



December 2011
Issue No 65

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Thaxted Morris Men: One Hundred, Not Out



Thaxted Morris Men dancing in Thaxted church above, and below, after the Service

Photo: Thaxted Morris Men

Over the weekend of the 3rd - 5th June 2011, Thaxted Morris Men hosted a Morris Ring Meeting. Again. Founded in 1911 on the initiative of Conrad Noël, Vicar of Thaxted, as part of the reawakening of interest in Morris dancing begun by Cecil Sharp and others, Thaxted Morris is the oldest revival side in the country. The Morris Ring Meeting was the pinnacle of their centenary year celebrations when over 400 dancers performed in and around Thaxted. More Photographs on back page and on page 9 inside this issue.



Squire's Capers

As so many of us know, organisation of a major Morris event takes months of meticulous planning in order to ensure that the execution of the gathering goes without a hitch. Our comrades at Rutland MM took this to a new level for the 330th Meeting of Morris Ring Sides. More planning than D-Day, more email enquiries than Corcoran's inbox, more reams of paperwork than the Bodleian Library, and still they managed to leave the MR Officers off the group photo of the massed troops. We shall forgive them, as this was the only blip on an otherwise faultless weekend. Our smallest county boasts some delightful villages, picturesque scenery and excellent ales and all were relished by the participants. This was the first full-blown weekend attended by our sister musicians and all involved were keen to see how this worked out. The results were spectacular. Several sides that had not been to a weekend such as this for some time or indeed ever graced us with their presence and their contribution added much flavour to the proceedings. There was a family feeling pervading the event and it felt good. Of course sides are at liberty to run these weekends as they see fit and many of the 2012 hosts were keeping a close eye on the outcome of Rutland to gauge best arrangements for their own forthcoming events. It is interesting to note that three of the four major meetings next year, Chipping Campden, Letchworth and Hartley, have decided to welcome our women musicians and we wish them as much success as Rutland. Applications are already flooding in so if you have not already applied, please do so



Peter Halfpenney, Squire of the Morris Ring
Photo: Harthill MM

quickly so as to secure your first choice venue.

It is worth pointing out that the Thaxted meeting next June (all male) may suffer a decline in interest as a hangover from the huge Centenary bash this year. So many sides attended and thus may be looking for a change in 2012 but please remember that these weekends are reliant on take-up to make them viable so please support them where you can. It may not be a landmark year for them but Thaxted will always be special.

There is a hallowed piece of God's County that lies below Saddleworth Moor made all the more special each August when the local Northwest Clog side organise the Rushcart festival. This year it was the turn of the Morris Ring's very own Treasurer Eddie Worrall to ride jockey on the cart and a damned fine cart it was too. The emotional involvement

was enormous and I am asked to pass on to him the thanks of Kleenex Tissues for the surge in product sales. If you have never experienced the Rushcart weekend, get your names to Saddleworth MM for next year's party – it's wonderful.

From Saddleworth I crossed the North Yorkshire Moors to Whitby for the annual Folk Festival. Not a Morris event per se but it was great to see many of our sides represented either attending as display sides, instructing at workshops or making up the infamous maverick Whitby Scratch Morris team.

Just to emphasize that 'Up North' doesn't close due to snow from September onward, I was pleased to accept an invitation from Lincoln & Micklebarrow MM with Harthill and an assortment of JMO sides in early September. We lit up Lincoln with some great dancing and singing and coaxed out brilliant sunshine as well. Thanks for a great day. Harthill have chalked up a few firsts in the past but this included the inaugural performance of Constant Billy in the corridor of an Arriva train!

The second weekend of October saw the 18-30 Morris gathering for their annual weekend. Oxford City Centre showcased their Saturday performances whilst on Sunday they danced at Wantage, home of their hosts, Icknield Way MM. As in recent years they made provision for the Advisory Council to gather and impart its wisdom to the SOTMR. Thank you for so doing. The slimmed down composition of the Council did not seem to impair the quality of advice and support that bolsters this weighty office and I am grateful for their sage guidance.

The winter ale feasts season was

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Squire's Capers continued

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launched for me in fine style with a trip to the revered Cambridge MM bash. Held this year in the Old Library of Pembroke College (founded in 1351), the august surroundings, formal black tie and dignified proceedings made this a memorable affair. I was informed that I was the first incumbent SOTMR to be invited since Colin Fleming in the early '70s and the significance of this great honour was not lost on me. Of course Cambridge MM are another side steeped in history and highly regarded in the MR so it was a pleasure to share their company.

Dashing home from Cambridge I followed this feast with a splendid home cooked Sunday lunch before enduring nil-by-mouth starvation in preparation for my first knee arthroscopy on the Monday. Such are the keyhole skills of the surgeons nowadays that I was able to dance at the Harthill practice that Thursday evening. If the second op in January goes as well, I shall be highly delighted.

Anker were hosts for their annual ale in November and a convivial evening with old friends and new, ample dancing, singing and general bonhomie ensured a successful event, as ever thoroughly enjoyed. Just a week later I endured a mystery tour south in the BFB TARDIS shrouded in fog to the Headington Quarry (boy!) Morris Dancers annual feast. Less dancing here restricted by the floor size but nevertheless a splendid affair with a buffet of gargantuan proportions matched by the goodwill and fine company of the home side and their guests. It is nice to stray away from one's own stomping ground giving the opportunity to meet sides from further afield that are less often in the same orbit. It

is appropriate here to thank BfB for ferrying me to a number of venues during the year. As we are geographical neighbours it makes sense to share, cut costs and ensure that the Morris Shop and its wares are present at as many Morris events as possible. We owe BfB a major debt of thanks for his efforts in raising significant funds for our cause to the benefit of all.

Much has already been written in praise of our late lamented John Maher. He had already asked me to consider arrangements to relieve him of the Morris Ring Website earlier in the year and his untimely demise precipitated the need to move ahead with this project quickly. We considered a number of alternative strategies, interviewed prospective specialists and, taking into account the amount of work involved and the national importance of the Website, we decided to award the project on a commercial basis to Natty Web Development, a company run by Martin Jones, present Squire of Dartington MM. Lack of Officer expertise in this field required us to refer to a number of our flock for technical evaluation, assistance in determining the most suitable format of the new site and in the preparation and transfer of information from the existing site. The working party involved have the grateful thanks of the Officers for their diligence in moving the project forward. In particular I must mention Keith Ashman (Manchester MM) who has gone beyond the call of duty in providing logistical and practical help to Natty WD. Progress on the work has been measured and methodical, weeding out the obsolete, updating the redundant and introducing the contemporary. We have asked

Natty WD to anticipate future uses for the site, particularly in making archival information available to the general public, as well as providing simple access and navigability to all that we presently derive from the site; promotion of the music and dance, the Morris Shop, news, publications, events and so on. The new site www.themorrisring.org was launched in November and has already been awarded much praise for its layout. The new editors are now being trained to add in those pages not yet uploaded and we expect the site to be fully populated by early New Year. We extend a huge vote of thanks to Martin Jones for his efforts and a job so well done.

Well the first snows of winter are with us. Armistice Day is behind us and that can only mean that the Sheffield Carols season has begun. Harthill Morris have been warming the Beehive in our home village with their harmonious warbling, we have attended a lovely acapella session with Bert Cleaver and friends at Silkstone Common and of course attended several of the local carol gatherings in the pubs of Sheffield. If all of this is a mystery to you, do try and make arrangements to come to Sheffield and samples these delights. They are truly festive treats.

I hope you all enjoyed a cracking dance out on the feast of Stephen. I wish all our dancers, musicians, families and friends a very happy 2012.

Peter J Halfpenney
Squire of the Morris Ring
December 2011

Stafford Morris Men -50 years a Morris Ring Member

by Peter Copley

The Day of Dance was to help celebrate the 50th anniversary of Stafford Morris Men joining the Morris Ring in 1961. The organization of the event was delegated to Andy Cooper (who was unable to attend on the day due to a family bereavement) and Mark Carter (who then moved to Hereford and coordinated via the Internet, but was in charge during the day).

A number of clubs were invited, but those attending were full sides from Manchester MM and Leominster MM. In addition there was a good representation from Jockey MM. The host club was well represented by about 16 members, including some of the boys who dance with the side. WAGS were also present to form a core audience. The format was a walking tour of Stafford, thus reducing costs and travelling.

The weather for the day was reasonably warm and sunny with no sign of rain – ideal for dancing. The various groups assembled on the large paved area outside the Guildhall. There was already a captive audience queuing to view



Leominster, above; Simon & Son below left, from Stafford Morris Men, dancing The Abnalls, Lichfield; and Stafford's Musicians Gordon, Peter-Stafford's first Squire, 1957- and Terry

Photos: Keith Ashman, Manchester Morris Men

the Staffordshire Hoard which was on tour. The teams took it in turns to dance and the developing crowd was able to see contrasting dance styles – Cotswold, North West and Border.

Similar shows were held outside Marks & Spencer and the Ancient High House, again to good audiences. Between the two spots, men were diverted to take ale at Joxter Brady's. An excellent lunch was taken at the recently opened 'Pie and Ale House', where an upstairs room with its own bar was reserved for the attendees. There was plenty of time allocated for eating, drinking, chatting and a bit of singing.

The post prandial activity revisited Marks & Spencer, followed by a show outside 'The Chambers', a Grade 2 listed building, where an afternoon pint was available. The final show was in Victoria Park, augmented by Alison Simpson (associated with Jockey MM) performing a clog dance, as well as audience participation

in Bonny Green Garters. The Stafford Squire, Peter Copley, thanked the organisers and everybody for attending, including those he had known from the early 1970s! It was then time for most of Manchester MM to return home by train as they were now adjacent to the station.

The remainder moved off to The Luckpenny (Stafford MM's 'local') where Richard, the landlord, put on a fine spread for teatime refreshment, the bread being made by David Austen, Stafford MM's master baker.

Thank You to the organizers and the attendees for making the day so successful.



Still ‘Reignin’ after 75 years a Morris Ring Member

by Keith Ashman

Wherever you travel Manchester’s reputation, for its weather, seems to go before it – damp! But then we Mancunians don’t overly moan about the rain because we’ve grown up with it and for those who have adopted the City as home they’ve just had to get used to it. And you have to remember that it was Manchester’s climate that ensured it became the international centre of the cotton and textile processing industries during the 19th century, gaining it the title ‘Cottonopolis’. So, it came as no surprise on Saturday 17 September, 2011 the morning of our Day of Dance in celebration of 75 years of Ring membership, when the weather forecast was, how shall we say, not the brightest. Still if the weather and the City needed brightening up - what better way than to have nine morris sides performing across the city centre, all day long.

The planning had all been completed, permissions arranged, invitations accepted and we were determined that such an important milestone should be well and truly marked.

Thankfully the forecast didn’t put our friends off either and Manchester Morris Men were delighted to be joined for the celebration day by old friends Leeds Morris Men, the Britannia Coco-nut Dancers of Bacup, Thelwall Morris Men, Fiddlers Fancy Women’s Morris, Saddleworth Morris Men, Mossley Morris Men and contingents from Jockey Morris Men of Birmingham and Stafford Morris Men.

All started well in Piccadilly Gardens, where Manchester got the proceedings under way, and things were going reasonably well until a few spits of rain towards the end

of the last dance. Unfortunately, as Thelwall took their places to dance there was an ominous darkening of the sky and by the time they’d

The main thing was that everyone was true to the spirit of the day and our 75 years of Ring membership was well and truly marked in the



Manchester Morris Men and Jockey Morris Men dancing on water!

Photo: Manchester Morris Men

finished there was a definite rush for cover, coats and umbrellas as the clouds opened up. Fortunately it dried up after a little while as the teams set off in their tour groups, making for the various dance locations across the city centre.

Throughout the day the tours criss-crossed the City so that everyone had an opportunity to dance at each of the venues and appreciative audiences had something to brighten up their day. Changing venues also provided an opportunity for teams to dodge some of the heavy cloud bursts that were now rapidly becoming a feature of the late morning – early afternoon. Some teams were becoming more adept at this ‘dodging’ than others. Thelwall, it seemed, were having a job mastering the skill, whilst other nameless ones always seemed to be close to a local hostelry at the appropriate time!

late afternoon – by which time the weather had dried up - when all the teams came together again in St Ann’s Square, in the heart of the City, for a series of showcase performances. This was before a large and approving audience, many of whom commented very favourably on the spectacle before them, with several suggesting that it should become a regular event.

This all passed in warm autumn sunshine and without any further interference from the elements. At its conclusion those that had trains or buses to catch set off for the station, whilst those remaining headed for the pub to round off with a celebratory drink.

Throughout the day we had asked each tour to collect at every dance venue they visited as we had decided to share the bag equally between the Ring Archive and our own Manchester Morris Men’s fund for fostering contacts in local

.....Still 'Reignin' after 75 years continued

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like once again to thank all the sides for their splendid collecting efforts on the day.

It proved an excellent event, thoroughly enjoyed by everyone and Manchester Morris Men would, once again, like to thank everyone for helping us to mark, so successfully, this very special 75th year in our 81 year history.

education.

Consequently we were very pleased when, in October, we were able to

send a cheque for £225.00 to Ed Worrall, being the Ring's share of the day's bag. In this respect we'd

Saddleworth Morris Men prepare to dance

Photo: Manchester Morris Men

Cambridge Morris Men Ale – Saturday 26 November

by Mike Stevens

It was my privilege to attend the Cambridge Ale on Saturday 26 November. Held as usual in the Harston Village Hall, the event was attended by representatives from Anker, Colchester, Devil's Dyke, East Suffolk, King's Men (of King's Lynn), Letchworth and Peterborough. In the unavoidable absence of their Squire, Cambridge men were led by Matt Simons who also proved a capable MC for the evening.

The dance list was a comprehensive selection from popular traditions – some simple and some more challenging - and as most sides attended with musicians we were provided with an effective musical collective for the dancing. Cambridge has for many years welcomed female musicians to their Ale and this event was no exception, with such representatives from three Morris sides, illustrating just how vital

these individuals are to their teams.

I was particularly pleased to note the presence of Devil's Dyke MM their musician and I welcome their decision to apply for full membership of the Morris Ring now that they perceive there is no longer a bar to the recognition of women musicians. The support to them from local sides is demonstrated by the agreement by Cambridge MM to propose their membership. I am sure that the ARM will also welcome them.

I was pleased to see past Squire of the Ring, Mike Garland, current Squire's Fool and South Midlands Area Rep, Roger Comley of Letchworth and Cambridge musician, Michael Blanford, now looking a lot fitter but sadly no longer playing his rather heavy accordion. Also present were a couple of juniors from East Suffolk and Peterborough who both acquitted themselves well, demonstrating good knowledge of the dances and attractive technique

and style.

This report would be incomplete without proper mention of the food and beer. Graham Cox provided a very tasty meal of vegetable stew with baked potato and sausages (or vegetarian option), followed by cheeses and granary bread. And plenty of time to enjoy it and the conversations that accompanied it. Two very acceptable beers were provided from the Potton brewery and at the end I noticed John Jenner loading a very light barrel into his car having distributed the remaining samples in reused one and two litre containers. So, nicely judged there, chaps!

Finally, should it be that I have left out some important fact, my excuse is that it was probably missed through my own inattention – due to having a thoroughly enjoyable evening myself. Thank you all for your company and thank you Cambridge.

The writer is Eastern Area Rep



The Morris Ring Circular Editorial



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It seems a long time that Christmas has been and gone and many of you will have enjoyed your traditional event of Mumming, Dancing and Wassailing. Whatever your seasonal participation the next issue is celebrate that time of year so a request that your photos and reports be sent post haste.

Your reports for this issue were most welcome and appreciate the response to the earlier request. Such was the response that certain items have failed to appear in this issue, but will surface in the next. I have held over a couple of obituaries too.

Please forgive the small font for the Unconvention-it fits perfectly! All it requires me to say is good luck to who ever is elected to Squire of The Morris Ring in February, where, if not before, hope to see many of you at the ARM.. Happy dancing in this the Olympic and Diamond Jubilee Year.



Greensleeves' hosted Morris Ring Meeting



*These Photos: from top left, clockwise:
Greensleeves Morris Men in Hemel Hempstead;
Greensleeves Morris Men in Ashridge Park, with victim
and the Bridgewater Memorial in background;
Steve-The BFB-Adamson, at The White Horse, Bourne
End; and
Dolphin Morris Men in Ashridge Park
A report of the meeting is on pages 10-13.*

Photos: H Stevenson

New Editors of The Morris Dancer

Editorial staff changes have been seen in the Morris Dancer publication since the retirement of David (Thommo) Thompson. We are delighted to welcome Andy Bullen, abullen@ameritech.

net (Chicago) and Mac McCoig, mac.mccoig@btinternet.com (Utttoxeter Heart of Oak) as new co editors. We trust that you will point them to any articles, photos etc of academic interest to grace future

editions and we wish them well in the execution of their Offices.

Peter Halfpenney
Squire of The Morris Ring

The 2011 Unconvention-for Fools & Animals

by John 'Knotty' Edwards

This event was hosted by Kennet Morris Men in Bracknell, was a well-run and thoroughly enjoyable occasion. The food was good and various dietary foibles were well catered for. The scout leaders did well to produce excellent food all weekend.

On arrival Peter and Clive, the two main organisers, welcomed us. The weather was kind to the outside sleepers, as indeed it was for the whole of the weekend, the rain just starting as we departed for our returns home.

On Friday the customary opportunity to meet old friends and make new ones was well exploited and the usual suspects, having participated in the song and music session, took the opportunity to exchange anecdotes until about 3 a.m. despite the 8 a.m. breakfast scheduled for later in the morning. Julian clearly takes his responsibility to heart by ensuring that everyone else is asleep before he begins his nocturnal symphony concert. He always travels to our gatherings with a pocket full of earplugs, but few requested them this year.

Remarkably, this Unconvention had the unique spectacle of fools and beasts being early for the published activities. Even the return to GMT for the Sunday did not change this although the extra hour's drinking / sleeping was very welcome. This feature has been a traditional aspect of Unconventions for many years.

We dutifully gathered at 9.15 for the bus tour and the hobbyhorses were impressed with the attention to detail of Peter de Courcy in booking Horseman Coaches for this task. Richard, our driver quickly got to grips with the strange cargo that needed to be unloaded at each stop. He even dealt with the beasts, instruments and sticks as well!

The first stop was the 'Frog and Wicket', as displayed prominently below the pub sign, "The home of Yateley Morris". For fear of seeing his carefully planned programme go up in smoke, Peter had urged us not to get off the bus while Yateley got on. As a result of Eliot Brady having trouble catching up with his masked horse there was a short delay, so a few disobeyed Peter's request and were rewarded with jugs of free beer. With Yateley now in the party we travelled to our first spot in Reading. This was



outside the old town hall where we met up with a fine contingent of Kennet Morris Men. Fortunately, both sides were very tolerant to an inordinate number of fools and beasts interfering with their dances. For those involved in "communicating the dance to the audience" an excellent leaflet entitled "What on earth am I watching" had been produced. The next spot in Reading, Broad Street, had a bigger audience, with many nationalities included, needing further explanations. It was a privilege to be able to meet so many people supportive of our folk traditions from home and abroad. What a pity the organisers of the Olympic opening ceremony are not amongst them, as many people felt that traditional activities, such as ours, are just what should be portraying British culture. Apparently, permission could not be obtained to dance in the large Oracle shopping centre nearby, but Knotty took his rider shopping there and caused a bit of a stir. Does Reading not see hobbyhorses on escalators every day? After a quick pub stop at the Allied Arms, the dancing continued next door in front of the Minster of St Mary. At this spot, never to be upstaged by anybody, Henning saw fit to commandeer a bicycle and go through his fooling routine on two wheels, rather than two legs. A feat that later gained him the special award for the weekend's most innovative manoeuvre. A bit of a trek to the Nags Head for a pie and beans lunch outside in the yard gave a bit more time for a natter, which is more than could be done inside as the clientele were glued to a number of TV screens showing the Chelsea v Arsenal match. We

were treated to the company of one of the country's most respected fools, Geoff Hebditch, (late of King John's Morris), who is now sadly confined to wheelchair. This restriction seems to have had precious little effect on his ability to participate in the Morris, or his sense of humour. Julian, who introduced him, later said that it was Geoff who had inspired him to take up fooling, leaving the assembled company to muse on whether that had been a good thing.*

Suitably fed and watered the Unconventioners boarded the bus to the 'Frog and Wicket' for another dancing spot. Following the dancing, the pub's skittle alley was pressed into service for a match between Fools, Beasts, Maidens and Musicians. The match was very close with the Fools and Maidens being declared equal first, as the coach had to leave for Bracknell before a decider could be played. After a short period of rest and recuperation fortified by tea or coffee and chocolate biscuits the company got spruced up for the feast, for which the tables had again been rearranged, this time with a 'top table'. The occupants of that table were the Squire and the Convener of the Illustrious Order, the Squires of the supporting teams and our guest of honour Roy Dommett and his good lady. The traditional toasts followed the excellent meal accompanied by copious beer and cider, and some great singing by people nominated from each



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.....Unconvention continued

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Photos: previous page: Peter de Courcy, the Kennet Morris Men Fool and above, the Unconvention throng.

Photos: The Unconvention

table. At the end of the feast certificates were awarded to new full and associate members. This year was notable as the Unconvention where we admitted our first sentient canine associate member, Rodney, who had done a great job entertaining the crowds during the day.

The tables were then cleared for dancing, which gave a number of folk who had been encumbered by their beastly friends, to join in the session. Most of us heard some new songs, but whether we will remember them all is very doubtful, possibly due to the rate the barrels were being emptied and various hip flasks sampled.

Sunday breakfast at 8 a.m. seemed a more reasonable time than on the previous day and once again everyone was ready for their bacon, scrambled eggs,

mushrooms and toast.

Yet another rearrangement of the furniture set the scene for the AGM. This was attended by some 35 members, possibly our biggest turn out for some years. The details of the meeting are recorded elsewhere, but matters were discussed in an efficient and businesslike manner to ensure that we were ready for the next session at 10 a.m.

We were honoured that Peter had persuaded Roy Dommett, to come out of semi- retirement for our benefit. Roy has made an amazing contribution to the preservation and development of the Morris in this country in parallel with his work as a rocket scientist at Farnborough for which he was made a CBE. Roy regaled us with words of wisdom about the philosophy and practicalities of

being 'Morris Characters' based on his many years of experience. The talk was inspirational for both long standing and new members of our organisation and made us think about how we could make our individual contribution to the tradition. He has provided us with some documents setting out some of his thoughts and advice on the subject, which will appear on the "foolsandbeasts" web site.

After thanking our scouting hosts for helping to make this weekend so enjoyable, numerous cars and vans departed for Henley on Thames for the next tour. After some trauma in parking, we arrived at the first spot on the river towpath at Mill Meadow, where Winsor Morris the local ladies team were already entertaining a substantial crowd. The arrival of lots of fools and beasts added much colour to the occasion. Another session outside the church of St Mary by Henley Bridge, again with an interested, but moving audience completed the dancing programme for 2011. We then repaired to the Catherine Wheel-a J D Wetherspoon's establishment to enjoy our pre-ordered lunches. We counted the last of the collections, which resulted in the weekend breaking even on costs, which was an added bonus.

We were all grateful for the hard work done by our hosts to make this a successful Fools and Beasts Unconvention.

*(Sadly, soon after the Unconvention, Geoff Hebditch was killed in a road traffic accident--Obituary in next edition)



A selection of Steve Archer's Photos taken at the Morris Ring Meeting in Thaxted, featuring Ravensbourne

The 329th Morris Ring Meeting at Chipperfield - 8-10 July 2011

by Roy Fenton

It's what comes of being kind to Ring officials. A few years ago, they called for volunteers to hold Ring meetings, as many clubs were put off organising these by the expense of hiring suitable buildings, especially schools which come with contracted, invariably pricey, caterers. Volunteering was easy for the then squire of Greensleeves, as he was confident that he would no longer be in office by 2011. The idea was sold to the club as it was both the 50th Chipperfield weekend, and – more prosaically – Greensleeves' 85th year.

There was something ironic in turning the club's annual Chipperfield weekend into a Ring meeting. These weekends had been started all those years ago when certain members of the club felt that Ring meetings were getting far too big, and wanted a more intimate event where Greensleeves could get to know the guests. So Chipperfield was started as an antidote to Ring meetings, a sort of 'I'm sorry I haven't a Squire of the Ring'.

Readers may be vaguely aware that Greensleeves are based in South West London, and even more vaguely aware that Chipperfield is nearer Watford than Wimbledon. Why then, do we hold our meetings so far from home? This is a question that Greensleeves often ask, especially when setting off on a 100-mile round trip to poster a pub. In fact, about seven squires ago, Leslie Nichols lived in Chipperfield, and thought it an ideal venue for a Morris gathering. He has been proven right, as this attractive and well-heeled village



Green Man dance North Skelton at Bekonscot Model Village

Photo: Greensleeves MM

on the edge of the Chilterns has taken Morris men to its heart, and we are made very welcome. It has a village hall, excellent pubs, a school field for camping, good

pubs, and several halls for indoor sleeping. And did I mention its fine pubs?

The constraints of the Chipperfield weekend, where meals are cooked and served in the village hall, meant that a cap had to be put on numbers. In the event, six clubs originally applied and six were accepted: Dolphin, Green Man, Long Man, Martlet, Ripley and Winchester. This conveniently made for two tours, with three guest clubs plus a Greensleeves' side on each. It has to be said that, apart from the welcome presence of Ring officials, it was not unlike the larger of the recent Chipperfield weekends.

After guests have been fed, the tradition on the Friday evening of a Chipperfield weekend is that at 9.00pm Greensleeves turn out to dance and invite any other guest side to put on kit and join them. Traditionally, they all decline, and

Greensleeves dance Alison's Fancy at Coleshill.

Photo: Greensleeves MM



.....The 329th Morris Ring Meeting continued.....

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Greensleeves are left to dance The Rose, Fieldtown around a tree on Chipperfield Common . planted by the club in memory of the aforementioned Leslie Nichols, who is buried in the local church yard. Greensleeves did a few more dances on the road outside The Two Brewers, after which the guests were shepherded into Chipperfield's pubs for music and singing. At closing time they were invited back to the hall for bread pudding.

Saturday tours

The Nichols Tour (there's that man again) took Green Man, Martlet and Ripley to the Chiltern town of Chesham, where two stands were danced. As a reward for dancing at these dry stops, the teams were led to the estimable Queen's Head, a Fuller's pub which would be paradise itself if only it had a decent dancing spot. The tour, its route tried and tested over many a beery summer, then proceeded by way of the Merlin's Cave at Chalfont St Giles to Coleshill for lunch at the Red Lion. Here those toiling in the village hall's kitchen for the morning joined the



Photo: H Stevenson

sides for lunch. It is appropriate to record that a certain Alison Bone, née Cleaver, could witness Greensleeves dancing Alison's Fancy, both tune and dance in the Sherborne style being devised by her father, name of Bert.

The afternoon stop on this tour is

controversial amongst Greensleeves. Those in favour cite an unfailingly appreciative audience, a level dancing surface, and an opportunity to enjoy tea or ice cream. Those against point out that the pub in Bekonscot is, like the rest of the village, just a scale model. As if to placate the latter tendency, the tour wound down by stopping off for refreshment and light dancing at the Boot, Tower Hill, before returning to Chipperfield.

The other squire who had a tour named after him was Greensleeves' first, N.O.M. Cameron. This did not please those running this tour, who did not relish leading Dolphin, Long Man and Winchester off on a tour whose title might suggest it honoured a contemporary holder of the name, often seen on the



Winchester at the Black Horse, Chesham Vale

Photo: David Legg



Greensleeves, 'The Rose, in Hemel Hempstead with guest, Charlie Corcoran

Photo: David Legg

news saying nothing in a sincere tone of voice.

The first stops were in Hemel Hempstead, a town so dull that its most notable feature is a roundabout. However, serial dancing in a pedestrianised precinct named The Marlowes elicited a few coins from the audiences. It also gave opportunities for officiating club officials Peter Halfpenney and Charlie Corcoran to shake

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.....The 329th Morris Ring Meeting continued.....

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their bells and do something useful by helping out Dolphin and Greensleeves. The tour squire was quite content that the first pub stop, at The White Horse, Bourne End, should be run on the basis of 'buy a beer first and only dance if you encounter an audience'. But audience there was, and Dolphin eschewed the delights of McMullen's beer to entertain them. Such unauthorised dancing almost got them barred from sharing the chips very kindly dispensed by the landlord and landlady of The White Horse. The next stop, the Black Horse, Chesham Vale, is a pleasant country pub, but suspicions that it was mainly a lunch-eating pub were confirmed when only three people came out to witness the dancing. However, when the sun came out, the sight of the sides dancing in front of the pub was little short of chocolate-box-perfect. Keenly anticipated was the lunch spot, The Full Moon at Hawridge (rhymes with porridge), a gem of a country pub high up on a Chiltern ridge. Its beer had been tested and pronounced excellent, its landlord



Long Man at the Black Horse, Chesham Vale

Photo: David Legg

knew all about the Morris, his staff were happy to cater for us, and the rain continued to hold off. So what could go wrong? Well, for the second consecutive stop, the audience let us down, although the guest sides did not let it worry them. In fact, it proved hard to stop them dancing.

In order to protect the guilty, we'll give the name 'Beechcrest' to the afternoon stop at a National Trust site. During previous Chipperfield tours, it has proved an excellent place to perform, with numerous visitors and the opportunity to

sip a post-dance tea in glorious surroundings. We had danced near the cafe, on grass in dry years and on the hard standing in wet. However, we had reckoned without the vengeful figures of the primates who ran the cafe, who decided we were distracting their customers from their over-priced fare. The officials of the National Trust, for whom the caterers were tenants, crumpled at their wailing and initially refused to let us dance at all. On appeal this decision was reversed, but on arrival we were met by a NT official: ominous as



Martlets at the Bekonscot Model Village

Photo: Greensleeves MM

Dolphin at the Full Moon, in Hawridge

Photo: David Legg



they usually had to be searched for. The lady was adamant that we could only dance in the centre of a soggy field. Roads fully 20-feet wide could not possibly be used for fear that we might hold up 'mobility vehicles' (wheelchairs to the rest of us) all of two-feet wide. In the event dancing mid-field did attract a very respectable, if slightly distant, audience.

The winding down stop, The Windmill, Chipperfield, was reached just as showers returned, excusing us from the need to dance.

Saturday evening

The traditional Pimms party which

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Dolphin at the White Horse, Bourne End

Photo: H Stevenson

precedes the Chipperfield feast was held under gazebos to hold off the rain. The event was extended as the feast was running a little late, due to an unfortunate incident the previous day on the Barnsley to Chipperfield motorway. Bert Cleaver was conveying much of the weekend's food in his trailer when he was rear-ended by another vehicle, demolishing this not-unsturdy, homemade appendage, and scattering half the veal for the feast over several lanes of blacktop. Substitute beef had to be purchased on the Saturday, understandably delaying the cooking process, and putting the feast back about 20 minutes.

But no-one would have known anything was amiss with the food,

who, in the club's opinion, contribute to the gaiety of nations, or to our bag. Yes, for his regular attendance at Chipperfield, the pleasure of his company, the devotion of his collecting (and for bringing with him the friend who sometimes plays the whistle), we were delighted to bestow our badges of membership - a pair of green sleeves - on Little Willy. (To keep him happy, the BFB was

which set the tone for a wholly pleasant evening. Squire of the Ring, Peter Halfpenney, proposed the toast to the Immortal Memory. The remaining toasts were preceded by granting honorary membership of Greensleeves, an award given sparingly to those

given a pair too.)

Sunday

Greensleeves' log records nothing untoward breaking the routine of a Ring meeting's Sunday morning. The clubs processed a few hundred yards to the car park adjacent to the Chipperfield Parish Church using an interesting processional dance, half Wheatley and half Bampton. Greensleeves performed Greensleeves (what else?) in the Fieldtown tradition during the open-air service, which was followed by a very-well-attended massed show. The clubs



Long Man form up to dance to an appreciative audience in Chipperfield

Photo: Greensleeves MM

then Winstered through the village to The Windmill for a further show before lunch was taken in the pub garden.

From Greensleeves' perspective, the 329th meeting of the Morris Ring (the fifth the club has hosted at Chipperfield since 1976) was a success, barely distinguishable from a regular Chipperfield, with no known outbreaks of unpleasantness. The guests departed happy (or so they claimed), leaving us a whole afternoon of washing up.

Ripley with unicorn, in Chipperfield

Photo: Greensleeves MM



Sword Dance Union's 'Day of Dance'

Part I

by Andrew Morris

It is often said that Monseaton Morrismen are best known for their spectacular Rapper sword dance. However, the team also perform Longsword to a high standard. This was clearly demonstrated at the Sword Dance Union's 'Day of Dance and Longsword Tournament' held at Guisborough, North Yorkshire on 15th October 2011. The day was hosted by Monseaton's old friends Redcar Sword Dancers whom themselves are previous Tournament winners. After a chilly summer we all

Accurate stepping combined with precise figures won the day for Monkseaton who were presented with their trophy by the Mayor. Later, stewards also awarded The Trevor Stone Memorial Trophy to Monkseaton which is given to the most entertaining performance of the day. Many, many thanks to Redcar our excellent hosts. We aim to defend our honour at next year's Tournament.

However, the main day of dance each year for Monkseaton Morrismen is 1st January outside the Ship public house in Monkseaton. The display begins at Noon precisely with a Cotswold processional. Last year in excess of 500 spectators watched and it has become a fixed day in the community calendar. This year is the 40th New Year's Day performance held at this venue and the weather never stops the performance as you can see above. Monkseaton dance various Cotswold, Longsword



Monkseaton Morrismen

Photo: Mrs Morris

delighted in wonderful autumn sunshine during the outdoor dance displays. Redcar Sword are both warm-hearted and well organised and the crowds enjoyed the splendid dancing from a wide range of teams.

In the afternoon came the Tournament itself a time for serious dancing held at nearby Prior Pursglove College. There were three classes of dances: Youth Team; Traditional and Own Dance. Monkseaton prefer traditional dances and chose to display the Ampleforth. This ritual dance was taken at a steady pace and the quiet atmosphere was electric.

and Rapper dancing including the Ampleforth Tournament winning dance, but combined with its original Mumming Play. The main dancing finale is always the North Walbottle 7-man Rapper. After this, dancing will continue in the bars of the Ship, Black Horse and Monkseaton Arms. See you there, this year!

Part 2

by

Brian Pearce

An appreciative audience of fellow dancers and members of the public filled the Stephen Whitehead Theatre to capacity and saw Monkseaton Morrismen,



Monkseaton Morrismen performing the Ampleforth Sword Dance and Play

Photo: Steve Metteam, Grenoside Sword Dancers

Stone Monkey from Derby and Maltby Nestlings from Rotherham earn themselves a well deserved place in the record books as winners of their classes. Brian Pearce of Redcar Sword Dancers said 'The day exceeded our expectations – excellent weather, first class performances from all the teams and the generous support of the people of Guisborough. Many people have helped to make this event possible, for which we thank them, but we would particularly like to thank Prior Pursglove College for the use of their outstanding facilities, and the Mayor of Guisborough, Councillor Mike Kilby and the Mayor of Redcar and Cleveland, Councillor Olwyn Peters for their support.

The Mayor of Guisborough, Mike Kilby, with the dancers at the Market Cross.

Photo: Steve Metteam



Peterborough Morris Day of Dance 24 September 2011

With a Fool & a Cock!

by Peter Copley

At about 10 am, on a dry, muggy September morning, there was an assembly of morris men gathering outside Peterborough Cathedral Gate to help celebrate the local side's day of dance. There was almost a full side of King's Men, two men from Forester's MM and one from Stafford MM; in addition there were a number of WAGS, some of whom were musicians. These and other musicians produced enough volume of music to fill the large dancing area in front of the cathedral, which was partly shared by a BBC tent advertising local history.

The first scheduled show of the walking tour was for 1030, with a massed Wheatley Processional announcing the start of the event, which soon gathered a sizeable audience, especially with two sides performing. The show was augmented by the Peterborough Fool, Matt, who was resplendent in his blue and orange kit and painted white face. This was to be his last morris event before going to University where he was intending to join Leicester MM. In addition to the Fool, there was also an animal, or strictly speaking a giant cockerel, the alter ego of Matt's dad, Richard. The next show outside the town hall was adjacent to a stall offering free copies of the Koran; the music and dance



Oliver Simons dancing in.

was certainly enjoyed by those manning the stall. In addition, a dog wearing its own baldric, in Stafford MM colours, was spotted on its owner's lap sitting outside Costa Coffee.

The first official ale of the day (Charles Wells) was had inside The Grapevine (there being a byelaw re outside drinking). During the show, three members of the host side were admitted as full members, two leading a dance and the youngest Ollie (the Fool's brother) dancing a jig. The Cathedral was the backdrop for the next show. Men were getting hungry, so they soon repaired to The City for a buffet and bottled real ale. Men and WAGS did justice to the food with very little remaining. A short music session followed to aid

digestion.

En route to the Rivergate centre, a show was given outside Comet and Iceland to a meager passing audience.

It was then over the river Nene to Charters, a boat moored on the river. The boat had a restaurant on top, underneath which was a bar serving about 12 real ales (decisions, decisions...). The enterprise has strong links with Oakham Ales, which, confusingly, are brewed in Peterborough! The final show of the day was back at the Cathedral Gate which finished with most of Matt's fan club joining in a quite passable Bonny Green Garters. Tea and stickies were next on the agenda.



There had been plenty of dancing and music and so this final event was most welcome. There was a presentation to Ian Paul, founder member and Foreman of Peterborough MM, as well as a hand over of Bagman.

Thanks to Peterborough MM for organising a most enjoyable day and their WAGS and Hugh for providing the tea and stickies.

Photos:

Matt Simons, Fool & his Cock, above.

Photo: Oliver, top and Matt – Peter Copley

Left, Outside the Cathedral

Photo: from Peterborough MM



Thaxted Morris Men: One Hundred and Counting



From top, clockwise:

Saddleworth entertain the large crowd before the Feast on Saturday

Photo: Steve Archer

The Feast, in Thaxted Church

On Sunday, Thaxted Morris Men dance in Thaxted Church

*and finally, above
The Thaxted Morris Men*

Photos, except top: Thaxted Morris Men

