



September 2010  
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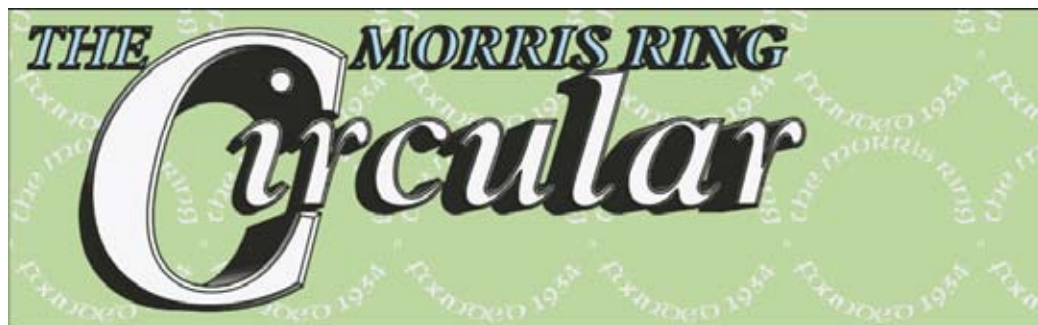
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## Mersey Morris Men's Mersey Tour



*Mersey Morris Men on the Mersey celebrating their 50th Anniversary*

*by Alan Barber*

The day got better and better and it got off to an amazing start as the mini bus, already half full, arrived ahead of time on a sunny morning. Maybe after 50 years of trying, Mersey time could have caught up with UK time? Yes, 25 years after their Silver Anniversary and a 50+ years after the merger of the Liverpool and Wirral men, Mersey were celebrating their Golden Anniversary on 26th June 2010. Dancers included their first Squire (Ken Winter) and returning dancer Dan Corcoran - who also brought his dad (and Ring Bagman) Charlie.

We arrived at our rendezvous point early and so travellers stopping at Lymm services were surprised to see a dozen morris men having a nice cup of coffee and a sit down whilst we waited

for the second mini bus. This got the day back on to Mersey time (20 min behind the UK).

The source of the Mersey now appears to be underneath a Shopping Mall in Stockport, so after bacon butties near the bus station we danced outside, above the river, which, it has to be said, had a distinctive odour. Things picked up at the next stop where the river was odourless and, refreshed with beer, one dance was performed on a narrow footbridge. Those watching the suspension bridge move in time with the perfect synchronisation of the dancers were wondering how the Morris Ring would react to the loss of their bagman into the swirling waters beneath (actually shallow and calm waters but the bridge was moving a lot)

By now the sunny day was really  
(..continued on page 4)

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## **The Squire of The Morris Ring - Brian's Final Report –Summer 2010**

After the ARM it was back to business as usual. At Easter I made my annual visit to Tongeren in Belgium for a sword dancing weekend. This year it was the turn of Sallyport and Pengwyn (an account of this may be in the next Morris Ring Circular). I was planning to go to the JMO event in Bury St. Edmunds but unfortunately the volcanic ash cloud delayed my return from a visit to Northern Ireland and I didn't get home in time. The following weekend included St. George's Day and I enjoyed a wonderful weekend of dance with Chester and learned how to polka! I danced "Step and Fetch Her" with Thaxted and was surprised to discover that like Hartley they finish the dance after the rounds by turning in. As we did this I shouted "Hoy" as we do in Hartley. I was alone in this and as we walked off Daniel Fox whispered to me "There's no "Hoy" in Bampton".

The first weekend in May was the Morris Ring Meeting, hosted by Helmond. A splendid weekend with lots of excellent dancing. I was very impressed by both the quality and the variety of the dances performed by the Great Yorkshire Morris Men. They dance Cotswold, border, longsword and rapper and have an interesting repertoire of songs and monologues. I was amused by a text received by one of the Helmond men: "Don't expect a lift home, wife inebriated". The following Saturday was the annual Westminster day of dance attended this year by twenty sides. I was dancing with North British, an occasional sword side with no fixed abode. Someone said "Why is the Squire wearing a three piece suit?". Well it wasn't a three piece suit but our smart kit of black trousers,



***Castleford Longsword with Brian Tasker holding the sword lock at the Meeting of the Morris Ring, hosted by Castleford Longsword***

Photo: Catherine McArdle

waistcoat and tie and tweed jacket. Tweed is very fashionable at the moment, or so the North Britons believe.

In the middle of the month I attended Southport Sword's annual day of dance in Liverpool. This is organised on very similar lines to the JMO day of dance with twenty one sides present including six from the Morris Ring. The Coconutters danced outside the Maritime Museum to the consternation of the curator who was not happy about their blacked up faces. He would probably have been even less happy had he seen them posing for a photo next to a poster advertising the Slavery Museum. They danced to their silver band which was fantastic

and gave a whole new dimension to their dancing. The same weekend my wife's side, Kettle Bridge Clogs, were out dancing with North Wood. Roger Comley was there and introduced himself to Carol as the Squire's Fool, to which she replied: "Yes, and I'm his wife!" Roger apologised for not recognising her with the excuse that he had not seen her with her kit on before. Later in May I was invited to attend a children's dance festival in Plumpton, in Sussex. Primary school children from nine local schools had been taught a variety of Cotswold, North West, border and molly dances and they performed them with energy and enthusiasm. If ventures like this could be held all over the country

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## ..... continuing Brian's Final Report –Summer 2010

the future health of all our traditions would be assured. Remember, the Youth Fund is there to help with the costs of setting up new youth sides.

Over the late May bank holiday weekend I went to the Isle of Man with North British. While there I hoped to do some research into scallop dancing. In particular I hoped to make contact with Fred Scuttle, a local fishmonger who is an authority on the subject according to an article published in the Isle of Man Examiner and passed to me by Roger Comley, the foremost English exponent of scallop dancing. Sadly, Fred was nowhere to be found but we did meet up with the Perree Bane folk dance group. We joined them one evening and we each danced our own versions of the White Boys sword dance. They are aware of reports of the scallop dance and are conducting their own research.....

June started with the annual Morris Ring Meeting in Thaxted. The highlight of the weekend was the attendance of the Adelaide Morris Men who were elected to membership of the Morris Ring at the ARM in March and danced in during the Saturday evening show in front of the Guildhall. We wish them well for the future and look forward to the first Morris Ring Meeting in South Australia! The next weekend was the Hartley Ale to which we welcomed the Squire Elect, Peter Halfpenney. During the Saturday I crossed over the river to join Rumford for their Golden Day of Dance, celebrating their 50th anniversary.

I attended the annual Mayor's Day at Abingdon in June and had the pleasure of watching Abingdon dance. I had not seen them before

and was much impressed by their lively style of dancing. For many years the Abingdon Morris Men have conducted the election for the Mock Mayor of Ock Street. I was surprised to learn that there are now some 2,000 people eligible to vote although only a small proportion actually do so. Duncan Brown, the current Mayor of Abingdon (not to be confused with the Mock Mayor), is a member of the side and he invited us to join him in the Mayor's parlour where he had thoughtfully provided a barrel of beer. At 4.00pm polling closed and the votes were counted. Roger Cox was re-elected and presented with the Mayor's baldrics, goblet and sword before being carried along Ock Street in a flower bedecked chair by the other members of the side. Whoever is elected as Mock Mayor also becomes the Squire of the side until the next election.

On the first weekend in July I joined Ewell St Mary on their annual family cycle ride. This year the tour was based at Tenterden in East Kent and visited Sissinghurst Castle and some of the surrounding villages. It was a very warm and sunny day and we all had a great time. Ewell have developed their own repertoire of dances based on the Adderbury format. Rather unusually, I spent the next two weekends with Hartley. The first was the annual Shepherd Neame tour where we visit a number of Shepherd Neame pubs in East Kent travelling around on an open top bus. The second was a trip to France, visiting Azincourt and Bergues where we were the warm up act for an open air concert.

The first week in August is Sidmouth Folk Festival and I joined the sides on the esplanade for the Sunday morning display. In the afternoon I

took part in the annual John Gasson jigs competition, dancing "Lumps of Plum Pudding" from Bledington to music provided by Frank Lee of the Hexham Morris Men. After the dancing I said to Jack Worth (Bristol and Nonesuch): "Well Jack, I think it's between you and me", and it turned out to be him! Jack's winning jig was "The Nutting Girl" from Ascot which he learned on the Friday evening of this year's Morris Ring jigs weekend. He is keen to publicise the Sidmouth jigs competition and encourage more of the men who go to the jigs weekend to enter. On a personal level I enjoyed taking part but of course it is an event primarily for young dancers and that is how it should be. Nevertheless it is important for the balance of the competition that some older dancers enter and show their skills and their interpretation of their jigs. The competition is as much about taking part as it is about winning. I was the first Squire to enter since Roy Yarnell nearly twenty years ago.

The following weekend was the Dartmoor Folk Festival where on the Sunday I had the pleasure of dancing with the Exeter men. The end of August was very busy with Saddleworth Rushcart, Whitby Festival, where I taught the Escrick dance at the longsword workshop and danced a double jig with Peter Halfpenney in the Shambles bar, and the Shrewsbury Festival, which I attended with North British, all following each other in quick succession.

September arrived and the final two Morris Ring Meetings of the summer. The first was hosted by the Trigg Morris Men in Cornwall. Twelve sides made their way to St Austell for what was a very

*continued on page 4*



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## ..... continuing Brian's Final Report –Summer 2010

enjoyable and relaxed weekend. The pace of life is supposed to be slower and less stressful in the far west and I saw an example of this when Trigg Squire, Ian Chanter, left a bag containing some important Trigg possessions, including the special Squire's bell pads, at the site of the first display in Bodmin. He showed no particular concern and calmly picked them up again some two hours later when we passed through Bodmin en route to our lunch time stand.

The final Morris Ring Meeting of

the summer was based in Selby in NorthYorkshire and hosted by Castleford Longsword. It was an excellent meeting and especially enjoyable for me as I am a member of the side. It was great to dance out as Squire at a meeting hosted by Castleford and attended by Hartley, my Cotswold side who were with me two years ago when I danced in at the Dartington Ring meeting.

I look back with great pleasure on all the events I have attended and all the new friends I have

made during my term of office. I would like to thank Charlie and Ed, my fellow officers, and Paul, the Chairman of the Advisory Council, for all the help they have given me. I wish my successor, Peter Halfpenney, an enjoyable and productive two years as he copes with the challenges which face the Morris Ring. I would also like to thank you all for the support you have given me and I look forward to enjoying your company in the years ahead.

Brian Tasker

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### Mersey's 50th

*(continued from page 1)*

hotting up and at the Ferry Tavern. Mersey's Cheeky Peasants drank them out of Cheeky Pheasant bitter before eating lunch. A vigorous Uptonstick dance, full of controlled power and dynamism, impressed some of the local youths – shame it's a bit far for them to join us on practise nights. As we left the landlady handed us a full bottle of Bushmills which disappeared into the wrong minibus!

Arriving at Speke Hall we were relieved to find half the bottle of Bushmills was still left and its level rapidly diminished. The National Trust staff looked after us exceptionally well, even providing us with a rose for the Fieldtown dance. The heat helped us attract a large and static audience who did not run away when the hat went round. A dance for all Mersey Squires present (Lichfield too, we had eight out dancing) revealed how some of our dances have evolved over the years.

As we were now running late, even by Mersey standards, a quick show of hands led us missing the Anthony Gormley statues on Crosby beach in favour of a dance

spot at a great little back street CAMRA pub, the Volunteer. The regulars were enthusiastic and people came out of the terraced houses all around to watch. By then our minibus contingent had polished off the Bushmills so Kevin asked the landlady if he could buy a bottle. No need said the landlady – and gave him one (a bottle of Bushmills that is.)

Half the bottle was drunk on route to our last pub and evening meal stop, The Egremont Ferry, which was back on the Wirral side of the river. The other half bottle went missing but it was noted that our bagman was no longer capable of walking in a straight line. After more dancing we adjourned to the bar for beer, hotpot and a grand finale rapper set from Scally Rapper.

Presentations were then made to Ken Winter and Bert Eccles (original bagman) as the latter had been able to join us for the meal. Unfortunately Jim Jones as an original Liverpool man and long serving Mersey squire was not able to make it and nor was John Stapledon (originally a Wirral



man) but they will be out with us again soon.

Finally thanks to Tony for most of the organising and special congratulations for arranging dispensation for two mini buses to park on double yellow lines in the middle of Stockport. Big thanks too to Ron and Peter for staying alcohol free and doing all the driving, a long day for both of you. Last, but not least, a big thanks to our guests for coming. See you in another 10 years for our 60th.



**Tony Foard and Charlie Corcoran,  
and top, Mersey Morris Men**

All Photos: Phil Hughes

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## All the latest gossip

I love a good old gossip especially when meeting up with old friends at a Morris do and this year I was at Saddleworth Rushcart weekend, which is a perfect time for indulging in a bit of chat. In the Waggon on the Friday night it was absolutely heaving but it's the place where everyone passes through at some time during the evening and therefore if you've got the stamina to keep drinking and love the seamless tumbling stream of Morris music coming from the front bar it is an ideal venue to meet up with lots of old friends. Sure enough it wasn't long before I was shaking hands with Tom and Dick, and then even Harry!

I had a chance to hear about all the latest about the goings on, who was praising who, and who was out of favour for doing this that or the other, and what they thought about Brian and what they hoped for from Peter and so on. At one time it was possible to spot a 'knot' of ex-Ring Squires in the corridor enjoying each other's company and having a good chuckle about something. An ex Saddleworth man interrupted my thoughts pushing past me with a huge banjo case and I remembered the time when he was jockey on the Rushcart, but my memory isn't always as good as that.

Its always an interesting moment when you remember a face coming towards you and then realise you can't quite recall his name or be quite be sure of which side he dances with, but he certainly knows you!

A few exchanged reminiscences and it usually floods back into your memory before it becomes an embarrassment. It isn't long before you talk to someone about a dancer you expected to be there but not yet seen only to hear sad news of an illness, personal problems or even death. Then the mood quickly changes when a friend turns to you to introduce their grandson who is now dancing. A pint of Longwood Thump bitter is thrust into your hand and the evening fun flows on, a smile here, a kiss on the cheek from someone's wife, a waved hand there, and a wonderful feeling of happiness that comes from being part of it all.

It is often at such informal times of chat and gossip that valuable insights arise. Charlie Corcoran was there and smiled as he went by, and I was reminded about his piece about the ageing population of dancers and the likely demise of Morris. Looking round at all the men in the pub with that on my mind I noticed it was certainly the case that the older generation was apparent but then it suddenly dawned upon me how many young men I could spot in the company there. Not only standing chatting among those enjoying a drink but also in the large group of musicians playing instruments. It was something I watched for the next morning as everyone assembled in front of The Commercial ready to the Rushcart to set off, and indeed the young faces were there among the teams.

Luckily Morris is a team activity and sides can assimilate new members into their style of performance and way of dancing as they arrive into the group.

Many comments, however, are still being made in the circles of power about "youth", recruiting young men, and the importance of younger members and perhaps there is a danger of creating a feeling of failure in our older men or within teams without any youngsters. The messages about recruiting young men are correct, but I worry they are sometimes delivered without the sensitivity that recognises the sound and often stunning performances of sides made up of older dancers. Look at teams such as Bacup Nutters, older dancers but exhibiting a magic unsurpassed by most of our efforts!

I'm sure Charlie's worries of our imminent demise will prove to be unfounded because at least some teams seem to have found a way to regenerate their numbers with young men. Let us celebrate their arrival but still value the experience and quality among our long serving members. Our incoming Squire has great plans to concentrate on recruitment and I hope the first signs of a new generation of dancers I saw at Saddleworth are only the vanguard of a new golden age for The Ring. Someone has to be there at the Rushcart weekend in twenty years to buy me a pint!

Dicky



**Morris Ring Circular No 63**  
Nov 30 is copy date, to feature the final two Morris Ring Meetings of 2010-If you went, how about your report from the event?  
***Men of Wight and Harthill at Bodmin, Trigg were the hosts***

Photos: H Stevenson



## Letters To The Editor

From Steve Felton

Hi Harry

I have a copy of the jigsaw puzzle (complete) you refer to on the final page of the circular (good issue by the way) and it features the Pebworth Morris Men (Worcestershire), who are not members of the Ring.

They are local to me. They practise at The Fleece Inn, Bretforton, a thatched pub, owned by the National Trust. The landlord is a member of the side. Bizarrely I bought my puzzle on holiday in Porthcawl. Hope your season is going well.

All the very best

Steve Felton, Shakespeare MM,  
Ilmington MM  
Bagman, 2012 Cotswold Olympics  
Morris Ring Meeting

From Antony Heyward

Dear Harry,

Helmond Morris Men were delighted to see two photos of their performances at the Fools and Beasts Unconvention in Utrecht last October (in The Morris Ring Circular No. 61). However the second photo (page 5) was wrongly captioned as being Utrecht Morris Men performing Step Back, Fieldtown. Actually the picture shows Helmond Morris Men performing a four-man Bledington dance, the Black Joke. Wassail,

Antony Heywood

*(Apologies, I replaced a photo, but did not amend titles. Ed)*

From Chris Hutchinson

Dear Harry,

### Morris Solutions R Us plc

I would like to introduce myself as the md and marketing manager of the dynamic newly formed company Morris Solutions R Us plc. We are here to help you, Harry, sort out those annoying little problems about morris dancing which have evaded solution since before Cecil Sharp's time.

For example, Harry, how often when going round with the collection box has a member of the audience said to you "How often do you hit yourselves with the sticks, ha ha." Or "Why is that man lying motionless on the floor amongst the other dancers?"

Well, Harry, all this can be a thing of the past! Simply kit your men out in our novel Basic Overall Long Lasting Orthopaedic Contra Knock System! We are trying to think of an acronym for this but for the time being are just calling it a suit of armour.

Well, Harry, I think you can see that with a suite of armour bruised knuckles will be a thing of the past.

You can own a suit of armour for a very competitive price or gift one to your newest trainee. We will do a discount for a set of six and I'm sure you can think of at least one morris side you would like to see (trying) to dance in suits of armour

- especially on a hot day when, of course, accidents are most likely. Even bigger discounts are available for Lichfield sides.

We are working on a suit of armour for musicians but at present it looks like there is only demand for drummers' or trombonists' suits.

Especially for you, Harry, I attach a photograph *[see below, ed.]* of a prototype in action (as a coat stand) in the Argyll pub in Henley when Kennet danced there for the Regatta earlier this month. Kennet tell me that since this event they have always been one short for any set, but none of them can remember who it is that is missing.

Nevertheless, feel free to advertise this unique offer in the Morris Ring Circular if you wish.

Best wishes

Chris Hutchinson,  
Kennet MM







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## The Morris Ring Circular Editorial



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### Ritual & Entertainment

Mike Garland's response to John Jenner's article (Issue 61) has added to the debate about entertainment and ritual. Mike argues that ritual and entertainment are not mutually exclusive; this maybe correct and cites the example of choristers at The Morris Ring Meeting in Canterbury. The singing was practised regularly and taught by experienced choir masters and thus its expertise gave it both the ritual and the entertainment.

Morris Dancing taught well and practised regularly can be both ritual and entertainment. Morris performed shoddily is most certainly not ritual but maybe viewed by some as entertainment.

It is our duty as Members of the Morris Ring to uphold the quality of dancing as our main raison d'être. It is also true that another tenet of the Morris Ring is its maleness. This

is being diluted somewhat with the current discussion on women musicians. It has been proffered by some that the Constitution of the Morris Ring does not specifically exclude women or women musicians. Surely, item 2 of the Constitution states: 'The Ring shall be an association of Men's Morris, Sword and Mummers Clubs and Teams.' That is unambiguous.

### Composers and Folk Tunes

In Mike's article he refers to composers of 100 years ago turning to the folk world. This theme is examined in Rob Young's excellent book, 'Electric Eden', published in August this year.

### Celebrations & Anniversaries

Finally, another theme in Mike's response is celebrations-as in the farming year, church calendar days

of Christmas, Whitsun.

Sean Goddard asserts (page 14) that Morris Dancing survives on anniversaries. So, in Brian Tasker's final report as Squire of the Morris Ring he highlights Rumford's Golden Jubilee. The Mersey Morris Men report (front page) their antics on their 50th Anniversary. Congratulations to both and indeed Sean and Chanctonbury Morris Men re-enacting the famous Times photograph of 1st May 1956.

### Sidmouth Jigs Competition

In Brian Tasker's Final Report as Squire of The Morris Ring (page 3), he asserts that the jigs competition (at Sidmouth) is an event 'primarily for young dancers and that is how it should be'. Is this strictly true Brian, or just your view? Are we to restrict the Morris Ring's Jigs Instructional to men under a certain age?



### Three Squires in a Row

During the Morris Ring Meeting based in St Austell, hosted by Trigg Morris Men, three Squires of The Morris Ring, Past, Present and Future, perform in Bodmin.

Brian Tasker, far left, the then current Squire; Mike Chandler, Past Squire and the then Squire Elect, Peter Halfpenney

Photos: Harry Stevenson

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## Primary Schools Traditional Dance Festival May 21 2010



*by John Bacon*

Last years traditional dance festival for the Chailey cluster of primary schools, East Sussex was so successful, that they decided that it should be repeated in 2010. Four schools took part in 2009 and nine schools wanted to participate in 2010.

Since South East Folk Arts Network (SEFAN), believed that all children should know about our folk art heritage they agreed to support the project. From early January the schools chose and learnt one of our traditional regional dances. Ditchling Morris founders Ann and John Bacon, (also SEFAN Trustee) together with Gail and Lucy Duff, from TRADS, (Traditional Arts Development South

East), provided the tuition. The class teachers then worked with the children to produce a varied programme of dances covering Morris, Molly, Maypole and

Social dance.

Over 300 children took part and some 400 parents came through the festival venue during the day.

The costumes were out of this world, and in keeping

with the styles that were performed.

The Festival took place at Plumpton Race Course in their events marquee and the day ended with a traditional Ceilidh for the







community in Plumpton Village Hall with the local band, "Unreel". Plumpton School Morris

Club performed during the interval. The very successful day was organised, managed

and run by Plumpton Primary School with Dave Johns their Physical Education Link Teacher

as the Festival Director. SEFAN's Patron Shirley Collins MBE, the Squire of the Morris Ring, Brian Tasker and Rachel Elliott, Director of Education at EFDSS attended the festival.

The whole event, including tuition, the festival and Ceilidh was sponsored by Sussex Community Foundation SEFAN, Ditchling Morris and Plumpton Race Course.



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# The Morris : What is it? Why is it?

## A response to John Jenner's article\*

*by Mike Garland*

John Jenner's article encouraging us to take the Morris Dance back to a suggested true purpose of its traditional ritual roots raises many questions. Any discussion about something as old as the Morris is bound to run into difficulties, but when this is linked to the problematic concepts of community, tradition and ritual the task becomes almost impossibly complex. In his article John draws heavily on the work of Russell Wortley and his paper "The XYZ of Morris"<sup>1</sup>. Although I also accepted much of what Russell said at the time that he wrote the piece I have since changed my view and now I think that in his writing Russell was both right and wrong. He was true to the artistic culture of his time, but I believe he was historically incorrect.

In his book on the history of the Morris John Cutting<sup>2</sup> lists many of the earliest references to the dance, noting in particular the way in which there are fifteenth century records from across Europe. These tend to be of the same pattern that we see in the Betley Window<sup>3</sup>, and apparently show a Lady as the central figure in a circle dance. She is known as Maid Marian, but could equally be regarded as a Madonna, and it is interesting that many Tudor critics of the dance refer to "popish practices"<sup>4</sup>. If it does have references to the Catholic Church the figures surrounding the Lady could easily be characters representing The Feast of Fools, but whether or not this is a Christianised version of an older celebration I suggest will never be known, and while it may be a fascinating study for a historian of the pre-Christian era I don't think

it need trouble the modern dancer. From the time when the dance was performed in the royal court in the fifteenth century it was seen as an entertainment and its original practitioners were highly paid. Cutting notes that the court of Henry VII paid 40s in 1494 and 53s 4d in 1502 for performances of the "mores dance"<sup>5</sup>, but in common with all other art forms the dance migrated to the world first of the growing middle class and then to the common people. Arriving in the wider community it was necessarily an entertainment that took place on the only days that they had available for such pastimes, which were days in the church calendar – Sunday, Christmas, Whitsun – or days of celebration in the farming year when the working man was allowed time for relaxation – May, hay harvest, Autumn and Plough Monday. Malcolmson, in his book on Popular Recreations notes that many recreations took place in churchyards. "Moreover, many popular diversions occurred at times when people were expected to be devoting themselves to religious observances."<sup>6</sup> Putting the dance into this context certainly leaves it open to later suggestions about a connection with religious rites. And along with entertainment came the need to collect largess.

The Morris was certainly not alone in this and Bushaway<sup>7</sup> says that many pastimes demanded money, food or drink from the upper classes within the community. Indeed in an age when wages were generally low this form of ritualised begging was seen as a vital way of providing a living wage for a large part of society. But Bushaway also notes that this structure operated as a very important check and balance

within communities and there was always an underlying, unspoken threat, a kind of "give us the money or else...." The Ploughboys threat to dig up the lawn of the big house may have been no more than light-hearted banter but the threat was still there. Unfortunately it was a threat that led to the suppression of many events.

Such implied threats from the "common man" could not be tolerated at a time when Europe was in revolutionary turmoil, so the gentry, the upper and middle classes and members of the clergy, began to question whether or not it was right to sanction such apparent legalised begging, however it was dressed up, in their society. This combined with the rapid growth in the population of major cities following the Industrial Revolution, the increasing ability of gangs of youths to travel into rural areas, and concern about alcohol consumption led to most of the old pastimes being banned. Dover's Games at Chipping Campden was stopped in 1852, the Kirtlington Lamb Ale in 1858 and the Otmoor Garland day in 1863.<sup>8</sup>

However, having stopped the old entertainments because of the threat they posed to polite society, the same people who instigated the ban realised that such pastimes could be used to good effect to draw communities together. In a modern day parallel to Pope Gregory's edict to St Augustine to use pagan rites for the glory of Christ, the morris was re-introduced to show the beneficence of the Powerful. Morris at the big house was no longer the proletariat exercising their rights and demanding recognition, but The Gentry allowing the little people



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

to entertain the great and the good as a part of their natural place in Society. "The popular customary calendar had been annexed by the Victorian middle class, purged of its disagreeable features and restored as a respectable medium for the expression of social order within the village community in which concepts of 'Merry England' actually represented a new form of deference."<sup>9</sup> And in 1848 a group was founded that was to make an enormous and lasting impression on the cultural ethos of the whole country for many years to come.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood included not only the painters Rossetti, Hunt and Millais, but also the writer, craftsman and socialist William Morris. Their ideas dominated the cultural landscape, led naturally into the Aesthetic Movement, to Art Nouveau and the Arts and Crafts Movement and certainly had an impact on Cecil Sharp, Mary Neal and on the Christian Socialist Conrad Noel in Thaxted. At the same time composers were turning to folk tunes and songs for their inspiration and Frazer was publishing his epic work *The Golden Bough*<sup>10</sup>. When the Morris was found in the villages of the Cotswolds against the background of this culture it must have seemed to some like the final glorious chapter in a book that was pointing the way into a brave new century, and when that century descended not into a rural utopia but into the mud and hell of Flanders they could be forgiven for hanging on to their dreams.

I am quite sure that it was against this cultural background that Russell grew up and developed his thoughts and theories of the Morris. I have a great respect for

both Russell and his theories and because society constructs and believes in the traditions that are relevant for it, as Hobsbawm has pointed out with relation to both Scotland and Wales<sup>11</sup>, I would have no hesitation in saying that Russell was right to work within his own cultural background. Yet I would still contend that he was historically wrong, and that the available evidence as outlined above would all point to the dance being used as an entertainment. Any connection to ritual has to be supposition, because it goes beyond our current historical knowledge. I realise that seeming to both agree and disagree with Russell's argument is an awkward position to justify, but as I said at the beginning of the piece the concepts involved are difficult and complex and I am sure that people dance for many different reasons, all of which are perfectly valid for that dancer at that time. However, I think it is also important to say that ritual and entertainment are not mutually exclusive. When the choristers of Canterbury Cathedral sang the piece by William Byrd at the Canterbury Ring meeting it was not only an important part of the ritual of the Cathedral Service but also the most wonderful entertainment.

In the world prior to the onslaught of the twentieth century dance, music and song were entertainment. Brueghel's paintings of villagers dancing bring to life the exuberance and great joy of just being alive that those folks experienced through dance and it is perhaps unfortunate that no contemporary artist did the same for the Morris Dance, except possibly Erasmus Grasser in Munich, if you are happy to call

his figures Morris Dancers. In the twenty-first century things are very different and entertainment is very much seen as something that is done to people rather than something in which we take an active part, so when we try to entertain on the street we must fight the draw of the television and the computer. It may be a dreadful indictment of our society that people would rather sit alone in front of a screen than be out enjoying good company, but all types of clubs and societies are saying the same; numbers are falling and the young are not joining, whatever field we consider, from the sports to the arts. Many people would far rather Twitter or watch Big Brother than play an active part. But we can fight back, and we can do it by combining entertainment and ritual. It is possibly taking a very broad and general view of the situation, but it does seem that regular events that Sides have developed, where the community involved knows that something will happen on the same day each year, attract a larger audience than the weekly club night out. The ritual of a regular event helps, but it still needs the encouragement of entertainment to keep the audience. We are fighting a hugely sophisticated world of entertainment and unless we can provide something special for the people who have made the effort to come out the Morris will lose the battle. Perhaps it was ever thus? John Byng wrote in 1784 that he "attended to a troop of Morrice Dancers headed by the buffoon; but to me, their mummerly appear'd tedious, and as little enjoyed by the performers, as the spectators: the genius of the nation does not

*(....continued on page 12)*

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

take this turn”<sup>12</sup>. I rather think that the final part of that quote has been learnt by the organisers of the Olympics!

In conclusion therefore John, I would say that the “true purpose” of the Morris is still today what it has demonstrably been since Alice de Wetenhalle made her will in 1458, to entertain the audience. It may once have also had religious overtones, be it Pagan, Roman Catholic or Anglican, it may have provided Guilds with a means of entertaining their customers, it may have given the common man food for his table and allowed him to assert his place in society, but as it was collected and as the majority of teams and communities use it today, it was and is an entertainment.

Individual men may feel the power of the years as they dance; they may well be aware of the weight of history and of the many friends and family members who have gone before, but the greatest service we can do is to give the dance back to our communities, to instil in them the sense of the passing years and the place the Morris has occupied down all of those years, and above all to Entertain.

Mike Garland

June 2010

*\*see The Morris Ring Circular No 61, Ed*

(Endnotes)

1 Russell Wortley *The XYZ of Morris* (The Morris Ring 1978)

2 John Cutting *History and the Morris Dance* (Alton, Hampshire 2005)

3 Now in the V&A Museum, but see the

excellent article on the Window by John Price as part of the St Albans Morris Men's website at <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/john.e.price/betley.htm>

4 Malcolmson *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700 – 1850* pp. 6-7

5 Cutting, pp.107 - 108

6 Malcolmson p.5

7 Bob Bushaway *By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700 – 1880* (London 1982)

8 Bushaway *By Rite* p.246

9 Ibid. p.274

10 Sir James George Frazer *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London 1890)

11 Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge 2009)

12 Bushaway, p.242. The note says – F.Harvey-Darnton, *English Fabric: A study of Village Life* (London, n.d., probably 1935), p.205 which quotes the Torrington Diaries ed. C.B. Andrews, (London, 1934), vol.I, pp.124-5

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## ‘From Third Army Rest Camp’

As a seasoned morris dancer and dealer in old postcard, I collect morris PCs. Generally those of the original teams in Edwardian times are easy to identify if they are not

annotated through dress style, faces, etc. The attached has thrown me as it appears to show morris dancers in part army uniforms. The back is annotated with From

Third Army Rest Camp. The rest camps were for troops to have some time away from the front in WW1 and I suspect that possibly morris

dancing was encouraged as a form of relaxation and exercise by the authorities. There were so many men called up that I suspect that there were some with morris experience. Note the knot with what look like proper swords.

Hopefully something for the circular in the hope that somebody knows more or possibly can recognise a face from one of the original teams,

Regards Chris – East Surrey MM





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## North British v. the TT

### ...being a tale of steam, swords and kippers

by Martin Hanley

The inimitable gentlemen of North British Sword Dancers have for many years included in their repertoire the delightful White Boys' Dance from the Isle of Man, and have therefore long yearned to take the dance back to its origin. They originally intended to do this a couple of years ago but were scuppered by some sort of motorcycle race, which was celebrating its centenary that year. A couple of years' delay later, they decided the time was ripe to try again.

Due to a major misunderstanding (namely that the author counted as a responsible adult), the team met up in Liverpool in two different pubs, but it didn't take long until their collective wits managed to join up into one huge, tweed-clad group, leaving them free to make their way to the ferry and surge forth to the gem of the Irish Sea.

The weekend proper began early on Saturday morning (earlier for some, who had copulating pigeons in their rooms, at no extra cost!) with an trip on the Electric Railway to Laxey to view the spectacular Laxey Wheel, a working waterwheel more than 22m in diameter which used to pump water out of the nearby mines. North British used the platform on top of the structure for a rather nerve-wracking rapper dance whilst various people gazed up adoringly at their manly courage.

From here it was but a short ride to the top of Snaefell where the balmy temperatures gave way to sleet. Only the hardest of the team made it to the summit, and the wind was such that plans to dance there were abandoned, leading to our



*Right: Lady Isabella, also known as the Laxey Wheel, is the largest working waterwheel in the world.*

*Above, inset, North British attempt a rapper dance in tight circumstances*



first White Boys' Dance on the Isle of Man being performed inside the summit café instead.

After returning to more reasonable heights, we decided it was time to call in at the pub, and any that know us will realise how hard it had been for us to wait this long. We performed Elgin longsword and Saddleworth rapper, before repeating the rapper at the café by request of the owner.

That evening, we switched to rapper for a pub crawl around Douglas. The pubs were incredibly welcoming, with the high point being (as so often it is) bumping into a hen night. As is now to be expected, the ladies started to dance alongside us but, in a move against the norm, they were actually in time with the music. What could be going on?

It emerged that the hen and her cohorts were members of Perree Bane, the Isle of Man's preeminent

traditional dance side. It further emerged that they also danced the White Boys' Dance, so we all trooped outside for a run through. However, it finally emerged that our interpretation of the dance and theirs differed in a number of ways and that, while it was clear that they were the same dance, it was also abundantly clear that the two could not co-exist.

Much hilarity followed this, of course, plus we received an invitation to join them at their practice the following evening. The rest of the crawl passed in the normal manner, with the only notable incidents being dancing in the Manx Legion for a couple of hundred aged revellers, plus of course the classic sight of the Squire falling off his bus seat for no apparent reason.

Sunday dawned and brought with it another day of travelling by

(....continued on page 14)

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## North British v. the TT

.....continued from page 13



unusual public transport (today included a steam train and a horse-drawn tram), with many dance spots, quite a few of which were large enough for Papa Stour. We included the now obligatory North British paddle followed by a dance for the local youngsters on the beach, a dance in a pub dedicated to Norman Wisdom and finally a meeting with Perree Bane where we compared our approaches to the White Boys' Dance. We also joined them in a social dance which saw one of our number ending up

falling on his backside. As Andrew said, "Well, at least you didn't embarrass yourself in front of forty people you've just met. Oh no, hold on..."

Our evening rapper crawl was a little unusual, mainly because someone who should remain nameless (but won't: it was Ken) left our rappers on the train. Our evening rapper crawl therefore became an evening longsword crawl, with much in the way of Elgin and a little in the way of the White Boys' Dance.

It ended with the author being interviewed for Manx Radio, under strict instructions from the interviewee that every answer should in some way relate to the TT Races, since he was the TT correspondent. Apparently the interview went very smoothly, which is surprising given that it took place some time after midnight following heroic sampling of the local beers from Okell's and Bushey's. The evening descended from here into much more sampling, with oral sustenance in the form of pickled eggs, and nasal sustenance in the form of medicated snuff. It's these little differences that mark out a truly classy side.

Sunday morning arrived early,



*North British, left, at the appropriately named 'The British' and above, perhaps an even more appropriately named pub, The Terminus Tavern.*

All photos, Brain Tasker and Jeff Lawson

giving us just time to nip down to Peel for kipper baps, beer and a dance spot in front of a group of appreciative motorcyclists before we rushed back to Douglas for the ferry home. Ah, the subtle scent of slowly-warming kippers as we walked onto that boat!

Our final memories of the Isle of Man were of a beautiful and truly unspoilt island with an amazing amount of industrial heritage (or "public transport system" as they call it), but more than that, of a warm and generous people, a huge percentage of whom were familiar with sword dancing from their school days and who welcomed us in the most pleasing manner.

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## Following in the Footsteps

*by Sean Goddard*

Morris dancing survives on anniversaries. The Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men were formed in September 1954, and held their first ever tour on 1st May 1954, As that was a Saturday, and 1st May 2010 was also a Saturday, we felt it appropriate some 56 years later to dance at some of the same spots. But, there is more to this than you

first think.

Chanctonbury started in 1953, as an offshoot from the Shoreham Country Dance Club by men who wished to expand their knowledge of Morris Dancing. The Shoreham Club had already displayed Morris Dancing in Sussex, and in August 1953 they had attended the Europäische Trachtenwoche [European Endeavour Week] at Neustadt, Holstein, Germany

with the support of the British Government where they performed Morris and Country Dancing and met performers from other European countries.

The Shoreham Country Dance Club in the early months of 1954 decided that they were going to dance in Shoreham on 1st May to celebrate the arrival of Summer. There would be Morris dancing

*(...continued on page 15)*



by the Chanctonbury Men and Country dancing by the Shoreham Club, followed by breakfast of eggs, toast and tea (but no coffee!!!). Then the Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men along with Ravensbourne Morris Men from Kent would tour Mid-Sussex, while another tour consisting of the Martlet Morris Men from Chichester and the University Morris Men in London would tour West Sussex. Both tours to meet up again in Shoreham where there would be more dancing followed by a large Barn Dance in St. Mary's Hall. This all happened and was a great success.

The Chanctonbury and Ravensbourne tour's first stop was at the Shepherd and Dog pub in Fulking, at the base of the South Downs just north of Shoreham. Here they found a large crowd of spectators along with a BBC Outside Broadcast Unit and a staff photographer from The Times.

Paul Plumb the founder of the Shoreham Club and a founder member of Chanctonbury, was working as a National Wireless Broadcaster for the BBC, and had arranged for Harold Rogers to film the dancing at the Shepherd and Dog for the BBC's Permanent Archives - they were broadcasted again several years ago on the Jack Dee show so they still survive. The BBC's publicity unit had circulated to newspapers about the filming, and The Times telephoned Paul a few days before the tour asking if they could send a photographer down - of course Paul said yes. A photograph was taken and published in The Times the following Monday - on page 14: the back page! This photograph shows an ideal view of the dance: outside a pub, good view of the dancing and musicians, good back drop and good crowd. It has been

used many times since to illustrate Morris Dancing including The Times Calendar for 1956 and The Morris Ring's very own With a Crash and a Din...

The original photograph is reproduced here and close

The only problem we could think that would stop the photograph being taken was the amount of traffic and the addition of a man-hole cover in the dancing area. Back in 1954 you'll be lucky to have 5 cars an hour down this road,



**The Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men, at Fulking, 1954**

Photo: © and courtesy of 'The Times' newspaper

inspection will see that the Chanctonbury Men are performing the Processional Down from the dance Lads a Buncham from Adderbury. On the extreme right hand side there is Willy the Hobbyhorse and the Man/Woman. Chanctonbury decided this year to re-enact the photograph, especially as 1st May was a Saturday and men wouldn't necessarily have to go to work. Events started early in the day by dancing on top of the South Downs at Chanctonbury Ring at 7am. This was followed by a BIG traditional May Day Breakfast in Shoreham and then two dancing stands in Shoreham (both at the War Memorial where Chanctonbury also danced in 1954) before we made the short trip out to the Shepherd and Dog at Fulking.

now it's almost 5 cars a minute. We didn't worry about that too much; anyway the bright sunlight would shine off our dazzling whites and red and green baldrics so we would be seen. We knew where to stand as our fiddler Jim Hoare (nearest the camera in both photographs) was there in 1954.

Willy the Hobbyhorse has been retired for some years now and is stabled at the Marlipins Museum in Shoreham for safe keeping: he got quite upset when Chanctonbury traded him in for a new dragon in the early 1960s. Well, the dragon does eat lots of money! As the original skirt material is quite fragile, a new body and skirt was made for Willy, and the museum generously allowed his head out for the day. It was jockeyed by John Goddard

(...continued on page 16)

## ...continuing: Following in the Footsteps

who joined Chanctonbury in 1955. The Man/Woman was a problem. We contacted Alec Davey who took the part in 1954, although he would be able to come for the photograph he felt unable to take the part of the Man/Woman – as he no longer had the dress. Quite by chance, one of our members Gavin Bayfield (regular readers of The Morris Ring Circular will recall the reports of his outlandish activities at the Bathampton Ring meeting last year), said his sister ‘Gavina’ would be keen and she had a handbag. Unconfirmed reports from numerous unnamed sources suggest she was wearing two ‘Bonny Green Garters!’

Of the men in the original side, only 4 still remain – Jim Hoare (fiddle player), John Portlock and

Paul Plumb (dancing 2 and 6) and Alec Davey (the Man/Woman). The remaining participants from that day, I am sad to report have passed away.

I will end with the weather. For 1st May 1954, the Times daily weather forecast stated that there would be a Depression over the Southern England, with a Moderate South-west wind, veering North-west or North. Cloudy, rain at times. And the Midday temperature 50-52 deg. [That’ll be Fahrenheit, for the modern Morris Man its approx 10 Celsius]. Not ideal Morris Dancing weather I hear you say, but it’ll do! It was just the same this year.

Chanctonbury Men in the original photograph are

Jim Hoare, Michael Nutt and Arthur Edwards fiddles

Dancers 1, Geoff Biggs. 2, John Portlock. 3, Tony Woods. 4, Richard Trigwell. 5, Derek peachy. 6 Paul Plumb.

Taking photograph Mike Nash  
Willy the Hobbyhorse Paul Morris  
Man/Woman Alec Davey  
Fool Ian Scott-Walker

In the 2010 photograph the men are: Jim Hoare fiddle. Doug Parott melodeon; Brian Cooper concertina; John Grzegorzek hidden, but you can see his melodeon!

Dancers 1, Sean Goddard. 2 Don Faulkner. 3 Keith Willis. 4 Colin Sansom. 5 Mike Bloxsome. 6 Wal Jarvis.

Willy the Hobbyhorse John Goddard  
Man/Woman ‘Gavina’ Bayfield

*Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men, Fulking, 2010*

Photo: Roz South.

