch us. The new year should have started with the annual White Star Sword plough tour. We had been practising since October and had a line up including handbell ringers, rapper, step dancing, a hooden horse and a mummers play. Then the snow fell again, the roads froze and the tour was cancelled. Fortunately the weather improved by the following weekend and I was able to go to Horsham in Sussex to give the Broadwood Men a days

instruction on the Escrick longsword dance. The annual jigs instructional took place as usual in the middle of January. I have not attended this event before and it was quite an eye opener for me. I was very pleased to see that like me many men were there for the first time including a good number of youngsters. The Morris Ring offered a £10 discount for first timers and this may have encouraged more men to attend.\* The instruction and the demonstrations were of a very high standard and I came away inspired to expand my very limited jigs repertoire. The Joint Morris Organisation met at the end of January to discuss matters of common interest. We all take very seriously our combined responsibility to promote

the Morris and safeguard its future. In 2011 it will again be the turn of the Morris Ring to host the joint day of dance and we are currently discussing possible locations. I attended the Winchester feast in February. This year it was Malaysian cuisine to receive attention from their catering crew and the standard was up to the usual high standard. The six candidates for Squire of the Morris Ring were invited but only four could make it and they sat in a row at a bottom table. A highlight of the post feast entertainment was what I think was a song performed by Harry Stevenson\*\* entitled "The Six Aspirant Squires". Later in February I attended the Kennet Ale with a small contingent of men from Hartley, my own side.

March went by in a blur of winter ales: Aldbury, Devil's Dyke and Letchworth on successive weekends leading up to the big event, our ARM. Peter Halfpenney was elected by the smallest of margins: he was just one vote ahead of Robin Springett. Congratulations to Peter and commiserations to the other candidates. It was a very enjoyable and successful weekend and our thanks are due to the Stafford Morris Men for all their hard work.

Our attention now switches to the summer ahead and I hope to meet many of you during my travels around the country.

Brian Tasker

\* see jigs report and photo on page 14; ed

\*\* I agree. ed.

## Being good at what we do!

Looking back over all my years in Morris I am clear about one thing: there is far more poor Morris dancing about than there is good Morris. My reasoning behind that statement is based not only on observation of poor standards of dancing, which does occur as we are all aware, but also and perhaps more importantly, on the overall performance. I can best explain by drawing your attention to the need for teams to have greater concern about a show of Morris being a complete

performance: it should be far more than just a few dances strung together, much more.

When we put on our kit and go out in public to dance we are the Morris! The whole effect is 'the Morris' and it is easy to spot those sides that have grasped this essential truth and know the importance of seeing their appearance and presentation is spot on all the time they are in public view. Presentation is vital to the Morris, and watching a fine team dance well with a 'complete' performance

is magic. The quality of dancing can be reasonable but unless a side can raise that magic by the way they present it much is missed.

Often so little is needed to remedy things, but it is amazing how sides fail to notice. It's all about how dances are introduced, how the dance sets move on and off the dance area, uniformity of style, tidiness of kit, quality of musical accompaniment, choice of dances, etc., etc., etc. I could continue the list but you need to look at your team and

decide what applies!

At its most positive 'complete performance' means Morris at its best. It implies a step into that intangible area of performance which goes beyond skill and becomes virtuosity; into an area of performance which lifts a hobby into a vocation, and which transforms expertise into authority. Go to it lads, make me eat my words about more poor Morris than good!

Dicky  
respond to Dearest...c/o  
editor



# Fools and Beasts Unconvention, Utrecht 23-25 October 2009

by Trigger

As the Unconvention this year was abroad (for most of us) in Utrecht, we all had to get there in various ways – not easy when you have Beasts to transport as well. Trigger, for instance, unceremoniously bundled in recycled bubble wrap inside a bicycle bag which then could not go through the X-ray machine at Exeter Airport, had to be unpacked – fortunately, one of the security chaps was a Morris Dancer! Other beasts got left behind – Bilge, Plymouth's rat, was confined to his quarters because he is mainly papier mache, whereas Stafford's Knotty got a free ride with Max Haynes and Jack Brown, leaving his master, John Edwards to fly in.

We all eventually arrived to an excellent supper of apple salad, cold meats, sausages, mash, broccoli mash and blancmange out of a carton!

The excellent beer was provided in tins looking very much like Watney's Party 7's – with a convenient tap at the bottom! And thanks to Utrecht MM's generosity (and their various sponsors) the beer was free throughout the weekend. Fuelled by this beverage, there was lots of chat, but little music until Max Haynes (Stafford) and Chris Chisman found

their guitars and jammed together until late!

After a continental breakfast we attended the main Workshop, introduced by Robert Chisman (Trigg) and run by Henning Koefoed (Utrecht), where Henning introduced us to the practicalities of dancing in and out of a dance set. Utrecht men were utilised in interminable half and full gips so the fools and beasts could practise getting in and out of a set. We all agreed this was an excellent workshop. Now we all went out to dance, so we could try it out for real!

Helmond Morris Men, and the Maids of The Mill joined Utrecht Morris Men in the City Centre so the Fools and Beasts were split up to dance with each team at different locations – and then, it rained. Julian Kohler (Plymouth) is convinced that the Unconvention has a curse – any mention of a boat trip for an Unconvention makes it rain; this is based on two Unconventions at Plymouth, both of which should have had a boat trip, but were cancelled because of the weather. We were due to go on a boat trip in the afternoon!. Ho-hum. At least, the delegates had a chance to try out their newfound interaction skills with the teams – but none of us are as good as Henning



*Helmond Morris performing at De Neude with Martin Harris (Hartley), and Max Haynes (Stafford)*

– he is the Master! Arnold (Utrecht) rearranged the boat trip for half an hour earlier. So, we arrived at De Neude (the Market Square) a little early. Undeterred by the weather, with the musicians sheltering under some trees, we tested our Unconventional skills once again, until we were interrupted by a mass demonstration against reform of squatter's rights, whereupon we spotted a familiar maypole in the middle of the melee – only Henning could have done that! Meanwhile, Jack Brown (Stafford) and new member Martin Harris (Hartley) danced the Fool's Jig – whilst Paul Mower (Aldbury) showed us his new animal – Lawrence the rescued Pantomime camel – the kids loved him! Roger Comley (Letchworth) thought he was helping the music with his homemade drum, which looked like a chamois cloth stretched

over a tambourine frame, and made a dull thud as opposed to any recognisable percussion. Chris Chisman also joined in the music with guitar and mandolin. There were two Horaces in attendance – Ripley's Unicorn (Roger Ward) aided by his Valet, Clive Sturgess, and Red Stag's – erm – Stag (Christina Pritchard), joined in their antics by Knotty (John Edwards, Stafford), who was asked by one little child, in Dutch, if he was Father Christmas, and had to promise to deliver an indecipherable present! Fools abounded – Julian Kohler with his

*Squire's Fool, Roger Comley*



trademark Thomas the Tank Engine waistcoat, John Burke (King John's) in resplendent yellow and black, Mad Max Haynes (Stafford), John Drake (Wadard), Maarten Niessen (Helmond) and Kevin Farrell (Thelwall). Other beasts of note were Dick Keen (Thames Valley) with both his goat and his horse. Poor Doug Herdson (Plymouth) was without animal – but was seen doubling up in Lawrence. Verna Wass was diligently attending Banbury's Fine Lady (Stephen Wass), trying her best to keep the drizzle off this large beast. All this was observed by Brian Tasker (Squire, Morris Ring), and, hopefully, directed by Rob Chisman (Trigg and Convener) with Trigger. Then down to the boat trip, setting off opposite the bistro where we recently had lunch. The boat gave us a short tour of the city basin, then turned around, heading back to the Fort. Despite attempts for organising a continuation of the workshop, the dancing teams decided to start some impromptu dancing instead, which filled in time before the Feast. The Feast took place in the Fort's Restaurant where we were treated to soup, pasta, salad, veal, and wonderful desserts. Robert started the toasts, with the Queens (Elizabeth



**John Edwards (Stafford) with Knotty**

II and Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands), Brian Tasker gave the toast for The Immortal Memory of Cecil Sharp, followed by Verna who asked us to celebrate the lives of many others who have contributed to the collection and preservation of the Morris. Roger Ward proposed a toast to absent friends, John Burke to the founders of the Order, Julian Kohler gave thanks to Utrecht MM for the weekend, which was returned by Arnold of Utrecht (confusingly wearing a Helmond baldric). Robert then inaugurated the two newest members of The Illustrious Order of Fools and Beasts, Martin Harris (Fool, Hartley) and Clive Sturgess (Valet to Horace, Ripley). We completed the Feast with singing, Robert starting with the Yogi Bear song, and contributions from Martin Harris, Utrecht men, Roger Ward,

Max Haynes and Chris Chisman and interrupted by Julian who presented Robert with a trophy for Trigger because Trigger won a race at the National Arboretum at last year's Unconvention.

Singing was finished off with Come Landlord Fill the Flowing Bowl, then dancing and singing. until at least 3 in the morning (well, the clocks did go back...)

The Annual General Meeting followed breakfast, and a full report of the AGM will be published and will be available on request. Next year's Unconvention which will be based around, Banbury, dates to be announced. The Hobby Horse Festival in Banbury 2-4<sup>th</sup> July 2010. Unlike Exeter, who arrived home on time, Southampton bound Christina and John – their FlyBe plane was grounded, and they had to find a hotel for the night. Many thanks to Utrecht Morris Men for excellent organisation of the Weekend, and Helmond

MM and the Maids of the Mill for the dancing.

A lot of pictures were taken, and if you would like to see more, check out Utrecht's website: [www.utrechtmorris.nl/umt/english.php](http://www.utrechtmorris.nl/umt/english.php) or the fools and beasts site [www.foolsandbeasts.org.uk](http://www.foolsandbeasts.org.uk)

Members of the Order can order the new pin badges or embroidered cloth. £4 each P&P free. Cheques payable to The Illustrious Order of Fools and Beasts, and send to Robert Chisman, Robert's Pharmacy, The Coombes, Polperro, Cornwall, PL13 2RG.

***Below, Utrecht Morris Men in De Neude performing Step Back, Fieldtown***





# The Morris Ring Circular

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## Letters To The Editor

### The Tale of the Model Morris Man

Dear Harry

In August 2005, my partner and I, along with two friends, walked The Inn Way to the Yorkshire Dales. This is a 76-mile circular walk which takes in 26 pubs over six days. Following Mark Reid's excellent guide we 'clocked' all the pubs listed, although I would be lying if I said we drank in every one.

On the third day of walking we came to the Anglian settlement of Arncliffe. Ancient houses huddled around a village green in the traditional Dales style. Baking under a hot midday summer sun we were thankful to arrive outside the Falcon Inn, its open doors and cool interior pulling us inside like a thirst magnet. The guide says: "The Falcon Inn is a superb Dales Pub with wooden settles, open fires and beer straight from the cask, a living and integral part of our culture and heritage." H Sutcliffe wrote of The Falcon in 1929: "The Falcon Inn stands; as such a tavern should, unobtrusive in its simple dignity, instinct with the hospitality of other days." What more could a thirsty and tired

Morris Man want?

The girls wanted soft drinks, but us chaps ordered pints of bitter. The beer was brought up in an enamel jug and carefully decanted before our wide eyes and drooling mouths (just like John Mills at the end of 'Ice Cold in Alex').

As we waited for the beer to be poured and settle (this took some time), my eyes wandered along the shelves at the back of the tiny bar. At about head height I spotted a little white figure on a stand. Suspecting this to be a model of a Morris Man, I asked the landlord what it was and he confirmed that it was indeed, a Morris Man. He passed it down to me and explained that a friend of his had made it for him. It was about nine inches tall and was very good, catching in caricature the classic rotund Cotswold dancer of popular perception. I asked why he'd got, of all things, a model Morris Man. He replied:

"During the summer I often get bunches of Morris Men coming here. They ask me 'Can we dance outside your pub?' I point at my model Morris Man and say 'I have all the f\*\*\*ing Morris Men I'll ever need – now p\*\*s off!'"

He added:

"Coming in here with their pagan traditions, I'll not have any of that!" The beer was the best I have ever tasted, before or since. I can also recommend the pie and peas. Do not tell the Landlord about your hobby if you wish to continue experiencing the hospitality of other days.

Mac McCoig  
Uttoxeter Morris Men

### Morris – our Intangible Cultural Heritage

Dear Harry,

I quote here an extract from the Telegraph published Thursday 30 September 2009:

"The tango dance steps of Argentina and Uruguay are part of the world's "intangible cultural heritage", the United Nations has declared."

And from the UNESCO website:

The intangible cultural heritage, as defined in the Convention that was adopted by the 32nd Session of the General Conference of UNESCO, means in the first place the practices, representations, and expressions, as well as the associated knowledge and the necessary skills,

that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage."

Some brief notes from the UNESCO website:

In 1994, a UNESCO programme was launched with the aim of encouraging the creation of national systems that give official recognition to qualified tradition bearers and practitioners and that encourage them to transmit their knowledge and skills linked to specific elements of the intangible cultural heritage to the younger generations.

Subsequently, it was found too much emphasis may have been placed on documentation and researchers, and not enough on the protection of living practices and traditions, or on the groups and communities who are the bearers of these practices and traditions.

Thus, in 2001, the 31st session of the General Conference decided to work towards a new international convention, to include, inter alia, performing arts. Viz:

"The expressions central to the performing arts include especially vocal or instrumental music, dance, and theatre, but

*continued on page 7*

# The Morris Ring Circular Editorial

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## One Real Election

When you read this the general Election will be over and we can concentrate our minds on things Morris and indeed our own election back in March.

Was it a pity the six candidates were not allowed to present their respective case on the telly? Or maybe not! Further, I think it important to applaud all the candidates for standing (including yours truly). There can be only one Squire Elect, but all candidates should be

proud of contributing to an eventful weekend.

On behalf of all the candidates I congratulate the new Squire Elect Peter Halfpenney and with it goes my support.

have been) be putting last minute plans together, hoping for good weather and no last minute hiccups. To them and their respective bagmen, all good wishes for a successful weekend.

this to Charlie Corcoran for possible inclusion in the next Newsletter, but include photo of Charlie Hogston below.

## Dancing Season

As I write this editorial of the Morris Ring Circular many will be preparing for St George's Day and then May Day. In addition the Hosts of the Morris Ring Meetings will (or will

## Obituaries

I receive Obituaries from time to time and am conscious that lack of space in this edition has prevented even an edited version of Charlie Hogston's. I will pass

Copy date for next edition is 31st July. Please, if you travel to a Morris Ring Meeting, Folk Festival or just a Morris evening out, appoint one of your members to record the event. Readers are interested.

Sorry we are back to B&W: but added gloss!

## ...Letters continued

there are indeed many other traditional forms such as pantomime, sung verse, and certain forms of storytelling."

Whilst I and any other morris man might indeed feel a touch intangible after a day's dancing and refreshment, is it perhaps appropriate for us to assert that the Morris is definitely part of the UK's own intangible cultural heritage?

To help inform, I have

posted files of the Telegraph article and an extract from the UNESCO website under headings prefixed "ICH – ". Does anyone else think we should pursue this?

Mike Stevens

(Peterborough Morris)  
Morris Ring Eastern  
Area Representative

(Entered as a discussion  
item in the Morris Ring  
Google Group 4 Jan  
2010)



# Green Man's Morris and Sword Club strut their stuff in the ballet section of Verdi's Othello.

by Rod Stradling

Described as a performance which, "Turns Verdi, and Shakespeare, into a disturbing critique of race, identity and cultural assimilation," by Richard Morrison of The Times, Graham Vick's Birmingham Opera Company produced a spectacular version of Verdi's famous opera in a massive warehouse - or "space" as we knew it - on the outskirts of Birmingham involving 250 local singers and dancers as well as professionals and an orchestra on a gantry.

This extravaganza, held on various dates through December 2009, was an opportunity for Green Man's Morris and Sword Club to show how they could rise to (almost) any occasion. The original enquiry came "out of the blue" through a phone call to Brian Mills our Bagman and, encouraged by our Squire, Peter Taylor, caused an immediate enthusiastic response within the side. We danced in the entrance area as the audience arrived for each performance and then



again in the ballet section in Act 3. Whilst we were dressed in our regular kit for the arriving audience, our clothing for the opera section was very different.

As Morrison goes on, "And the ostensibly "English" morris dance is cleverly morphed into its ancestor, the "Moorish" dance."

The ballet section of Verdi's opera is rarely performed but this time it involved not just Morris dancing but also street dancing, break dancing, contemporary dance, ballet and Bangra. All dancers were dressed in white overalls which partly obscured their clothing beneath. Each group choreographed their own moves based on the original ballet music. Given only a

week's notice before rehearsals were due to start, our dance sequence was envisaged by David Rendell, who plays the accordion for us, together with our Squire Peter and Foreman David Easton based on a series of different Morris styles.

The first few bars involved a section from Lads a Bunchum, Adderbury, the stick-striking adding its own percussive effects to the orchestra's music. With the orchestra some distance away on a raised platform this presented an interesting timing effect. Stick-striking rapidly morphed into the handkerchief dance, Monk's March from Sherbourne, as the pace of the music slowed. After a few moves of this corner dance, a circular hey allowed us to re-arrange

ourselves for a section of Long Sword dancing from North Yorkshire. Again, the clashing of the swords added impact to the proceedings - especially as all the other dance groups were silent in their performances.

After a double-under figure flowed into guard of honour, the sword lock appeared and was placed on the floor. At this stage, the action took a further dramatic turn as all the dancers donned black balaclavas and assumed a threatening posture.

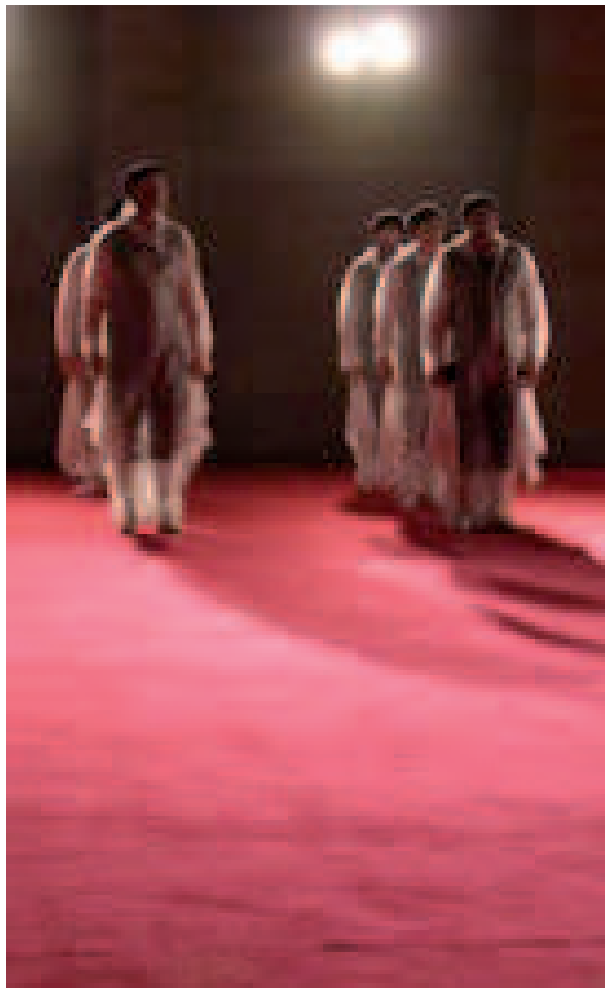
All dancers now flourished their handkerchiefs and, in circular formation we continued, performing Lichfield stamp capers and galley overs followed by Lichfield capers and a further galley over to reform the circle. As we moved round the circle we performed Lichfield cross-capers to end facing up. A cannon and the next fanfare sequence heralded the re-commencement of the opera's main action. We dropped to the floor as the lights and action moved to the new area of the space, rolled to the wall and filed out silently.

*...continued on next page*





As the sequence of performances drew to an end we made our own special presentations to the three individuals with whom we had interacted. Jen Irons, the deputy dance director, will be remembered as the first contact from the opera group and she will remain famous — or notorious — for her warm-up activities in the room above the opera space. Ron Howell, the dance director, sadly had to miss some of the excitement due to personal commitments. Last but not least, we made a presentation to the director of the opera, Graham Vick, a Morris man in his youth who was the main driver for adding our art form into the performance. Our thanks go to him and to Jen for



*All photos from Green Man*

contacting us. Thankfully we have a strong enough side to have been able to provide at least six men for each night's performance plus at least one musician to play for the pre-performance dancing.

Video recordings were made during the performances and we are told that BBC Television will be airing the opera in late Spring.

One has to ask the obvious question; "Was it worth it?" It's too early to say what the ultimate result might be but we have already had a couple of bookings as a direct result of the performance. In time we shall see how this has increased the visibility of the Morris and perhaps augmented our membership.

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### Alan Green 1956 - 2009

On Tuesday 10th December, Alan Green Passed away suddenly and unexpectedly, leaving a wife, two sons, and many old friends in Yateley Morris men. Shortly after moving to Farnborough, a young Alan Green joined Yateley Morris Men. Morris dancing, along with youth hostelling, astronomy & camping were some of Alan's hobbies. Alan had spent a season or two with the East Surrey men.

At Yateley we quickly recognised and valued Alan's qualities – his quiet caring nature,

dependability, attention to detail, dedication, his dry sense of humour with that wry smile of his and, yes, even his endearing absentmindedness!

It wasn't long before his talent as one of our best dancers was put to good use as a foreman or teacher in the side.

He was our Squire or leader from 1990-92 & was made Yateley MM of the Year on two occasions. This much coveted award is presented to the man deemed to have done the most for the side each year. Alan set the Club website up without any previous experience,

having said, in his usual modest manner, that he would give it a go! He kept it up to date, so that our website, arguably, became one of the best in the Morris world.

It comes as no surprise that Alan had kept extensive computer notes. Only Louise and the boys truly know how many 100's of hours Alan spent on yateleymorrismen.org.uk for which we are extremely grateful.

All this, and Alan would still step forward if asked, to lead an evening if the Squire was absent, call a dance, or perform a jig. And then there was

Alan's inventiveness; some will remember the cakes he made for impaling on a sword, the beer he brewed for our 20th anniversary & a more lasting legacy - the trolley he made to carry the sticks! The side remembered Alan with a glass of his famous beer after the funeral.

It has been an honour and privilege to have known Alan Green & to count him as a friend - we will all miss him very much.

*Adapted from Paul Montague's eulogy by Steve Betts of Yateley Morris Men*

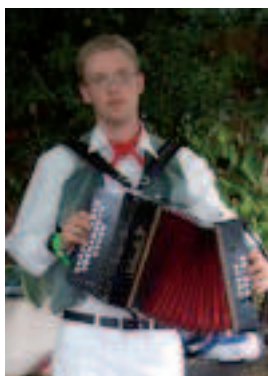
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## 2009: Fifty Years of Icknield Way Morris Men (IWMM).....

*by Sem Seaborne*

In the 1950's Mary Shunn was a teacher at Icknield School in Wantage, that stood by the ancient Icknield Way as it passes through the town. Her interests were in folk music and dance, and she was a member of the Oxford branch of the EFDSS. She was a close friend of Charlie Kimber at Headington, (William's cousin), and had helped to maintain the Whitsun dancing in Headington during the War when menfolk were in short supply.

Miss Shunn, as the boys respectfully called her (or "Granny Shunn" out of her hearing), was a strict disciplinarian who taught English, Geography and History and was a Deputy Head. She introduced country dancing and morris dancing into the school activities but being a traditionalist taught only boys the latter skill. As well as Cotswold morris Miss Shunn instructed on rapper and longsword, and there are extant photographs of 1950s pre-IWMM groups of dancers associated with Icknield School and Miss Shunn's endeavours. One September evening in 1958 a group of ex-Icknield School lads were standing in the Market Place discussing their options on what to do, since the Youth Club



*Clockwise from top left, Mary Shunn, Graham Pearce, Joe Marns and Graham Hubbard, current Squire of IWMM*

*Photos courtesy IWMM*

was only open one night a week. As they had learnt some morris dancing at school they approached Miss Shunn about starting a club. She was keen and started Wednesday night sessions at Icknield School, instructing the dance with her piano accompaniment.

Those original men whose idea eventually created IWMM were local men like Bob and Reg Hart, and Graham Pearce and they were soon joined by other ex-schoolboys who were younger than the "pioneers". The lads needed to make a decision on naming the side and Icknield was preferred to Wantage because of the school connection. Mary had friends like Peter and Alan Gill, Dennis Manners, Bob Weaver of Oxford City MM, Ian

Dunmur of Kennet MM and John White at Abingdon TMD. These men were happy to give time to get The Icknield Club underway, instructing on chosen traditions and providing music for dancing out and other morris engagements. Jim Phillips who was Squire of the Morris Ring from 1958-60 also used to attend Icknield practices with two other Headington Quarry men, and gave detailed instruction on the Headington tradition. From around 1963 the team danced at events by invitation from Abingdon TMD and Oxford MM; and John White (Abingdon) was frequently the musician on these occasions. Graham Pearce was the first Squire of IWMM.

He held the position for over seven years.

The first tour out occurred in 1965 in the presence of Leslie Nicholls & Ewart Russell. The lads must have impressed because in September that year they were invited by Dennis Manners to the 100th Meeting of the Morris Ring in Oxford where some 40 teams participated with 12 different tours being organised around the county. IWMM also joined in with the May Day revels that year.

Tours with Kennet MM were also popular, such as the visit to Goring Mill in 1966 which was photographed and famously turned into a national jig-saw entitled "The Morris Dancers" by Whitman Publishing.\*

The team entered a new era when they acquired their own musician in 1967 during National Folk Week when a Market Place performance grabbed the attention of Joe Marns a skilful musician. Joe was to become the most important person in the history of IWMM for the next 20 years or so. He attended many instruction sessions, notably Ducklington, Stanton Harcourt and Lichfield given by Roy Dommet, Tubby Reynolds, and others to become the expert foreman within

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## .....Icknield Golden Jubilee continued

the team.

Although IWMM did not join the Ring until 1974/5 at the Stratford meeting, they attended a number of Ring meetings prior to this e.g. in Oxford, Yeovil and Headington. The Staff of Office was finally received by Tony Paddock, the 1975 Squire, from Morris Sunderland on 28th June 1975 at Shakespeare's meeting. Later that year the team performed at events for Pete Townsend of the Who, and Princess Margaret.

The early 80's saw the arrival of Charles Whitlock, as Foreman and Squire. Charles started dancing when up at Oxford and had maintained the May Day Revels tradition. Charles was also a member of Whitchurch MM, and St. Albans MM and brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to Icknield Way which was to form the core knowledge of the current team.

The mid-80s was a vigorous recruiting period with many new members coming from the scientific and engineering business community around south Oxfordshire, and Charles willingly knocked us into shape. The arrival of more musicians and members greatly increased the team's activities profile, benefiting from Charles's contacts. Visits to the

Whitchurch and St. Albans events became regular and The May Day Revels in Oxford remains a fixture to this day. Joe made all the new musicians learn to dance before they played that is excellent advice worth repeating. The amount of touring increased, particularly to Cornwall, and there were some performances at prestigious events such as the visit of the Princess of Wales, and the European Particle Accelerator Conference at the Dorchester Hotel in London.

We also joined forces with local 'amdram' groups to create a "promenade" performance of Flora Thompson's "Larkrise to Candleford".

In July 1996 IWMM hosted the 267th meeting of the Morris Ring in Wantage. We sent tours out to the four locations where the morris had some semblance of continuity, viz. Headington, Eynsham, Bampton and Abingdon, and were well supported by those local teams. Mary Shunn was proud to have lived to be a guest of honour at this occasion.

Our associations with the world of drama brought us an invitation to film a much repeated edition of Midsomer Murders, with John Nettles, Peter Jones, Tessa Peake-Jones and

other celebrities, and later (2007) we performed in the BBC2 showing of Michael Hirst's "The Tudors".

Early in the new millennium, thanks to an excellent website, we attracted a number of younger dancers who have had a tremendous impact on our activities and the young morris world in general, by creating Morris 18-30 and gaining support from the Ring. There's nothing like youth and energy for generating new ideas, and we met up with many new teams, learned new dances, and went to different events, including more festivals. Our 2005/6 season received the blessing of Lord Hattersley (yes THE Baron Hattersley of Sparkbrook) in his role as Daily Mail Journalist. The nationally published article included the immortal words "each man foot perfect..... singing in perfect harmony....." It seemed unreal having m'lord sitting in the Abingdon Arms buying a round.

At our 50th Anniversary Ale there were over 100 guests; friends old and new. We also held a Weekend of Dance in Wantage for the numerous old boys and non-Ring sides with whom we enjoy good relations. In a

strange coincidence there were 50 IWMM dancers on the day.

In September we achieved a long sought after target when we danced at a number of locations along 50 miles of the Icknield Way, from Ivinghoe Beacon to Wantage. It would have been difficult to achieve without the help of Whitchurch MM and Aldbury MM, so many thanks to them. Our "Brothers-in-Law" from Kennet joined us en-route at Goring where we re-created that famous Jig-Saw scene from over 40 years ago.\*

So at a time when many morris teams are ailing and folding, IWMM are fortunate to have a list of 38 members and continue to attract new and young dancers.

Part of an explanation for this has been the ability of IWMM to continue to re-invent itself over the years. Every so often there has been a new influx of men who have brought new enthusiasm and new ideas, and the team has accepted change, adapted, and adopted the new directions. I hope that will continue for the next five decades at least!

(\*See page 16 for copy of a jigsaw-is this the very one referred to in the text? I think maybe! ed.)



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## The Morris . What is it?

*by John Jenner*

It has concerned me for some years that the Morris has lost its sense of Ritual and indeed ancient history. The recent report on the Contemporary Dance Choreography Workshop has revived these concerns, and I think we must make ourselves clear on whether the Morris Ring and its member clubs are to encourage and uphold the standards and dignity of the Morris or morris dancing as performed over years with or without adaptations in the actual dance format, or to dance for their own enjoyment with little emphasis on the traditions. I wonder was the small amount of actual dancing seen in the film "Morris: a life with bells on" actually Morris dancing.

I was persuaded to start dancing by Russell Wortley and whilst influenced by him I still believe in most of his ideas both with regard to the "ancient" history and its modern developments. In the late 70's Russell wrote his "XYZ of Morris" (still obtainable from the Morris Ring shop) as a simple guide so that the ordinary morris man could answer the regular questions from the audience with, at least, a basic background knowledge.

It was given that title to indicate that the subject is not as simple as ABC. Since then very little has changed although numerous scholarly books and articles have been written, some critical of his views, but none have successfully studied the origins and most do not even venture further back than when it was first recorded. However I think that the average club's attitude has changed and we have forgotten our roots. We have to decide whether the Morris is still an ancient "ritual" or just a form of street entertainment. It is generally agreed that Stonehenge is older than the first written reference to it, yet the morris is not thought of by most writers to be either of very ancient origin or even English in origin.

Russell was one of the very few writers who tried to define "morris". He said :-

The participants in various seasonal customs in parts of England are in their own localities called "morris dancers". According to the time of appearance, they celebrate either the turn of the year, the coming of spring, summer or harvest in autumn. In any case they are looked upon as bringers of luck: thus they serve the community at large and in return collect

contributions of money and/or refreshment.

Although called "morris dancers" they may act a play (mummers) or they may dance dances which vary in character and with other names. The teams or gangs are usually limited to quite small numbers: they were exclusively male and invariably wear some kind of disguise or special costume. Thus "morris" is the traditional name, not just for a kind of dance, but for a seasonable observance taking the form of a ritual perambulations of a locality by a small group of disguised male performers who give their display not for fun, nor primarily as an entertainment, but with the unspoken purpose or promoting the cycle of the seasons. Where the tradition is unbroken the local people still feel that the year is incomplete without the annual appearance of the "morris dancers".

And in his final paragraph of XYZ, which I quote in full :-

To me it is more important that some form of mystery should remain. In this connection there may well be a danger at the present time (1978) arising from the multiplicity of morris dancing clubs. The morris dance was never a popular dance for the community at large and if

it becomes over-familiar it will be in danger of losing its vital and distinctive quality. It would indeed be regrettable if morris dancers came to be regarded as a bloody nuisance rather than harbingers of spring or celebrations of harvest. If we no longer really believe that the performance of our morris can make the slightest difference to our unpredictable English weather we can still use them to celebrate the annual rebirth at the turn of the year, the annual renewal of spring and annual harvest of autumn. It is good, surely, not just to take our varying seasons for granted but to celebrate them with their appropriate traditional rituals.

In the last thirty years much has changed in morris activity. The number of sides male, mixed and women has grown out of all recognition and way beyond Russell's worst predictions. (He died in 1980) The annual "perambulations" in the traditional villages, whether in the Cotswold on "Whit" Monday or elsewhere, on Plough Monday, May Day or at other special times such as at Bacup, Abbots Bromley or Saddleworth, have become very popular and supported by great crowds and this

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## .....continuing: Morris. What is it?

enthusiasm also includes “modern traditional” annual visits by revival clubs. However, the normal dancing shows do not have the support of the public that they did, as the morris has just become too familiar.

This move away from the traditional annual events of which the morris dancers, in their various forms, were an integral part, to the morris becoming a street entertainment (often weekly) based on particular forms of dance may not in itself be a bad thing but we must not lose sight of our roots and history. Recently there has been much publicity over the declining numbers and the age of dancers, but over the centuries this has often happened, and yet the traditions have been remembered and kept going. It was popular in the middle ages and introduced to the equivalent of the Lord Mayors Show and Livery company processions, in Elizabethan times Shakespeare and others made it popular and it was included and adapted in the nineteenth century to the great Wakes processions, mostly in the North. After the Puritans and Cromwell at the Restoration, community celebrations soon recovered along with

morris and indeed other dancing. In wartime and depression it was reduced but the local Morris and related activities did not die and as Violet Alford concluded in one of her books “After all nothing dies as hard as tradition”. As I have indicated above there have been many books etc written in the last thirty years which have traced in great detail the recorded history of the morris and the influences on the movements etc from other dance cultures both at home and abroad but very little on the pre-recorded history or on why it exists or has survived at all. It is strange that in this secular age writers have gone back to support the views of the puritanical Victorians about the origins of the morris. They did not encourage the thought that its origins were religious or indeed English, so they perpetuated the idea that it was brought back by soldiers from the Spanish wars. We have had many wars in the last century but has anything similar happened? Sharp in his introduction to the first edition of the Morris Book (1907) follows this line. However, in the second edition (1912) he goes to great lengths to explain “following the discovery of the Sword-dances and a closer study

and better understanding of the significance of the traditional customs associated with the Morris have led us to change very materially our views on the history and origins of the dance.”

These views are summarised in the following extracts:

In the first place the Morris-dance, in various forms is found very widely distributed over pretty near all of Europe. If therefore we ascribe to the English dance a Morris origin we must to be consistent attribute a like source to all the similar dances in the extended area. Then again we have this significant fact that wherever it is found the Morris is nearly always associated with certain strange customs which are apparently quite independent of the dance. He goes on to conclude that “the faces were not blacked because the dancers represented Moors, but rather that the dancers were thought to represent Moors because their faces were blackened”.

In her book “Peeps into English Folk Dance” written in 1923 Violet Alford takes a similar line but goes much further than even Cecil Sharp dared. Her opinion was that the morris sword and mummings are bits remaining from

very ancient English and Europe wide pre-Christian “religious” festivals which along with many such activities were adapted and in fact used by the “church”. She goes on to link the fool or moll to ancient priests and that the dancers disguise themselves so that it is not known who the ritual killers are may well be idealistic and now considered over the top, but it is well known that traditional sides and old dancers held the view that the fool was very important.

Douglas Kennedy writing in the forties basically agreed.

You may say “Ah well” even if we revise our understanding and views on the origins and history of the morris what does it matter that we have lost that history and sense of annual ritual and it has become just street theatre. I disagree with this loose view and want us to continue to give full support to and interest in the ritual as the true purpose of the morris, whilst acknowledging a change in the present emphasis on the actual displays and other activities.

John Jenner  
April 2010

# Beer and Loathing in Las Bonnington

Jigs Instructional 22 – 24 January 2010

by Mac McCoig

This year, some 36 acolytes attended the temple of Terpsichore and were fed and instructed to a standard which would have made Zeus envious. The Temple was attended by many 10th Dan Jiggers, but this year a new batch of virgins were offered up to the Muse. Fresh young faces glowed in the light of knowledge radiated by the Chief Muse, the demigod Jerram. ‘We are not worthy’ they cried, but after some self-selection, the assembled students divided into two groups – the self-deluded ‘advanced’ and the self-deprecating ‘basic’. There were one or two beginners in addition.

Instruction in the mysteries of the inner sanctum was provided by Alan Chetwood (Fieldtown & Sherborne), Geoff Jerram (Bleddington, Headington & Bampton), Ian Small (Bampton), Mike Bennett (Bleddington), Mike Wilkinson (Fieldtown) and Tony Ashley (Oddington and Ascot). The able and overworked demonstrators were Ian Nichols, Joe Oldacre and Steve Parker, with guest appearances by Albert and Geoff (Geoff didn’t go wrong – you just weren’t watching properly), among others. Music on the lyre, harp and



*The First Timers at the Jigs Instructional, and below the Officers at the Feast, Thaxted*

Photos: H Stevenson

bouzouki was provided by the Heavenly Chorus of Geoff, Jon Melville and Matt Wright. Their patience had no bounds: “give us an A then a B – no just the last notes of the A, no just the B, or a C...”

Malamalama – the Hawaiian Hula Hula - was not, sadly, on the agenda – even though we asked nicely and wore our best Iron Maiden T-Shirts. The Terpsichorean Priests demonstrated beautifully and the acolytes, under the firm guiding hands and gimlet eyes of the tutors, fumbled through jig after jig. “It’s Saturday” they cried, “so it must be Fieldtown”. Terpsichore wept silently.

The Feast (as was all the

food) was prepared by Albert, inhibited by his band of Rhine Maidens; Ian, Tony, Joe, Harry and Paul, all of whom had hands full of thumbs and lacked gastronomic hearts. Tears were shed, voices raised and rosti burned. But what culinary delights there were! The assembled acolytes and Priests fell upon it as though they were starving men. High Priest Jerram sang a song of such wondrous beauty that my eyes grew misty and I had to look away. Tony Foard, recently appointed Captain of the Salvation Army, had prepared a devotional temple song of such great wit that all present saw the light and were instantly converted

to the cause.

The Temple annex was jammed on both Friday and Saturday nights. The singing and playing was so wonderful that the landlord has had to apply for retrospective planning permission due to the added height of the rafters. The locals looked like rabbits in the headlights and scattered gasping into the night, thinking themselves fortunate to have made it out alive (save for two young ladies who gazed misty-eyed on one young and handsome acolyte). The ritual of the ‘Lock-in’ was performed both times to great effect and lasted into the wee small hours. Such stamina impressed the landlady to the extent that she was seen to smile and carry out the annual blessing of the till. “Verily, these men are Gods with deep wallets” she cried, “pass me the paying-in book.” Altogether a great weekend, the jigs of which can now be viewed on You Tube. We were not worthy, but we are grateful and we promise to dance the jigs during the summer months and come back for more in 2011. (Now was that ‘Young Cuckoo’ Bleddingfield or ‘My Lord of Jockey’ Headington under Wychwood? Bugger!) Mac McCoig is a member of Utttoxeter Morris Men





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## Morris 18-30 Group: The Wakefield Event.

*by John Jenner*

Having heard a few years ago that the 18-30 Group were a rebellious lot and that the dancing was not good I felt that it was about time that I should see for myself. I had never been to Wakefield before and the particular weekend in October was free so I decided on a nice warm Saturday to drive there and see what was the situation.

I arrived about eleven and soon found the men gathering to start a show by the Cathedral. I remained in the background partly so as not to be easily recognised but also to hear the casual remarks of an audience. One does not get that opportunity when in kit, but I have often been told of things overheard by morris wives. The remarks were all favourable.

After a good introduction the show proceeded alternating between massed dances for three "sides" and others for individual "sides". After a few dances I realized that I was not going to be disappointed and anyway knew some of the men so I was soon recognised and immediately thanked for coming to support them. First impressions were good and another show was given in the

shopping centre before taking a break for refreshment in a useful pub. On coming out after a pint some of the men noticed a good number of young ladies in the shop opposite and entered the store to investigate, as you would. I would admit to wondering if all was lost but no, the men left behind found out what a new fiddler on his first outing could play and they gave a very good show, before the other men soon joined them.

I joined the men for lunch and the only complaint from a regular was that during the previous evening, drunk the pub out of his favourite ale. He had really enjoyed the evening of song and wondered why we were concerned about the future of the morris with such a keen lot about.

A short show followed outside the pub when the dancing did not reflect the size of the audience. While walking back to the centre for a very enjoyable show by the Cathedral, I overheard a man complaining that the Foreman had limited them to only one pint per pub. During a very good rendering of the Bledington Leapers, with the fool accompanying a young lady, who after the

usual ending was greeted by each man (and others) then back to dancing a sidestep hey and all in, raising her in the approved manner. This dance was particularly well received by the audience and again I heard someone say "I thought there were no young morris men".

The men then went to a local brewery-come pub and as I had to drive and also my parking time was running out I left them to enjoy the rest of the weekend.

If you have read this far you will have gathered that I thought all was well. I had expected to find a bunch of young men enjoying themselves with the morris and audience second and very mixed sets made up of men with lots of different styles etc. like many of the usual massed dances, even on the tours at most Ring Meetings. Six men (including a few new men) each came from two sides but the majority were spread over various sides.

However on the previous evening they had run through the dances that they knew and sorted out any major differences, leaving only the finer points which I had a job to pick up and certainly the general audience

would not have noticed. I only saw one new man get lost.

If I may finish by quoting a lady in Guiting Power in the centre of the Cotswolds and a village often danced in by visiting sides. I was collecting and soon discovered that she lived on the Square and always came out to view the dancing. "I am enjoying your show". Oh why I said "Well you are talking to me, the first man to do that". Really! "Anyway it's a good show. Just at that time a man quite clearly had never danced Dearest Dicky before and went entirely wrong. "Oh that doesn't matter they've all got to learn and it doesn't spoil a very good show".

The men on the 18-30 weekend were talking to and interacting with the audience and dancing some lively active "men's" morris, with lines straight, handkerchiefs going up together and smiles on their faces and no tankards or beer bellies in sight..

John Jenner is a member of the Cambridge Morris Men

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## Plymouth Morris Men's 'Hoe' Down continued

(....continued from page 1)  
performed while the collecting buckets were passed along the lines of spectators.

Then it was off to collect our 'Goody Bag' and medal!

A quick group photo to show off our medals and then off to the Yard Arm, to keep that promise to ourselves!

Members taking part were: Andy King, Adrian Foss, John Summerscales, John West, Little Jeff, Tim Ingram, Ray Newnham, Dan Shearer, Mike Frost and Doug Herdson (following on crutches after his recent knee replacement!).

So far, as a team, we have raised £939.22 in



*Plymouth showing their paces on the Hoe and below, with their 'medals';* both photos, Plymouth Morris Men



sponsorship and collections for Sport Relief! This brings our charitable giving to over £5000 since 2001.

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You can still sponsor us! Just visit <http://www.mysportrelief.com/plymouthmorris>

The money you give, or have given, will help people who are living incredibly tough lives both at home in the UK and across the world's poorest countries.

Thank you for all your support!

Andy King is the Bagman of Plymouth Morris Men



### Morris on a Jigsaw

A member of Winchester Morris Men brought this jigsaw along to a practise session during the winter. Unfortunately, not only is it sans one piece, it does not name the dancing side.

We at Winchester have our own ideas but do you think it is the one mentioned in the Icknield Way article on page 10? Any ideas?

Harry Stevenson