

ISSUE 71

Summer 2015

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The Morris Ring *Circular*

Leyland Morris Men's revival of a historic dance honours those of their number who fought and fell in the Great War, writes club archivist **Roy Smith**.

"Mr Cecil Sharp...will give a lecture in the Public Hall on Monday...illustrated by limelight views, and also by a practical exhibition of dancing," read a notice in the *Leyland Parish Magazine* for February 1914. The event must have enthused some of those present, for at that year's Leyland May Festival the Morris Dancers performed not only their own dances but — for the first and last time — the Flamborough Sword Dance, too.

Sadly, that was to be the last dancing some of those young men ever did. In less than three months war had broken out and we know of at least four of the team who died in the conflict, plus another who was maimed. When the May Festival was next held, in 1919, there was no Flamborough dance on the programme.

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Only three days after his arrival at the Front, **Dick Berry** was badly wounded.

Studio portrait
c.1903.

1914

REMEMBERED

👉 p1

A hundred years on, the current Leyland team took the decision to perform the Flamborough dance once again. Only four of us could claim to have ever performed the dance before; for the others it was like stepping off a cliff! However, there was no lack of enthusiasm, with twelve members practising to fill the eight places — which was no bad thing. The band assiduously worked up a sequence of tunes: some traditionally associated with the dance and some not, including one specially written for the occasion by one of our musicians, Sue Jennings.

Early experiences alternated between the hilarious, the painful and the unbelievable, but things did begin to slowly improve. Although we shall never know how the two performances a hundred years apart compared, Mr Sharp would probably have described each as “a work in progress”! Nevertheless, we remained up-beat and were delighted to be invited to show the dance at a First World War exhibition being organised locally by South Ribble Borough Council in mid-June.

We began the evening with a photo shoot at Leyland Cross (the logo we use on the backs of our waistcoats) before launching into our first public performance. “Concentrate on the dance: remember it’s Friday 13th — and if



Present-day members of **Leyland Morris Men** (and below left) perform the *Flamborough Sword Dance* 100 years on.

All photographs Leyland Morris Men



Richard Lazenby was the Club's Secretary. He died in Mesopotamia in August 1918. **Leyland MM archive**

ever anything was going to go wrong...” we were reminded. Well, nothing did go wrong and we felt both relieved and pleased. Next we made for the lawn behind the nearby Parish Hall, for more photographs. Once upon a time this was the lawn-cum-tennis court of the old Vicarage, where early Leyland Morris teams would assemble to have their photo taken prior to each year's May Festival.

Then it was on to the Exhibition itself, which was being held at both the local museum and St Andrew's Parish Church, from which the team had originated 125 years ago. We went through the dance several more times for the large crowd and the response we had was most encouraging.

A week later we felt sufficiently confident — or foolhardy — to put on the dance again, at the modern Leyland Festival, and we were thrilled to discover that grandchildren of one of the WWI casualties mentioned had travelled over from Bolton specifically to see the performance.

We enjoyed the experience of learning the dance and re-creating a bit of local history but, most importantly, we felt we'd done our best to honour the memory of those brave young men.



Squire's Capers

Adam Garland, Squire of the Morris Ring, has been out and about at an event near you...

Well met, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Morris Ring. Since my last ramblings I have attended Mendip's evening in mid-December and the Jigs Instructional weekend in mid-January, both well worth going to if ever you get the chance.

Ripley's feast was the usual pleasant evening supported by many; the musician's workshop seemed to have been successful and the whole thing was wrapped up by Gilbert's cheese and black puddings spread.

Following this came Leicester's Feast; again another pleasant evening in good company.

I then attended the AGM of the Joint Morris Organisations (JMO). The majority of information was presented to sides through our ARM paperwork, but I can now advise that the Statement of Purpose has been formally accepted by the committee and is thus a good step forward in this environment of co-operation and liaison.

Towards the end of February I found myself at Kennet's Ale. I had not been to visit them in many years and it was nice to go again. I am not too sure about the pickled chocolate-coated chilli sprouts but the rest of the evening was great.

After the ARM I went to Letchworth's Ale and although I had to leave early, it was a very good natured event. Due to short numbers they had opened it to all local sides—a sort of mini JMO event and it was nice to see all clubs dancing together.

Talking of the JMO, in mid-April I wandered across to Bristol to see the national event, run this year by the Open Morris, and

hosted by Rag Morris. Strongly supported by all three bodies, it was another superb example of how the JMO's current desire to work together to promote Morris can achieve great things.

At the time of writing, the last event I attended was the Helmond Ring Meeting; again another good weekend of fellowship and quality dancing. I must congratulate Shakespeare on their Bidford. They said they



The Squire pipes up at Anker Morris Men's feast earlier this year. Joe Oldaker

had been working hard on it and it has paid dividends; throughout the event it looked great. The massed show was held in the Helmond Barrel Organ Museum where a new card had been cut to enable one of the organs to play for a massed performance of *Idbury Hill*, Bledington.

I would like to raise a few matters which have been brought to my notice during my trips out and about. The subject of instructionals was discussed at last year's ARM and it was decided that these should be kept on an 'as-and-when' basis for

clubs to arrange themselves. Recently though, I have been involved in a couple of discussions which have highlighted the fact that some people feel they would benefit from instruction.

Geoff Jerram advises that he has been asked whether or not the Jigs Instructional could be opened up to all three organisations. I have no objection to this and, indeed, I think it could strengthen the JMO relationship, and raise the general standard of Cotswold Morris dancing. The current venue is unsuitable for mixed accommodation, but Geoff is very happy to look at taking a team of jigs instructors round the regions, as long as local contacts can organise venue and food.

Further, it has been pointed out that a Beginners' Workshops may be beneficial. Those members who are relatively new to the Morris Dancing world could come together to learn the basics of just a few traditions thereby giving them a little confidence. As always, the big problem with all of this is getting someone to run the event. Often someone's desire to learn is frustrated due to the lack of a host. This is such a shame.

Similarly, we are always happy to look at Morris Ring meeting proposals from any side wishing to host such an event.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible during the coming months.

Galley Right

Adam

Jack Worth has been probing the health of the Morris and reveals the results of the 2014 Morris Census

The Morris Census was a project to collect information from all morris sides in the UK and provide a snapshot of the state of the morris in 2014. The Census was developed in collaboration between the three morris organisations, with help from Squires of the Morris Ring, past and present. The online survey was sent out to all sides in the world in June 2014 to find out how many morris dancers are out there, who they are and what they get up to.

The Census had a fantastic response. Over 600 sides responded from across the world, including 64% of UK sides and 67% of Morris Ring sides. Such a good response rate means the insights gained are likely to be representative of all sides. I am very grateful to those that took the time to complete the survey. Thank you!

I have been collating and analysing the data in recent months and this article summarises some of the results, with an emphasis on findings relevant to the Morris Ring.

Demographics

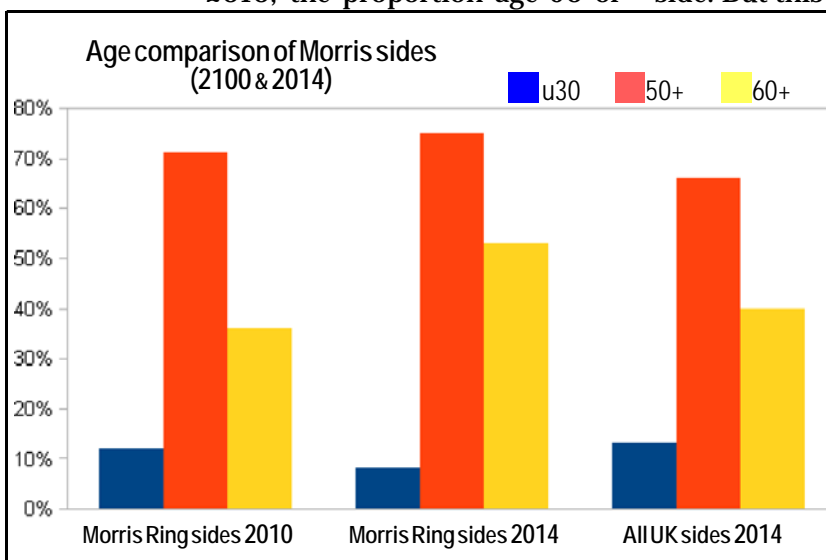
The main analysis so far shows a somewhat positive overall picture of the present and future health of morris dancing in the UK. There are 13,000 individuals that are regularly involved with a morris dancing side and, while

66% are age 50 or over and only 13% are under 30, sides recruited 2,000 new dancers and musicians in the last 2 years, 30% of which were under 30.

However, Morris Ring sides have, on average, an older membership compared to other UK morris sides and compared to their own past – see the chart below. Comparing Morris Census data to a similar data collection made by then Squire of the Morris Ring, Brian Tasker in 2010, the proportion age 50 or

collect data on the number of dancers retiring or reducing their dancing, but I would imagine that for most sides with the age profile described above, one or two recruits is just enough to keep overall numbers stable. It is not the same for all teams: a quarter of sides have had no new members join in the last 2 years.

However, it is less recruitment compared to sides outside the Morris Ring, which have recruited 2.8 new members per side. But this is not just a Morris



Ring issue: my analysis of the data suggests that it is not Morris Ring sides, *per se*, that are any less successful in recruiting, but that ageing, male Cotswold sides (which the vast majority of Ring sides are) find it difficult. Indeed, 30% of new recruits to

over has increased from 71% to 75%, the proportion over 60 has increased from 36% to 53% and the proportion under 30 has dropped from 12% to just 8%. The average age has increased and now stands at 56: ageing represents a threat to the continuation of a lot of sides in the Morris Ring.

Recruitment

Morris Ring sides have recruited 1.8 new dancers per side on average in the last two years, which is encouraging. I did not

Morris Ring sides have been under 30, the same as the national average.

The number of Morris Ring sides has reduced in recent years and looks set to reduce further: it currently represents less than a quarter of UK sides. No newly formed side has joined the Ring in at least 5 years, some have folded and others yet have left. And Morris Census data shows that one in five Morris Ring sides is not optimistic that it will still be performing 5 years hence.



Handkerchief Dance
Upton-upon-Severn

Rising in the East

Mike Stevens, East Area Representative for the Morris Ring, reports on a workshop where the defiance of gravity was just one of the subjects studied.

Peterborough was not quite ready for this, but the shoppers making their way through the city centre on a crisp Saturday in March stopped to watch as young men from the Morris Ring workshop filed onto the Cathedral Square to perform *Constant Billy*, a stick dance from Wheatley. Generous applause followed as the seats around the Guildhall dance site filled up with interested on-lookers. They were not disappointed as we were treated to a full show by this young danceside.

The fifth workshop for young dancers, supported by the Morris Ring Youth Fund, was attended by seven young men from six Morris sides: East Suffolk, Kemp's Men of Norwich, Thaxted and Peterborough in the East and Leicester and Ripley in the North Midlands. The inclusion of dancers from outside the East area was particularly pleasing. The workshop was led by past Squire of the Morris Ring, Mike Garland, but the choice of programme was largely determined by the lads themselves, building on material from previous workshops, with Mike providing advice and guidance. The morning started with an impromptu jig workshop with demonstrations by several of the participants. Following lunch the workshop team donned kit and made their

way to the nearby Guildhall in Cathedral Square. Their display here was energetic, varied and well-controlled with dances that included the hankie and stick dances from Upton upon Severn, the Bledington style *Skirmish* to Nick Barber's excellent tune (thank you, music!), the *Shepherds' Hey* stick dance from Ravensthorpe, *Room for the Cuckoo* from Wheatley and a very accomplished leapfrog jig from Ascott under Wychwood, *The Nutting Girl*, danced to great applause from a keen fan club that had assembled during the show. The performance ended with an entertaining Fieldtown *Balance the Straw*. There were cheers from the very appreciative audience as sticks were thrown across the set and deftly caught.

Afterwards I talked with team members and found them very pleased with the workshop and their display and very keen to do more. I hope that other sides with young dancers will get involved. Contact me through the Morris Ring Bagman if you have young dancers in your side.

I'd like to thank musicians Danny Gallagher and David Dolby, and Mike Jones, our Child Protection Officer, for all their work in support of these workshops.

I'd particularly like to thank workshop leader, Mike Garland, who summed up the display thus: "You can't send photos like this out—they're all really enjoying themselves, they're all off the ground and the sticks are flying high. We'll never live this down!"

Photographs (and p7) Richard Simons



Constant Billy Wheatley

Cathedral Square in the centre of Peterborough provides a natural opportunity to engage the passing public with entertaining Morris. Nearly sixty dancers, musicians and supporters gathered just outside the cathedral gates on the morning of Saturday 27th September to present a day of dance to the people of Peterborough.

We were pleased to be joined by full sides from the King's Morris, and Fenstanton Morris, and by morris men from Jockey, Letchworth, East Suffolk and Kemp's Men of Norwich.



The hosts with a dance from Adderbury

Peterborough Morris Men's Day of Dance

Precise performances please Peterborough populace, reports **Neil Costello**, who also took the photographs.

Amongst those attending were young men of the Great Eastern Morris workshops with their musician, David Dolby. We were also delighted to welcome Morris Ring Squire Adam Garland, and Fool and Scallop Dance expert Roger Comley.

Early morning shoppers soon stopped to watch as the dancing got under way and we enjoyed a good deal of enthusiastic support. Five sides, full and

scratch, presented a variety of traditions in rotation with the occasional massed dance performed to add to the spectacle. It has to be said that the Young Men's Morris drew a lot of favourable comments and their performance of *Queen's Delight* (Bucknell) reached new heights. After an hour on the square the Morris entourage ambled through the cathedral grounds to a lesser-known square adjacent to Peterborough Market. Here a smaller audience gathered to witness the performance; however, it was no less enjoyable for the dancers and much appreciated by the public and market traders alike.

From here a short stroll to our lunch venue soon had thirsty dancers clutching well earned pints of beer. Musicians and supporters joined in enthusiastically. The Solstice

accommodated us all comfortably in their upstairs ballroom and efficiently served us our choice of food. After lunch we were splendidly entertained with songs and tales by our talented guests (including the Reverend Spooner himself).

Returning to Cathedral Square after lunch we stopped the shoppers with a massed *Wheatley On* followed by *The Rose Tree*. The challenge of performing in the square is to



Great Eastern Morris dance in the fountains whilst David Dolby keeps his fiddle dry



A turn from the SotMR

avoid the water fountains by dancing on the dry bits. However, the Young Men thought this a bit of a cop out and egged on by Roger in his fool's costume, much preferred the added piquancy of moving deftly between water columns. This performance encouraged even younger supporters to mimic Morris

dancing right on top of the fountains, much to everyone's amusement (apart from their mothers.)

In the High Street we came across a sunlit space by the Town Hall so we took up our musical instruments and began dancing once again. After a while the King's Morris and Fenstanton moved on to perform in the shopping precinct south of the city centre, while others made their way to "Charters" – a real ale pub on a converted barge moored on the River Nene.

Here a spontaneous programme of jigs was performed on the wooden stage by the experienced, young and old, much to the appreciation of the audience gathered to enjoy a sunny afternoon.

The day seemed to capture some



of the best bits of Morris – in particular how music, dance and kindred spirits make for a thoroughly enjoyable day

wherever you are.

A big thank you to all who came along to perform or support. You made the day.

p4 Morris Census

Culture and attitudes

Bagmen were invited to describe in three words how their side saw themselves, and a lot of the demographic descriptions above are evident. While it was most common (34%) in the UK to describe a side's style (Cotswold, Border etc.), only 21% of Morris Ring sides did so, suggesting other factors are more important to their identities. Most common here were descriptions such as "old/ ageing" (46%), "male/ men" (31%) and "traditional/ historic" (28%).

The latter is confirmed by another question which asked the extent to which the side agreed that "preserving the tradition as it was originally collected is an important goal of the side". Whereas 39% of sides outside of the Morris Ring agreed with the statement, 76% of Morris Ring sides agreed. Also, a strong bond exists through the organisation: 58% of sides are members of the Ring "to attend

dancing events organised by the organisation", compared to 40% outside the Ring.

Conclusion

The distinct identity that sides in the Morris Ring have compared to the rest of the Morris community in the UK comes across strongly in the Morris Census data. Morris Ring sides are particularly male,



Up and over—but under thirty!
Youthful feats in Peterborough

predominantly Cotswold and have a love for tradition.

However, it is these features that are in relative decline across the morris: 57% of recruits and 59% of members of newly formed sides are women; the number of Border morris sides has grown rapidly in the last 15 years and Border sides continue to recruit large numbers of new dancers; preserving tradition is much less important to sides formed in the last two decades.

Partly as a consequence of this wider change and partly as a result of an ageing membership, the Morris Ring is likely to decline in size over the coming years. Most Ring sides face a demographic challenge, but should be encouraged by the modest amount of recruitment in recent years.

That handing down needs to continue apace if sides, and morris in general, are to continue many years from now.

Jack Worth is a member of, *inter alia*, **Bristol Morris Men** and **Headington Quarry Morris Men**.

John Edwards offers some thoughts on Archiving Morris Memorabilia

Part 1 Logbooks and Scrapbooks

Most Morris clubs will have a vast mixture of items which together paint a richly textured picture of a side's development and activity. This archival treasury will, in all likelihood, be occupying lots of space in the homes of many people, probably with little or no security in the event of fire, flood, burglary, or other disasters. The fact that the items are distributed to some extent eases the security element of losing the whole lot, but you cannot insure against the loss of the heritage. Unexpected house clearances can wreak havoc!

Stafford Morris Men recognise five types of memorabilia:

Logbooks 50+ years of records, 99% hand-written by Peter Stephens;

Scrapbooks 50+ years of large books, plus a number for special events;

Paperwork Books, minutes, attendance sheets, dance instructions etc;

Digital media CDs and DVDs, digital photos, video, web and Facebook pages etc;

Artefacts items bought by or donated to the club – tapes, tankards, pictures, models etc.

It would be wonderful to have a searchable computerised archive of all these things, but in most cases technology has not attained that level. As most documents are not standard size and are often hand written, the only way of recording this lot in a sensible time is photographic. If nothing else you will have something for the computers of the 22nd century to get to grips with other than a box of sodden paper.

So how might all these glories be

preserved and managed?

1. Logbooks

A few years ago our logbooks were photographed page by page and put on to CDs, which are held by several members of the club. (Incidentally, the CDs then need archiving under items 4 or 5, so you know where they are.)

We tend to think that we have done that, but the last few years still need to be added to the CD, as this is a never ending task. Hence, it is necessary to have some sort of updating schedule, which should be an item on every AGM agenda. Because most logbooks are quarto or A4, scanning these directly into a computer is also a possible method of digitizing them. However, that needs careful electronic filing and file naming to ensure that they can be retrieved in the right order. Digital photographs generally have a date and time code, which make that chore unnecessary



and, with the upgrade in resolutions, the quality is similar and the time to produce them rather less.

Typing all the handwritten stuff into a word processor would be a valuable contribution to making things searchable, but again it is

very daunting. OCR software is nowhere near good enough to deal with the foibles of multiple handwriting styles. The only way I have been able to enter such documents is by voice recognition software, a technology that is constantly improving. I have done the first bit of the log books using this method, but as soon as you say "er", "um"? or "what the – is that word" the software curls up and dies. Fortunately, recent software, like the free extra on Windows 7, works much better and needs no bedtime stories before it starts working.

2. Scrapbooks

Some four boxes (30 x 40 x 40 cm), each weighing around 30 lbs, comprise our collection. That's about a hundredweight to lug up and down stairs to take them to feasts etc., to say nothing about the space required to store them. Sadly, none of our members lives in a stately home! The ultimate aim is to reduce the books to a manageable size, make them widely available, and then offer them to the County Record Office for safe storage.

Our books vary in size from 38x25 cm (portrait) to 25x35 (landscape) and varying from 30 to 80 pages. Quite a mixture!

I have had valuable advice from several sides that have embarked on such projects. However, multiple scans, with the ensuing computer jigsaw puzzle, were beyond both my time and temper, if not my technical skills, so I experimented.

- Put the books on the floor and hand hold the camera: not enough light and fuzzy images.

- Use a tripod and add lighting: OK images, but turning pages and securing embedded books and leaflets tries both patience and back muscles.
- Put the books on a table: better lighting, but tall tripod and operator both required.

Check the internet for ideas: lots of high tech advice using A2 scanners etc, but just one gem of inspiration—the magic words “45 degrees”, resulting in this Heath Robinson structure of plywood and Conti-board with a lot of input from Mr Pythagoras. The support is hinged, as it is a bit of a lump and will need to be put away; soon I hope.



The advantage of this arrangement is that the books are supported on a small shelf and you can put bulldog clips around the edges to keep things flat.

Ideally a camera with a decent optical zoom, optional flash and hand focus, as well as the ability to use a tripod, is required. I know iPhones can do everything, but they are not good at this. Other considerations are a mains power supply for the camera and as the Fuji Finepix HS10 has an HDMI output, I used a TV screen instead of squinting at the small LED screen on the camera.

The reason for the zoom is for small items like birth announcements or club badges. It is better to take bigger optically zoomed pictures, since the images tend to break up with large digital magnification. Flash can help with weird colours, like blue writing on red paper, or faded handwritten material.

I have made a point of photographing the front and back covers of the books, so the location of any faulty or missing

images can be found and the photo re-taken. Also, it helps those looking for the originals to find the relevant book.

It is not necessary to be an expert photographer, as the images will be processed before release, at least to the extent required by most users. This system will probably cause dismay to professional archivists, but it should suit most Morris dancers. Having the results on their chosen device in a reasonable time will be better received than waiting years for conservationist grade preservation.

So what to do with this SD card full of images?

First load it on to your computer. You can work directly on the SD card, but better to keep that unprocessed, just in case. Picasa will immediately load images to the right place, normally catalogued by date taken. You can even put them into albums just like the original books.

Picasa (by Google) is a free editing and filing programme, which is quick and easy to use. If you have an ethernet-connected TV or tuner, the network option will probably allow the display of Picasa files. If you sign up to Google+ or various Android apps like “Gallery”, their integration makes it easy to view the uploaded images on various devices. On some, enlargement enables more details to be found. Picasa has several helpful editing features. **Crop** allows you to get rid of extraneous parts of the image. It also allows you to select bits of a page, (such as a newspaper article in several pieces), to put them together.

Straighten is invaluable if your camera and lectern are not properly aligned, or if items have not been stuck in straight. However, beware that this may remove some details at the image edge, so it may be necessary to re-take the photograph.

Fill light is an amazing facility, which can reveal details of dark



Camera and lectern both at 45°

pictures that make them far better than the original, or can be used to brighten pages.

I found the coward's button called “**I'm feeling lucky**” very useful. 90% of the time it applies corrections, which quickly makes the image acceptable. Use this *after* using Crop so it will optimise the cropped image—not the whole thing.

Once you have processed the image to your satisfaction, be sure to click “Save”, or Picasa will keep the original image. Your original will stay on the SD card.

Finally, upload the albums to the free Google web space and decide whether to restrict access to yourself, to your Google+ friends or to anyone with the provided link or let anyone view.

I have put some of the early Stafford Morris Men's scrapbooks ‘open to anyone’, so if this article is of any use to you, you can see the results at <http://tinyurl.com/qd5gdm2>. I make no claims that this is the best or the only method. However, it has been relatively quick and I have, so far, completed 8 of the 54 scrapbooks and look forward to soon having another 7 cubic feet of available office space. *To be continued.*

Part 2, in the next issue of the *Morris Ring Circular*, considers the archival treatment of paperwork, digital media and artefacts.

John Edwards is Archivist, Webmaster and Recruiting Sergeant to Stafford Morris Men and is assisted in all these endeavours by Knotty, the side's hobby horse, who also took the photographs and has yet to receive any payment. Shame!

Exit King Richard— enter Anker Morris Men

As vouchsafed by **Joe Oldaker**, a Gentleman of Nuneaton (and Bard)

It's not every week that we get a chance to join in a Royal occasion, so when Dadlington called, Anker Morris Men rapidly assembled a team. We dance regularly in Dadlington, a village close to the site of the Battle of Bosworth. Some of the dead were buried in the village, and the church was granted a chantry endowment to pray for their souls, so when the plan was drawn up to convey the newly discovered bones of Richard III from the battle site to Leicester in a special progress, Dadlington was an obvious stopping point on the route. It was decided to make it a whole village event, and the other entertainment included a couple of Morris teams: Anker and Anstey Royale Chalfont, a Leicestershire women's clog side.

We had to be there an hour and a half before the cortege was due, as the village was sealed off to traffic, and regrettably the pub was so full by 12 noon it was actually impossible to get in, and the beer tent on the village green was not yet open. The cortege was late ("My kingdom for a hearse" jokes were not encouraged, and what's 15 minutes when you've been waiting for 530 years?). The hearse, preceded by two very impressive mounted Heralds in armour, paused at the church, and then a short service was held on the Green. The entertainment had already included hand-bell ringing and a public lecture on the history of Richard at Bosworth; the Morris was planned to start after the cortege departed. Much of the 5000-



"I am strong-fram'd"
Squire **Toby Melville**
goes solo in Dadlington

strong crowd dispersed quickly, but we danced to a good audience in a pleasant corner of the village green.

Our chosen repertoire naturally included appropriately titled dances, including *"Royal Oak"* (Derby) *"Dear is my Dickie"* (Ascott under Wychwood) and *"King's Own"* (Oddington) to a ballad tune (1643)—the refrain in one version is *"When the King comes home in peace again"* which seemed apt.

After the dancing, there was room in the Dog & Hedgehog at last, where we refreshed ourselves with local ales White Boar and Richard III Plantagenet. The pub usually serves "Henry Tudor" but that was not available for some reason.

Altogether a remarkable occasion—"We were there!"



"Amaze the welkin with your broken staves!"
Excursions and alarums from **Anker Morris Men**,
with the author *third from right*.

Photographs: **Anker Morris Men**

Per ardua ad...

a somewhat quieter life, as far as much travelled (and Immediate Past Squire of the Morris Ring) **Robin Springett** is concerned.

After the amazing Devil's Dyke Meeting in Ely, talk and thoughts turned to the Britannia Coconut Dancers Easter Saturday event, with some trepidation, given the problems of marshalling which had been well aired in the national press. However, in the nick of time, their Bagman 'phoned me to let me know that a couple of local councillors had announced that they would pay for official marshals.

The day dawned clear and bright, and up on the moor, outside the long-closed Travellers Rest pub, I'm sure there was hoar frost on hip flasks as they were passed around. A "Nut" dance is followed by the processional, which goes at a fair old lick off down the A671, Rochdale to Bacup Road. Two teams take part, one on the left side of the road, the other on the right, and when one team is doing a "Nut" dance, the other is processing. Music is provided by the Stacksteads Silver Band, and as the day brightened and warmed up, the Nutters clattered along the road, diverting here and there



The Britannia Coconut Dancers

to dance a Garland dance or two amongst the sparse housing and denser new estates, before resuming their rapid progress.

All the while, the size of the audience grew, until it was a crowd; happy smiling faces everywhere. We followed the procession to the centre of Bacup, where a huge crowd had assembled and the Nutters were clapped and cheered to the echo. So what about the marshals? Well, it was all very correctly and safely done with a vehicle upfront and to the rear and "Road Closed" signs. However, it was done with little understanding of the Morris and the needs of the Nutters in particular. For what it is worth, I think traffic was held up quite unnecessarily; for example, when the Nutters were dancing well off the road, no attempt was made to allow one carriageway to be used, and public transport was held up, with no priority given to it. There were too many marshals; I counted 16 and most had nothing to do, but it was safe! In my opinion, and I am not a specialist, the whole day could have been undertaken safely with 4 or 5 marshals, signs, and no vehicles. Still, I had a brilliant day out! Long may it continue – thanks again, guys!

Trigg Morris Men's Easter Monday Tour of Bodmin, the Moor and surrounding area was blessed with fine weather. Choreographed by Trigger the Morris Horse, there were lots of opportunity for hay and water, and mostly we danced outside pubs; all good, especially the amazing Blisland Inn.

The following Friday found me driving back to Lancashire, as next day was Horwich Prize Medal Morris Men's Day of Dance. Not just fine weather on the Saturday, it was positively hot, and the parade got a good send off by the town mayor. The



marshalling and the parading around Horwich was controlled very simply by 3 marshals, much as it has been for years, I would guess. Of course, this was a feast of North West Morris, broken only by the Nutters strutting their stuff; so no opportunity for me to dance, but I had a great day anyway. Sadly the date had clashed with Chester Morris Men's Day of Dance, which was a real pity, as I feel Mens' North West needs all the support it can get, and on a personal note, I would have liked to have gone to both! My thanks to Horwich and the visiting sides, who all made me most welcome.

Despite the magical weather over Easter and in April generally, May Day promised to be wet in South Devon, and it didn't disappoint. Totnes Castle is a truly magical place at dawn on a fine day to welcome in the summer, but not in the wet. It started to rain at what passed for dawn as dancing started, and continued in that gentle, soft but steady way so well known to those of us who live in the western edges of our islands. Despite the weather, a hard core of 32 adults, six children and two dogs turned out to see us, and contributed £40 towards the £75 English Heritage charge us to dance on May Day Morning – well done, them!

Two days later and Dartington Morris Men were off to

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spend Saturday at Bovey Tracy Folk Festival. This event started around the millennium and has become a firm favourite with Morris sides from around the country. As with most folk festivals, sides attending are rarely from the Ring, although, with Dartington and Plymouth, this year was perhaps an exception. Lots of sides from the Morris Federation and Open Morris were there (no, not all Border!), and whilst mixed Border isn't really my cup of tea, we met and danced with a side called Steam Punk Morris from South London, who had amazing costumes, a great band, danced with style and were great fun too. I keep being reminded that we don't have all the answers when it comes to the survival of our hobby! It was the first time out for the Dartington Manx Scallop Dancers in full kit, and the dances were well received by the audience. I appreciate some may feel about the scallop much as I do about mixed (screaming) Border, but we enjoy doing it, and those taking part were ceremoniously awarded the Order of the Golden Cockle by past squire of the Morris Ring Tim Sercombe! The following weekend was the long awaited JMO Day of Dance in Cambridge, hosted in their 90th year by Cambridge Morris Men. There were an amazing 66 sides booked to take part and the largely unscripted finale on Parker's Piece was a huge success, with sides rushing to put on their "show" dances. I was

heartened by the large numbers of younger people involved, and the good humour and friendly rivalry shown during the day. Well done, Cambridge Morris Men, you had a seriously hard task, which you discharged to your and the Morris Ring's credit, and produced the most disciplined and focused collecting I have seen on a JMO DoD! The many plaudits from all quarters were well deserved. If anyone feels they can contribute to a "lessons learned" maybe they will email me direct? I am considering producing some guidance for future events. For me, the summer only really begins at the Thaxted Ring Meeting, this year being their 81st and the Ring's 341st! It may appear to most that someone in Essex just cranks a handle and it all happens, including the good weather, but rest assured, it may be done to a formula, but it takes a lot of hard work from the Bagman, Squire and others to make the weekend a success. It is a pity that not every side in the Ring can experience the utter magic of the Horn Dance processing down the main street in the gathering gloom, to the sound of the fiddle.

On the Sunday, East Surrey MM danced in the church and, in a moving ceremony, a window was dedicated to BFB Steve Adamson. My thanks to Squire Ray Page, meeting Bagman Ian Anderson, and the Thaxted MM for another great weekend. My abiding memory will be the to

display dances by some young men and boys, brought together by the hard work and inspiration of Mike Stevens, East Area Representative for the Morris Ring [see p. 5]. They danced as a scratch side, in their own kit, with enthusiasm and pride and were quite exceptional. Let us hope the friendships made last a lifetime.

The other side of which I am a full member is Grand Union Morris Men, but I don't get to dance with them too often these days. However, Saturday 21st June would be different, as I was going to join them in Abingdon for the Mayor of Ock Street ceremony organised by Abingdon Traditional Morris Dancers. After lunch it was off to County Hall, the Brewery Tap, White Horse/Cross Keys and finally back to the Market Place. Somewhere along the way there was an election, and Roger Cox (he of cake and sword) the reigning mayor was defeated by Harry Knight, who was enthroned and carried shoulder high to some pub or other. My thanks to GUM for having me to dance with them again and, of



Abingdon 2014 Mayoral progress
Photography by Martin Wackener
www.devine-timesphotography.com

course, to Abingdon Traditional Morris Dancers.

I took a bit of time off from Morris Ring matters in July and August to prepare for our own hosted

meeting in Dartmouth, but most importantly to do a day steam loco driving and firing on the Dart Valley Railway. I also managed to fit in three air shows, just to keep my eye in so to speak, and two regattas. All, of course, leading up to Saddleworth Rushcart!

Dartington had several who had not attended Rushcart before, as I guess other sides did too. For those it was a really amazing experience. Opportunities for dancing were limited with 26 Sides taking part, but DMM was able to introduce 'Filkins' to the uninitiated, and it created much interest. I confess that my feet were killing me by the end of the day – I don't want to imagine what clogs on all the time would have produced!

I packed up early on Sunday morning and headed for St. Chad's Church at the top of the hill to chat to Duncan the cleric taking the service, and to await the Cart on its final journey. DMM took the opportunity to entertain the gathering crowd with a quick 'Scallop Rehearsal'. Then the Cart arrived and bundles of rushes were removed for spreading during the church service. Quite a large number of us enjoyed the excellent service, with the ceremonial spreading of fresh rushes on the floor, before joining the ever-increasing audience outside in the glorious sunshine. Twenty-six sides performed, many twice. Thus, the individual displays took from 12.15 to almost 4.00p.m. when the Britannia Coco-nut Dancers from Bacup drew the day to a close. I know there was wrestling, and gurning to follow at the Cross Keys, but I took my leave of Saddleworth's 40th anniversary Rushcart weekend; the first one as a hosted meeting. My thanks go to Squire of Saddleworth Richard Hankinson, to Ed Worrall, all the lads and their army of helpers, for a truly memorable weekend. I am proud to have played a small part in making this one a meeting of Morris Ring sides. I sincerely hope this showcase for Men's

Morris, and North West in particular, continues as a Morris Ring event for many years: a counterbalance to Thaxted, and as much a fixture in the calendar. With another Rushcart over, my tenure as Squire drew rapidly to a close, but the Dartington meeting still lay ahead. The weather dawned a bit overcast, but dry on Saturday and the tours left starting at 09.30; two tours going across the ferry to Torbay and the other two to Totnes and the South



Hams. Dancing in Brixham and Paignton was to reasonable crowds. In Totnes, a Gay Pride march had caused many people to stay away from the town, but dancing on the plains was popular. All the tours met at Steamer Quay, Totnes, for the trip down river to Dartmouth.

There would be 187 sitting down for the feast; the top table comprised Dartington's 4 official guests, together with the 4 Ring Officers, 8 Past Squires and Squire of Dartington, Ken Hudson. Guests were received on the restaurant balcony, with the view of Dartmouth and the River Dart. Local Bays beer was served from two gallon watering cans, making sure no one went short.

After the church service on Sunday (at the end of which the staffs of office were blessed with holy water – a novel experience for me!) everyone met up near the Bandstand to entertain the quite sizeable crowd. The display

started with massed dancing, then I danced out, Squire-Elect Adam Garland danced in and I handed over the Squire's staff of office. Show dances followed from every side that would.

We closed with a quite massive Bonny Green. All the hard work had been justified; the weekend came together and I had quite a send off to end my term of office.

My warmest thanks go to my own side, Dartington Morris Men, who have supported me magnificently and produced a memorable meeting.

It had been quite a journey from Hartley in September 2012, via Adelaide and Copenhagen, to Dartmouth, my home town, two years later. During that time, winter, spring and summer, I have enjoyed wonderful weather for nearly all the events I have attended. I have been fully supported by the Ring Bagman and Treasurer; well advised by the Advisory Council and elected representatives. It will be for posterity to judge my squireship, throughout which my watchwords have been fellowship and consolidation. I have introduced one new side, Perth MM, and encouraged Saddleworth MM to make their 40th anniversary Rushcart a Ring event; I have attended funerals and supported the outreach to youth. Whenever available, I have been to every event to which I have been asked, and met friends both old and new. Our relationship with the other morris organisations continues to flourish, but most important of all, the Morris Ring is still here and I have had a really brilliant time! Thank you, one and all!

Robin

An expanded version of this article is available on the Morris Ring website.

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Obituary

Leslie Saunders

Westminster Morris Men
1927-2014

Leslie Saunders, always known to friends and colleagues as “Ginger”, joined John Strange and John French and others in the original, evidently “tall”, Westminster side in January 1953 during the first practice season, before their first memorable dance out just before Coronation Day. They were all social dancers and members of EFDSS, as were most of the sides that emerged in the early 50’s, when Douglas Kennedy encouraged them to break loose from classes at Cecil Sharp House and form their own sides!

He left school at 14 and worked as an engineer for BT for over 43 years. He attended evening classes and completed in five years the seven-year course to become a Chartered Engineer and a Member of the Institute of Electrical Engineers.

Ginger was very musical and enjoyed classical music by Wagner, Mozart, Brahms and Beethoven. Various pieces, including an extract from Vaughan Williams *Folk Song Suite*, were played at his funeral. He played the piano, sang in the church choir and played the organ during his National Service with the RAF, although he never played for Westminster.

On his first visit to an EFDSS festival at the Royal Albert Hall he was totally smitten and immediately joined EFDSS

where he immersed himself in the library at Cecil Sharp House researching English folk music and dance. He studied Sharp’s and Butterworth’s morris notes and was a prime mover in the decision that Westminster should concentrate on the Longborough tradition as it suited the team’s upright and flowing style. He also thought it sensible for the team to concentrate at that time mainly on one tradition so that the members would become proficient in the particular steps and movements, rather than having to learn several traditions. He wrote a detailed paper in 1961 on the Longborough tradition, which is lodged in the library at Cecil Sharp House. In it he analysed all the published Longborough dances and compared the variations noted by Sharp and Butterworth, including three then unpublished dances collected by Butterworth: *Gallant Hussar*, *Staines Morris* and a handclapping *Country Gardens* [all have since been published in Lionel Bacon’s *Handbook of Morris Dancing*, but that did not appear until 1974].

Roy Dommett, in his 1964 paper on Longborough, *Section 4- Interpretations*, refers to the work done by Ginger and that the team focused on a manuscript entitled ‘New’ dances from the *Butterworth mss*, referring to the three dances above. In his own remarks he argues that there are difficulties “in accepting all of this set of Butterworth’s dances which are not referenced elsewhere or fit comfortably into the known dance formats. It is not knowable now whether these were collected or composed by Butterworth. They are of course



Leslie “Ginger” Saunders in action in 1956 The first ‘modern’ deviser of morris dances?

included in Bacon. Douglas Kennedy always stated that Butterworth was very careful and not given to invention”.

On the Longborough style Dommett also refers to Harry Taylor’s remarks to Sharp: “...hands out and waving and held well up all time but opening them out at jump. In side step one hand up waving. In capering, true circles in vertical plane in front of the body, out then in (hands together) then out”. Douglas Kennedy also met Taylor on the 1912 tour and was left with the impression of wonderful galleys, although there were various opinions about galleys vs. hooklegs.

It is clear to me that Ginger, who was always most particular about the steps and movements, went with the Taylor interpretation, although Dommett was less

convinced and preferred the interpretations with “strong rapid shakings of the wrist”!

Ginger was not, however, averse to looking at dances afresh. He developed the movement for the sidestep figure in *Staines Morris*, as acknowledged in Bacon, as was his interpretation of the Longborough arm movements in the fore capers as “up-and-over *through* a forward position”. There was no tune for *Staines* in the Butterworth mss. Sharp had collected one but it was a copy of the Playford tune. Ginger wrote two modal variants for the *Staines* tune, one of which was used regularly by Denis Smith when playing for Westminster. Similarly there was no tune in Butterworth for *Gallant Hussar*. The team uses a modal variant, like many of the Longborough tunes, but I cannot find the original and I strongly suspect it was Ginger’s own creation based on the Sharp mss version. (Ginger did attach a number of tunes as an appendix to his paper, but the appendix has not survived. We are now left with memorised versions of these variants.)

He was also adept at devising new dances in a true Longborough style. Dommett suggests that Westminster were “the first modern team to invent rather than just to adapt dances across traditions”. Ginger’s dances include:

The Golden Vanity - a Leapfrog dance, using the song tune, which the team preformed at their National Gathering debut in 1957, at the request of Douglas Kennedy, and the following year at the Royal Albert Hall festival.

Old Harry – a corner dance, thought to be named after Harry Taylor, the Longborough dancer,

but possibly, according to Ginger’s widow, Olive, named after the Old Harry Rocks in Dorset, which they were passing on their travels!

Big John – a column dance, named for John Strange and John French.

Ginger also wrote the tunes for the latter two dances which still feature strongly in the team’s repertoire.

One of his contemporaries commented that, as a new team, they sometimes felt patronised by some of the established teams

At the Royal Albert Hall



Westminster Morris Men perform in the mid-fifties at the English Folk Dance and Song Society National Gathering.

Photo Westminster Morris Men

or even by EFDSS staff, although Marjorie Sinclair, “Sinner”, thought highly of him. They would “roll out” Ginger as their “secret weapon” to confound the critics with his extensive knowledge of the Morris.

Ginger still retains a firm place in the Morris, although most will not realise his contribution. He devised the dance *Black Joker* in the Bledington style, to the tune collected from John Mason at Stow-on-the-Wold, which is near Bledington. It has now passed into the tradition as a Bledington dance but was originally devised and performed by Westminster.

Similarly, he is largely responsible for the dance *Balance the Straw* in the Fieldtown style which we all

dance. This arose from the time in the 1957-58 when he was helping the Woodside team, local to him, with some new material. As Bert Cleaver related to me, he had looked at the original version of the tune and dance from Ascott-under-Wychwood, which is written in 4/4 time, but decided that the Ascott dance, a tradition then not widely known, would be too difficult for the side. He therefore suggested a dance in the Fieldtown style which he adapted to fit. Woodside’s Bill Davidson had developed a variant of the tune in 6/8 time, which is the one used now. Ginger did not favour Bill’s version and wrote his own variant.

He met Olive through the country dance in 1958 and they were married in 1961. They danced together in London with the Phoenix club and as part of the London Corps that provided dancers for the Albert hall festivals. This also took them to festivals abroad, where they made many friends. He was a patient, kindly, thoughtful man. His researches into the morris were thorough and, as it turns out, long lasting and his influence on the development and style of Westminster’s dancing lives on.

Mike Wilson-Jones

With acknowledgements to Roy Dommett, Bert Cleaver & fellow members of Westminster Morris Men.

Letter

An open letter to all Morris Ring sides from Cliff Marchant, Past Squire of the Morris Ring (2002-2004)

Gentlemen,

In the course of attending Morris Ring meetings and assorted days of dance, enjoying a beer and a chat with old friends, I became aware that some of the dancing I witnessed was below the standard that might be expected from Morris Ring sides. The problem seems to be that, despite knowing the tradition, the men cannot perform what is required: galleys,

hooklegs, split capers etc. as appropriate. This may be due to age, but at times it was really embarrassing to see such dancing being performed in front of other sides, some from the Morris Ring and, more importantly, some from the Morris Federation.

I am not trying to run down any side in particular, but to make ALL of us consider what we can actually dance well as a side. Why choose, for example, Fieldtown if the men can no longer galley properly?

I ask each foreman and squire to reflect on which traditions their side can dance proficiently and to choose what the men are capable of dancing, saving the more demanding dances for outside the pub watched by just the dog. We in

the Morris Ring pride ourselves on our dances and tradition, and rightly so, but if one side puts on a bad performance it lets down *every* side in the organisation. We must all strive to improve standards by selecting those traditions we can do well. I don't want to walk away from any more displays praying that any Federation side present had been looking the other way.

I write this with the approval of the Squire of the Morris Ring. Our ageing membership is a problem we must address and if you, the sides, squires and foremen, do look at how you can improve, then my efforts have not been wasted.

Cliff

Chiddingly, Sussex

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The Morris Ring Circular is published by the Morris Ring, the national association of men's morris, mumming and sword dance clubs: www.themorrisring.org.

Please submit items for future issues to the Editor: thecircular@themorrisring.org

All styles of literary and graphic endeavour will be considered for publication. Letters and articles may be subject to shrinkage; photographs should be at least 300 dpi and accompanied by full details of date, location, photographer and identities of featured sides and/or individuals. Items about *future* events should be sent in good time to bagman@themorrisring.org for inclusion in the *Bagman's Newsletter*; scholarly articles which expand our knowledge about the Morris (e.g. its practitioners, its history and its literature) should hasten (via mac.mccoig@btinternet.com) to *The Morris Dancer*. Everything else (or if in doubt), send to *The Morris Ring Circular*.

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Editor Anthony Foard 33 Cunningham Drive, Bromborough, Wirral, Cheshire CH63 0JX (0151 334 4566)