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The Morris Ring *Circular*

It's Longborough, Jim...



Taylor's Men leap into full membership of the Morris Ring with their unique take on the tradition.

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but not as we know it!

Which one's Taylor?

As the Morris Ring welcomes Taylor's Men into full membership, **Steven Archer** profiles this innovative side.

Drawing their numbers from wide swathes of south and middle England, newly minted Taylor's Men have been dancing out to great acclaim for the best part of the last two years. The Morris Ring's latest signing draws its name and inspiration from Harry Taylor, Cecil Sharp's primary source of Longborough dances in the early years of the last century. It's hardly surprising, then, that this testing tradition furnishes the side with its distinctive repertoire.

The prevailing view of the wider Morris community, according to Colin Messer, side foreman and one of the driving forces behind its formation, was that doing more than one Longborough dance in a performance, particularly when executed 'properly', was simply asking too much of the participators. Driven to re-examine the tradition as originally presented by Taylor, and with the help of a growing cohort of similarly-minded dancers and musicians, Colin recast it in a way that is, in his words, "arguably more pleasing to the eye, more suited to the body, and one that offers tunes played more lyrically to the ear". As a result, Taylor's Men can demonstrate that it is entirely possible to perform a stand of five Longborough dances with vigour, style and no discernible adverse effects! Following a successful inaugural practice in Wimbledon in February 2016, Taylor's Men has added more



Taylor's Men entertain at Port Royal during the 2016 Sidmouth Folk Week.

dancers to its ranks, and now boasts a corpus of twenty or so experienced men for call up; festival appearances and much expenditure of energy as guests of both Saddleworth Morris Men and Jockey Morris Men have all helped to boost the public profile. The distinctive blue and red costumes are an increasingly familiar sight, not least on the occasion of Taylor's Men's welcome into full membership of the Morris Ring at the London Meeting in July. And as if that wasn't enough, Colin led a well-received training session on Longborough jigs at the annual Jigs Instructional; a repeat is near-certain for the 2018 event (19-21 Jan).

Colin's fellow movers and shakers include Squire David Thompson and Bagman

Helena Cooper. These three, aided by Helena's predecessor Lewis Elliot and ace musician John Watcham, have impelled the side into its present state of buoyancy, notwithstanding the challenge of arranging practices for such a widely scattered group.

Taylor's Men practise at the Horse and Stables in Lambeth (SE1 7RW) on the fourth Sunday each month. For more details, see Taylor's Men's Facebook pages; the side welcomes interest from those who aspire to perform Longborough Morris dances the way that Harry Taylor intended. The man himself would certainly have approved!

Steven Archer is Treasurer of the Morris Ring; he also took the photographs.

Squire's Capers



Squire of the Morris Ring **Eddie Worrall** mourns a great Morris man, pays tribute to the end of an era in Staffordshire and enjoys hospitality at all points of the compass.

My first duty in this look-back at 2016 is to mark the passing of past Squire Peter Halfpenney in December. Many of you will know Pete and have your own memories of him. I was Morris Ring Treasurer in 2010 when Pete became Squire and I came to know him well as a fellow Officer and friend.

Pete took office just as the long running issue of female musicians in Morris Ring teams came to a head with the introduction of the Equality Act. It was his fate to lead the Morris Ring through the debate that issue caused and onwards to where we are today. The hard work and leadership he showed during his term of office in sometimes difficult times, were instrumental in helping shape a new chapter in the Morris Ring and achieve a unity

among us as sides. We owe him a huge debt.

Many clubs were represented at Pete's funeral at Grenoside Crematorium; my own Saddleworth Morris were honoured to march in procession in front of the hearse and act as pall bearers. A good send off for a good friend.

My own journey as Morris Ring Squire began in earnest at the East Suffolk Ring Meeting in September. It was a fabulous weekend based in Framlingham and my personal thanks go to Adam and Mike Garland and all at East Suffolk Morris Men for their organisation of the whole event. A special mention also to Cynthia Garland for organising an additional 'wives & partners' tour which enabled my wife Carolyn to join me for the weekend.

Having her there and also my brother Peter of Green Oak



Squires All Eddie with Matt and Graham at Peterborough Morris Men's Day of Dance

Morris Men made it a weekend I will never forget. Adam Garland did a great job as Squire and will be a hard act to follow.

I was asked many times during the summer which Cotswold jig I was going to learn for dancing in. Well, as a Saddleworth Morris Man, there is only one way I was going to do it, as part of my team, dancing Northwest. Thanks to all the Saddleworth lads for their support and friendship. If you get one, you get all - you have been warned! Since then, my first official event was the Peterborough Morris Men's day of dance, where Matt Simons passed on the Squireship of the side to Graham Cheetham at the Nene Valley Brewery during the main show. A lovely day out and great fun.

Next up was a proper

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Earlsdon Morris Men lend their support to the Broomfield Tavern.
Ed Worrall



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Northwest affair, the Earlsdon Morris Men's processional day of dance in Earlsdon itself. Earlsdon Morris Men are one of the best northwest sides you will see and are out at many festivals during the summer showcasing Men's Northwest to a high standard. It was a real honour to be made an associate member of the side on the day and to join in with their (ever increasing) band.

Ales at Anker Morris Men & Green Man Morris Men followed. Both quite different, Anker's being focused on dancing with little ceremony and Green Man's more formal with toasts, speeches etc. I thoroughly enjoyed both and it goes to show that there is plenty room for variety in how we organise events. Sadly this was to be their valedictory event: earlier this year Green Man's Morris took the decision to wind up the side. I'm sure you join me in sending to all members of the side, both recent and from years gone by, our thanks for their magnificent work in promoting the dance, especially the Lichfield tradition of which they were prime exponents. We wish them well.

Following that was at the Original Welsh Border Morris practice day in Worcester. A great fun day though it may be a while before I feel like playing 'Jenny Lind' again..... I wasn't able to make the tour itself this year, but I will do in December. I'm told the OWBM is the original Welsh Border revival side, but I will leave it others better informed than me to debate that!



Monkseaton Morris Men on home ground
Ed Worrall

Last up was joining Monkseaton Morris Men dance out on their home turf in Monkseaton. This was their 46th year of dancing out at New Year and it has grown into a real community event. The crowds were huge and a varied programme of Cotswold, Longsword and Rapper was performed. The highlight of the day however, was a rapper tour of the pubs of Monkseaton following the main show. The pubs were packed and it hardly seemed possible to clear space, but space was found and the crowds cheered their local team on. A wonderful way to start a new Morris year. Congratulations to Graham Salmon on taking over the Squireship of Monkseaton

from Brian Jackson and running the day's events.

Away from Feasts, I attended the Open Morris AGM in Rickmansworth as the Morris Ring representative. I was made to feel very welcome by Nicki Pickering and all the Open officers and it was an interesting day of discussion. I also made myself useful by acting as teller for their elections!

Attending the day as an observer brought home forcefully that the issues and concerns the Morris Ring have, are much the same as those faced by the Open Morris and Morris Federation. None of us exists in isolation. The JMO committee, made up of Officers from the three main

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Morris organisations, is a vital forum for information and ideas to be shared for the benefit of all.

Early January found many of us in Birmingham for Jockey MM's Plough Tour. Sides from across the JMO met to mark the turning of the agricultural year in the city! A grand day out with a full size plough being paraded along New Street and round the Bull Ring. Having secured the health of the year's harvest, the quality of the previous year's barley was tested in the Post Office Vaults and Wellington. As they say in Jockey, Marvellous.

Winter is of course the time for many Ales. Trips to Ripley's evening in Kirby-in-Ashfield (I recommend Gilbert Butler's late night cheese board), Leicester's feast in Birstall where I was pleased to catch a youth workshop in the afternoon and a display by the lads taking part before the feast and then Kennet Morris Men's Ale.

Ah, Kennet. More about them later, but for now I would advise you approach the pre-meal pickles with caution, if you attend (and I suggest you do next year, it is an excellent evening!).

Next up was the ARM held near Cannock. Many thanks to Mac McCoig for doing an excellent job in organising the weekend. Much debate and discussion as always and a chance for member clubs to have their say on the future direction of the Morris Ring. Important work was done also with the Archive Group and Area Reps on the issue of

recruitment.

Following a scheduling error in the ARM agenda, I subsequently called an Emergency Representatives Meeting to call a vote to admit Taylor's Men as full members

of the Morris Ring. It was I believe the first ever ERM called (historians please correct me if necessary!), and certainly the first to involve an electronic vote. I was pleased to note that the vote was



Taylor's Men are inducted into the Morris Ring at July's London Meeting. Squire of the Morris Ring Ed Worrall presents David Thompson with the side's staff of membership. *Photo Steven Archer*

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Five Minutes on the Somme

This poignant and arresting work is by **James Bartlett**, life member and past squire of Ravensbourne Morris Men. With the enormities of the Great War still resonating across the nation a century later, James examines the effect on those left behind and, uniquely in published First World War poetry, on the Morris itself. Opposite, James offers an insight into his poem.

Minute One - Once to yourself

No music played, no *Glorishers*.
Our villagers
in silence lie
'neath Flanders' sky.
No Cotswold grave for most of them,
our morris men
that danced their *hey*,
then marched away,
except for me - "Too old," they said.
Now they are dead,
their dancing done
while I live on.

Minute Two - Foot Up

The dance was dying on its feet
for incomplete
our side had been
since when? 'Fourteen,
when Dick the blacksmith shut his shop,
no more to hop
and dance about,
'cause war broke out.
All over now; the Great War's been
through here, unseen
save for results -
few male adults.

Minute Three - Half Gyp

The old, the young, a wounded lad
once danced but sad,
he cannot see,
this amputee.
Despite tradition, widows, wives
to dance contrived;
I taught; they stepped;
tradition kept.
Time marches on; mine nearly done;

my music gone.
Arthritic hands
can't play in bands.

Minute Four - Back to Back

Those women our tradition passed,
new blood learned fast
both dance and tune.
They danced quite soon
till history repeats. This time
in thirty-nine,
to bloody war
we went once more.
But more came back, were left alive
in 'forty-five,
again to clash
their sticks of ash.

Minute Five - Rounds

Five minutes long - the dancing takes.
The music makes
legs leap and prance
each morris dance.
Five minutes long - once whistles blew.
They never knew,
'twas all they'd left -
of time bereft.
Five minutes long - this dancing takes.
The *Maxim* makes
legs leap and prance
in *totentanz*.

Epitaph

No music played, no Glorishers.
Our villagers
in silence lie
'neath Flanders' sky.

Five Minutes on the Somme – some notes

The Battle of the Somme has always been of great interest to me as my birthday falls on 1st July, the exact date that battle commenced in 1916. It was the first time that Britain's new volunteer army, with recruits from diverse localities, occupations and social standing, took the leading role in a battle on the Western Front - with terrible consequences.

This is a suite of five minute poems, each named after a figure of a typical morris dance, plus a concluding valedictory stanza.

Although in decline, morris dancing was still carried on by traditional sides, made up mostly of farm labourers in a few villages in the Cotswold area of England, up to the outbreak of the Great War in the autumn of 1914. At first there was no conscription and Lord Kitchener's famous appeal - "Your country needs you" - produced enough volunteers to keep the fight going. Such was the carnage in the trenches on the western front, however, that conscription was begun in March 1916. The men who made up the morris sides disappeared off to war and largely perished on the Somme between 1st July and 18th November 1916, many in the first few minutes. As a result whole villages were denuded of fit males aged up to forty.

After the war many villages that had fielded a side of dancers could no longer do so and in several cases the women - traditionally not permitted to dance - became the custodians of the tradition until interested outsiders took up the dance. Today there are very few traditional sides left and the dance is in the hands of clubs all over the country. There are still men-only sides but nowadays these co-exist with mixed and women-only sides.

The Second World War was not so expensive in human lives and, though in abeyance for the duration, the dance was soon resuscitated after that war.

I chose the minute poem as five of them, representing the average length of a single dance, would be sufficient to cover the story briefly. Five minutes was about the time it took on 1st July 1916 for the flower of British youth to be blown away after they went "over the top" and charged the German lines,

believing that the long artillery barrage would have successfully dealt with the German machine guns. It hadn't.

I'm aware that not all who read this poem will be students of warfare, nor, indeed, *aficionados* of the Morris, so I hope that these notes will cast sufficient light on the verses for everyone.

James Bartlett

Minute poem Three stanzas of four lines of rhyming couplets in iambic metre with a syllable count of 8-4-4-4 = 20 totalling 60 syllables in all, hence the name.

Glorishers A number of dances from a variety of the Cotswold villages bear this name or something approximating to it, believed to be a corruption of "Glorious Years".

Hey A figure, often a chorus figure, in which the dancers weave around each other as in a reel.

Dick the blacksmith Dick must have been one of the earliest volunteers.

My music gone The old musician who is the narrator can no longer play.

Sticks of Ash Morris dances, broadly speaking, are of three types, stick, handkerchief and hand-clapping. The sticks can be of any wood as long as it is hard and reasonably straight.

Maxim The German medium machine gun responsible for so many deaths in WWI. During the preliminary artillery barrage the enemy took cover in their dugouts. When the barrage lifted they manned their *Maxim* guns and mowed down the advancing troops.

Totentanz (Germ.) Literally *Dance of Death*.



Bathampton Morris Men and their “most welcoming” hosts **Banchory Morris Men** at Burn O’Vat Visitor Centre

Bathampton Morris Men go Scottish Country Dancing

John Salmon recalls a memorable visit north of the border

The Bathampton Men are a fairly insular lot when it comes to dancing in the United Kingdom and rarely travel north of Chipping Sodbury. Even our annual Welsh Tour just creeps a few miles over the border near Chepstow or, more often than not, the Welsh Tour is in Dorset. So, in search of something a little different for 2015, and curious to understand the claim made just before the Scottish Referendum that the roots of Morris Dancing lie in Scotland because the Morris had been performed there in the 16th century, a visit was planned. But perhaps the most important reason for our visit was hereditary. Father, Neil Bayfield, and his sons Gavin and Martin are members of, inter alia, both Banchory-Ternan and Bathampton Morris Men and,

despite years of good intention to meet in Scotland, Bathampton have never crossed the border until now. And we are so pleased that we did.

Would you have guessed that there are more Morris Ring Sides in Australia than there are in Scotland? Based near Aberdeen Banchory Morris Men, comprising both Scotsmen and English exiles, is the only Ring side in Scotland.

We flew through horrendous weather and the most dire weekend forecast ahead made us think we should have stayed in Bristol Airport’s bar instead but the micro-climate around Aberdeen worked its magic and the climate remained clement throughout the tour. Neil and Gill made us hugely welcome and provided “butteries” before we

headed inland to Ballater where we were billeted in the old Schoolhouse. Ballater is a gorgeous little town on the banks of the Dee and was the rail head for the Balmoral Estate. Queen Victoria was known not to appreciate steam trains and would not permit the railway to be built over Estate land so a station was built in the town from where royalty could transfer to the castle. It is a little known phenomenon, not widely broadcast, but Bathampton has an uncomfortable reputation for dancing or staying in pubs and other places which are subsequently razed to the ground by fire. In Ballater, the old Royal Station, museum and visitor centre was already a charred wreck when we arrived so we cannot be blamed for that. However, we remain a trifle nervous about our potential link to the Christmas flooding of our hostel. And most of the town too. If anyone has not danced the Morris to the accompaniment of

a skirling bagpipe you have a treat in store. Lovely, kilted Cassandra played the pipes for us on our first



Breathless in Ballater Anglo-Scottish détente the Morris way

morning, the sound, like the Pied Piper's, attracting the punters who lined up to put their money in the bag. Of course, it is a fact, slightly better known than the roots of the Morris, that the bagpipes is not a Scottish instrument but one that probably originated in Mesopotamia but, to our Sassenach ears, the pipes epitomised the highlands and drove us to display our Cotswold culture to greater effort and to expel any possible remaining lethargy from the previous day's imbibing in Ballater's Alexandra Hotel. That afternoon we had learnt that Scotland's once derided beer industry is rejuvenated and produces some unforgettable ales and craft beers. I have a hazy recollection of Cairngorm Brewery's Trade Winds and Howler and Inveralmond Brewery's Lia Fail and Ossian but I can't remember the names of the rest.

The Scottish Pubs, often built of solid granite, were welcoming. The Scott Skinners in Banchory provided an opportunity for some local lads to try our "joining-in" dances despite the language barrier and the natural predilection of the lads to show off to their lasses (who then upstaged the lads by joining in). In Tarland, one evening, we were bemused by the Aberdeen Arms which shares its premises with

the Double Happiness Chinese Takeaway. So in this remote corner of Aberdeenshire you could pop in for a pint and, if you felt peckish, you could order your sweet and sour pork or, if you were to pop out to collect the family takeaway, you could drop into the bar for a quick one. A splendid Scottish arrangement. The Banchory Men took us to castles. Wonderful castles. Craigievar, near Alford, an iconic pink-rendered granite tower in rolling hills and an ancient



Craigievar Castle

woodland setting. Spectacular Dunnotar on the steep cliffs near Stonehaven where a small garrison held out for months against the might of Cromwell's army. The old ruins seemed resigned to this latest invasion of the English as we became surrounded by, and danced for, tourists of every nationality. The Chinese, Australian and Japanese especially wanted photographs with us presumably to demonstrate to their friends at home that they had witnessed this quaint old custom of Scottish Country Dancing.

Drum Castle is one of the oldest towers with a history linked to Robert the Bruce and a walled garden within which some men found a peaceful few minutes retreat from the busy tour. It was in the old library that we were consulted by a curator (a Wiltshire exile) who explained that she had heard on local radio

(so it must be true) that Morris Dancing originated in Scotland. We said that an explanation might lie in the old myth that the Bathampton Men had crossed Hadrian's Wall in medieval times to render assistance to Mary Queen of Scots and, whilst there, performed their version of the British Grenadiers which, as every Bathampton Man knows, aided the English victory at Waterloo 250 years later. We left the lady confused and consulting her many ancient reference books for historical evidence.

The Banchory men are geographically based over a huge area of Aberdeenshire and think nothing of driving forty miles to practice. They took us to local beauty spots, the hilltop Tomnaverie Stone Circle, the Bridge of Feugh where the salmon leap the seemingly unscalable rocks, Queens View and Balmoral's Royal Lochnagar



Tomnaverie Stone Circle Hosts and guests strike out for sunshine

Distillery. We went to Burn O'Vat, a natural pothole which isn't named after any dislike of European taxation but is reached by a trail through peat bog and a short climb over a waterfall. We like to think that our dance inside the Vat (once the hide-out of famous outlaws) was the first performance here by any Morris side.

The climax of the tour was a ceilidh and feast of local 'stovies' (potatoes and lamb) in

"Ageological quirk, once used by outlaws hiding from their pursuers" Bathampton Morris Men claim a first at Burn O'Vat



Tornaveen Village Hall, luckily miles from any habitation because Cassandra graciously joined us again with her set of bagpipes.

Banchory's huge Scottish hospitality and the men's desire to share with us the delights of Aberdeenshire on this tour made

us feel most welcome. Generously, they permitted Bathampton to take away and learn some of their own dances written and arranged by Foreman Don French.

We thank the Banchory Men and hope that they will enjoy Bath and our Cotswold Area of

Outstanding Natural Beauty when we can return their hospitality and show them where the real roots of the Morris might be found.

Photos Bathampton Morris Men

The World Famous Ashdown Mummers impress a hapless day-tripper during their tour of Shrewsbury last summer. **Joe Oldaker**, of Anker Morris Men, took it on the, er, chin.



Photos Jonathan Checkley

Penblwydd hapus!

Keith Lascelles has been revisiting lasting memories in the glorious Gower peninsula as the **Men of Sweyn's Ey** attain their half century.



The side was founded by Laurie Moseley in 1966. It started out as “The Mighty Men of Madoc”, a rapper sword dance team in the village of Llanmadoc in north west Gower. After three years the side moved into Swansea and became “The Men of Sweyn’s Ey”, dancing Cotswold morris, as well as the rapper sword dance. At that time, we attracted a lot of University students, some of whom are now well known in the folk world. One described his time with Sweyn’s Ey as “the start of an obsession”. Our last significant celebration was our 25th

anniversary, but about four years ago, with numbers dwindling, it looked highly unlikely that we would reach fifty. However, with a couple of ex-members returning and three or four new members, we kept going, and now have thirteen dancers and three musicians.

The main celebration was on the August Bank Holiday weekend. On the Saturday evening, present members and about a dozen former members gave an extended show at Llanmadoc, lubricated with ale from the Britannia Inn. We then retired to the delightful National Trust Bunkhouse at Cwm Ivy,

where most people were staying, for a prodigious curry. On the Sunday, we were joined by five other morris sides from South Wales to give over seventy dancers and musicians, plus founder Laurie Moseley and one other original member.

Starting at the Gower Heritage Centre, we visited three hostelrys on Gower on a coach that seemed too large for its narrow winding lanes. We ended the dancing at the very scenic but windswept Rhosilli, with a hang glider watching from a few feet above us.

Returning to Llanmadoc for a feast, we found that what had been a joke about a champagne toast became a reality as several members produced bottles of genuine bubbly.

The local press had been well briefed in advance, and gave us extensive coverage both before and after the weekend. This weekend was the main event of the year; in addition we danced out on eighteen other occasions.

Christmas is mumming time, and with the Swansea Valley play ‘Crwmpyn John’ and the Gower plays, we collected a record amount of £960 for Ty Olwen, the hospice at Morriston Hospital.

Our day of dance was supported by the Gower Landscape Partnership.

Grand Union Morris cast off for the last time

Tim Gane, Grand Union Morris Archivist, recounts the side's rise and demise.

Grand Union Morris (GUM) were formed in 1976 under the tutelage of Herga Morris from Harrow, Middlesex. With Uxbridge situated on the Grand Union Canal and several members living on boats on the canal it was a natural name for the new side, which danced out the following year and attracted more members; two sets were common. GUM were in demand, particularly for canal events such as The Canalway Cavalcade at Little Venice. We visited Germany and the Netherlands, danced at the Poperinge Hop Festival, pulled the Saddleworth Rushcart and raised thousands for charity. We appeared on TV, most recently with the Hairy Bikers, released two CDs showcasing our strengths as musicians and singers, and even appeared in the movie 'The Man Who Knew Too Little'. In 1995 we danced in to the Morris Ring at Thaxted.

All was rosy until about ten years ago when we began to see a declining interest in Morris. Our men were still keen, but we were unable to recruit, despite adverts in local papers, libraries, pubs and on Facebook. Fortunately a couple of experienced dancers moved into the area who found us through the Morris Ring.

Inevitably several of our members moved away and became our 'Country Cousins', returning for special events or to make up a dancing side. However, with no new, young blood joining, the average age of GUM was steadily rising with accompanying health issues. Several dancers stood down to become musicians. At the start of 2016 we had just seven dancers and four musicians. Several men had been with the side for over thirty years! With such a small cohort it became increasingly difficult to raise a full side.

We have always prided ourselves

on presenting an entertaining show, but often of late we have been dancing for just one man and his dog and occasionally no audience at all! Most of our venues are food pubs and understandably the public are not going to leave their tables to watch the Morris. This of course poses the question 'What is the point of dancing for no-one?'

With dwindling numbers and increasing old age we occasionally were forced to practise or dance out with fewer than six dancers. We considered trying four or three man dances, but is that Cotswold Morris? We think not. We have seen sides dancing with less than a full complement, often with dancers well into their senior years. Our decision was if we can't dance Morris properly, then we won't dance it at all. So how much longer we could continue?

This question was answered for us when Tim Shellshear, our Squire of 28 years, announced that owing to his health he would reluctantly have to hang up his bells. At a result, in October the decision was taken to suspend

Grand Union Morris, although an attempt would be made to dance out once or twice a year with the help of our Country Cousins. In between times, since we had all been friends for 30 or more years, we would continue to gather socially. Our interest in canals has continued over the years with trips away on members' boats. Several of the side have interests in steam railways, industrial history and archaeology which has resulted in trips and visits for anyone who is interested. We have had a lot of fun together over the years and it is hoped that this friendship can long continue.

It's sad that after 40 years we have had to follow in the footsteps of so many Morris sides and indeed that of our patron side, Herga, who disbanded in 1990. We will continue to maintain our Facebook page and website (www.grandunionmoris.org) where our full 40 year history may be viewed. Keeping an online presence may result in a GUM revival, but with so many other male sides folding that seems rather unlikely.



**Grand Union
Morris bow out**
Photo GUM



Paul Cross reports on his final (?) Morris 18-30 weekend

Well, there we are, then. My thirtieth year and my “final” Morris 18-30 weekend. It seems like a lifetime ago that I staggered into Birstall Scout Hut in Leicester for the 2004 weekend. When I say staggered, I mean that I had arrived in Leicester on the train and walked the 4 ½ miles to the hall via several pubs (for research purposes, of course). The weekend passed in a blur. One thing that I remember from Leicester 2004 was that this was a group of people that I wanted to see again; the dancing was excellent, and I had never before seen so many young Morris dancers. Flash forwards 12 years and I was once again getting ready to attend the weekend.

Truth be told, I nearly didn't make the weekend this year, I had a bike crash a couple of days before and wasn't fit for dancing. However, I decided that I would much rather see

the friends I have made over the last few years than sit at home moping and resting my shoulder, so off down the A1 we went. I was well behaved though; I only did a couple of dances all weekend.

The first thing that strikes you when you arrive at a Morris 18-30 weekend is that it is not your normal Morris event. For starters, to keep the price low (it's still only £25 per man), the events are normally held in Scout Huts. The Scout Huts have varied considerably in the events that I've been to, some were good, some had mushrooms. The benefit of a scout hut is the convenience of all the facilities; the beer is normally kept right by your bed!

Friday night at the Morris 18-30 weekend is a practice session. Here's a chance to tweak performance styles and get the side dancing in a similar fashion to each other.

The show dances, *Glorishers* and *Webley Leap*, are dusted off, and shorter dancers try in vain to leapfrog the taller ones (this weekend, 6'9", 6'7", and 6'4" were the top three). After the practice, it's down to the pub (for cocoa and cribbage...).

After an early night [sic], the dancers are well rested [sic] and clear-headed [very sic] and it's off to do some dancing. This year we started off in the centre of Letchworth, before catching a train to dance in Hitchin and Stevenage. The public transport element of the Morris 18-30 is always fun, especially when 20 or more return tickets are ordered on a bus, and the printer churns out almost the entire roll of paper! Past members of the Morris 18-30 will be pleased to hear that some traditions never die, and “*Dido, Bendigo*” is still sung on the first journey of the day.

The Morris 18-30 feast has, like many weekends, had its ups and downs, but this was definitely one of the best. Piles of Greek food, all lovingly prepared by the Squire, and washed down with plenty of hummus and beer. I can honestly say that I've never heard so many people complaining that they were full before.

After the feast, it's time for the AGM, and time to decide where to hold the next meeting (but more on that later), before heading off to the pub to celebrate a good day out. We ended up at the Garden City Brewery (again), and spent a pleasant night singing, drinking, and playing dominos.

The Sunday morning of the Morris 18-30 weekend normally consists of giving the Scout Hut a thorough clean, before meeting up with the "Host" side (i.e. the side that the Squire dances with). More dancing occurs, the host side normally make some comment about feeling old, and the weekend is over for another year.

There were only three men present this weekend who had been members since 2004. Over the past few years we've had a lot of members pass the upper age limit, and we've had a lot of new members reach the lower. It's refreshing to see new dancers come to these weekends, and strange to be considered one of the "old boys", but the time has to come to move along and let the next generation run the show. Of course, with the Morris 18-30 being in Leeds later this year, I think I might just have one more crack of the whip!

It's impossible to boil twelve

years of weekends into a few paragraphs, but a few moments stand out over the years. The entire group (some 35 of us) being led into a house party in Oxford (standing room only). Dancing *Monk's March* in a kebab shop, with people leaning through the set to pick up their orders. Walking into the Icknield Way weekend and being told that I was Treasurer (before I'd even got a beer). Dancing *Orange in Bloom* on a moving bus, *Glorishers* on a terrifyingly narrow railway platform, *Skirmish* with king p r a w n s ... c o c k t a i l sticks... Mars bars. The immortal phrase "after the bomb went off, we ate cheese", and, of course, brown sauce.

If you've read this far, you might as well come along and give the weekend a go. The weekend is open to any male dancer between the ages of 18 and 30, and will provide you with friends your own age in the Morris world. As someone who has attended 11 out of the 13 weekends I've been eligible for, I can attest to the fact that you will get a lot out of this weekend, and for £25 that's a very good deal.

The Morris 18-30 weekend will be held in Leeds from 13th-15th October 2017, still at the bargain price of £25 a man.

For details, please caper to www.morris1830.org.uk & [facebook.com/morris1830](https://www.facebook.com/morris1830)

Paul Cross is North Area Representative to the Morris Ring, and is bearing up well to advancing old age.

One Day Wonders call it a (wonderful) day

Those stalwart travelling Morris men, the One Day Wonders, bowed out in May with their 30th annual tour, which saw the side return to the area in which their very first once-a-year-only day of dance took place.

The side, which draws its members from existing clubs, made a stately progress around south Shropshire and, briefly, into mid Wales (the attraction here being the Kerry Vale Winery).

Other bucolic settings included The Three Tuns brewery and pub (pictured below) in Bishops Castle, where lunch was taken, The Plough at Wistanstow and The White Horse Inn, Clun.

This last had a particular significance for the visitors because the neighbouring Sun Inn had provided the base for that very first tour in 1988.

More about the singular nature of the One Day Wonders next issue.



New slings keep Paul's memory alive

Sean Goddard explains how a generous donation has brightened up the **Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men**.



Show offs Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men pose with their new slings, a gift in memory of Paul Plumb from his family.

Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men are the delighted recipients of a brand new set of North-West slings. The new red and green slings were bought by the side from a donation by members of Paul Plumb's family. Paul, a founder member of the side back in 1953, died in 2012, and it was the family's wish that his memory should be retained within the side. Our previous slings were made shortly after the side started dancing North-West Morris in 1975, and they had become a bit tired, faded and worn out – the slings, that is, not the side. When the family suggested they wanted to give something to the side to remember Paul, it came at the ideal time to replace the old slings.

JMO York Day of Dance 23rd April 2016

Photographs by
Derek Schofield



Clockwise from top

Peterborough Morris Men

Foresters Morris Men

Saddleworth Morris Men

Ken Watson,
Grimsby Morris Men



☞ p5

overwhelmingly in favour of my recommendation to admit them. In fact, more clubs took part than were represented at the ARM itself...

The ARM can only function with as large of a number of sides represented as possible. Please send a rep to the meeting in 2018, it's your organisation, not mine, get involved and have your say.

Fresh from the rigours of ARM debate came two Ales: Devil's Dyke Morris Men and Letchworth Morris Men. Both are great fun evenings, very much with the emphasis on dance, not speeches, and a wide variety of sides there from the Morris Ring and other organisations.

I caught up with the Bacup Coco-Nutters for their Easter Saturday beating of the bounds – an unbroken tradition going back over a hundred years and a true community event. The Nutters are a unique group and a fantastic Northwest tradition.

After a start to my own side's season at Easter, it was back on the road to join Cambridge Morris Men for their Spring tour in Ely and Newmarket. I found myself taking part in the procession for the Eel festival in Ely and eating a free cone of chips in Newmarket! Many thanks to Cambridge Morris Men, one of our founding clubs, for their hospitality.

May Day morning found me...leaving the dancing at dawn to the rest of you. Saddleworth Morris Men do

not partake, so thank you to those who made the sun come back up again for another year. The JMO Day of Dance was in the hands of the Morris Ring this year as the current Chair of the JMO Committee. Leicester Morris Men were the hosts, and Charlie Corcoran and the whole side put on a great show. The city made the Morris world very welcome and provided an array of great dance spots. The event was devised to highlight the things that bring us together and the day took place in exactly that spirit.

Spring Bank holiday weekend brought a trip to join East Surrey Morris Men for their annual camping weekend near Rye. They were joined by Greensleeves Morris Men, making it two founding Morris Ring clubs for the price of one. Sunday took us into Rye itself and a meet up with Martlet Sword and Morris Men, the first time I have met them. Beautifully graceful Cotswold Morris, great show lads. Thanks to Clayton Francis and all at East Surrey Morris Men for an enjoyable weekend.

The following weekend I attended Wakefield Morris's Osset Beer Cart weekend, much closer to home in West Yorkshire. The inspiration for this came from Saddleworth's Rushcart and how this has helped my own side play a part in our local community, and helped us with recruitment over the years. We attended their first Beer Cart in 2014 and lent them the ropes and

Stangs to get things moving (literally). Going back as an invited guest and seeing how it has grown to a true community event, complete with a dozen or more guest sides, a beer festival and numerous projects around the event locally, shows what a Morris side can do to raise their profile in a short time. Recruitment has already been boosted and promises to continue to do so. I joined Wakefield's band for the day, caught up with White Rose Morris Men & Hexham Morris Men from the Ring and saw some excellent dancing from all concerned, especially Wakefield and Customs & Exiles, two mixed North West sides. All this 45 minutes from home!

However, the next weekend brought a further tip south of the Thames to Hartley Morris Men's Ale weekend and the year's first Morris Ring meeting. Many of you will have been to the Hartley weekend and know what a superb event it is. Beautiful countryside, plus excellent organisation in all respects and sublime food. The lamb shank at the Saturday evening feast was I think the best Morris meal I have ever had. Terry Heaslip, Brian Tasker & co deserve huge praise for their hard work in putting the weekend together and doing the Morris Ring proud. The Ale weekend runs every year. If your side has not been, beat a path to their door and make the trip.

THE MORRIS DANCER

the digital journal that expands our understanding of the Morris in all its forms

Edited by Mac McCoig mac.mccoig@btinternet.com. Download from the Morris Ring website.

The last trip for me before the mid point of the year, was a rare midweek trip to join Royal Preston Morris Dancers for a dance out at Croston near Chorley on the longest day. Always good to see fellow Northwest dancers. A good mix of local sides were present from across all three Morris organisations, coming together in friendship.

Looking back on the preceding months, it is that outstanding friendship which brings us together and sustains us.

One issue that has cut across the Morris world in the last year or so is the use of black face paint. For those who have followed the online debate, much has already been said. Adam Garland issued a statement during his time as Squire, and I have also issued a follow up statement setting out the Morris Ring's position. I will not labour any points further here, but I encourage all to read the material on our website and take note.

The other matter I wish to mention is recruitment. In November I tasked the Advisory Council and specifically your Area Reps, to discuss this at a meeting. There is no more important and urgent issue in my view for sides in the Morris Ring. We have been collecting data on the number of active side members in clubs as part of the subs renewal process. I have tasked the Area Reps to:

1. Contact sides who have not given information on this, to complete the picture
2. Establish the reality behind the numbers in their areas, which sides are really struggling?
3. Identify those sides to me and the other Officers so we

Feasting St George

Kinnerton Morris Men were guests of Chester City Morris Men to help them celebrate a well-attended and very sunny St George's Day in Chester earlier this year.



Chester City Morris Men perform *The Miller* at Chester Cross. The side's legwear, unusual amongst modern northwest teams, is based on that worn by the historic Middleton Morris Men.



In the shadows of Chester's famous thirteenth century Rows, **Kinnerton Morris Men** close in on an apprehensive participant as they perform, appropriately, *The Rose*. Eastgate Clock, athwart the city walls, is visible top left.

Photos **Bob Barker**

can offer concrete help. The recruitment document first put together by Pete Halfpenney and updated by Adam Garland provides a wealth of ideas. We need to put that theory into action. I, the Officers and your Area Reps will do all we can to help you. However, you must meet us halfway and work with us if you want help. Demand more

of us and your Area Reps. We are here to serve you as clubs, not the other way around. On a final personal note I was very honoured to be elected as an associate member of Jockey MM at their AGM. Many thanks to their Squire Chris Carter and all for this. I look forward to wearing my Jockey baldrics with pride in the future.

Eddie

London Pride!

Ravensbourne Morris Men (right), hosted July's acclaimed London meeting. Side member and Morris Ring Treasurer **Steven Archer** captured these images of an unforgettable event, at which Taylor's Men were welcomed into full membership of the Morris Ring.



The South Bank Show: **John Watcham** plays for Taylor's Men...



...and **Taylor's Men** dance for St Paul.
Welcome to the Morris Ring!



Ravensbourne Morris Men's newest member, 4½ y.o. **Henry Archer** (he's the middle one).



Bathampton Morris Men in the courtyard of the Anchor, Bankside.

To London they came: a hundred-plus Morris men astonished and delighted audiences at some of the capital city's most historic venues. At the Tower of London the sides were granted the rare privilege of dancing outside the great fortress.

Sunday's church service in Farnborough was followed by a visit to Keston, source of the Ravensbourne river - a fitting way to mark the magnificent achievements of the host side.



Tower Bridge falls to **Saddleworth Morris Men**, in a picture taken by foreman **Paul Hankinson**.



Jockey Morris Men at the Tower of London, venue for Saturday afternoon's massed show.



Leicester Morris Men perform at the Greyhound, Keston, on Sunday morning.



Steven Archer, front, leads off after Sunday's church service in Farnborough.

Obituaries

Peter Halfpenney

*Harthill Morris Men
Hartley Morris Men
Squire of the Morris Ring 2010-12*

1954-2016

A personal reflection by
Mike Garland, Past Squire
of the Morris Ring (1988-90)

Peter was a man who believed in living life to the full. If he was invited to dance or to sing, he would be there. He made friends across the country, and we were all pleased that in 2010 he accepted the challenge of taking office as Morris Ring Squire. He danced in at Selby in September 2010, taking

over from Brian Tasker.

It was certainly a case of “cometh the hour, cometh the man”. The Ring needed to face some difficult truths, and Peter proved to be the man who could steer the clubs through some very choppy waters. I know well, and Peter would happily agree, that he was known in some quarters as a “marmite man”; while many of us greatly admired him, there were others who held different views. Yet, by a combination of diplomacy and dogged determination he successfully saw the Ring take a significantly new path. This commitment to the Ring was



seen dramatically by those of us who attended last year’s Annual Meeting, when Peter, already suffering from cancer, stood up to speak, and forcefully and clearly set out his view of the future.

During his term of office Peter continued to travel and increase his circle of friends. It was a measure of his success, that after he had handed the badge on to Robin Springett at the Tonbridge meeting he still received countless invitations to feasts, ales and days of dance, and it was lovely to see that, even in this final year, he was accepting invitations to become an honorary member of clubs. They all admired his dancing, and wanted to thank him for his dedication to Morris Dancing, but above all they valued his company and his singing.



Peter (standing 4th from left) with Hartley Morris Men colleagues

Neville Moulden

Mersey Morris Men

1933-2016



Nev was born and raised in Wirral, Merseyside. He and his devoted wife Pat first took up country dancing sometime in the 80s, and it was at such an evening that a couple of existing Mersey Morris Men tried to persuade Nev to join, because they were desperate for new men. He rose to the challenge.

Nev stuck with it in the early days, despite Mersey's venerable (and formidable) Jim Jones asking why he bothered because, in Jim's view, he was a rubbish dancer! It soon became clear, however, that the qualities we had gained were far more valuable to us. We had gained a first class character.

Not satisfied with just learning how to get by on the dance floor, Nev became fascinated with two other aspects of the morris—the music and dressing up as a Liver Bird (the

latter in a costume of his own devising). The latter was easily arranged because nobody else really wanted to do it, so from then on Nev was the Liver Bird, adding props in the form of eggs, noises, webbed feet and stripey legs and, again by his own skilled hands, motorised baby chicks! His one-man act could hold a large audience spellbound as he laid eggs, made labour pain noises, hatched and lastly taught his offspring a Morris dance.

Nev's determination to learn a folk instrument was partly borne out of his realisation that this would keep him in the hobby for the long term. He always said that he wished he had come into folk as a young man rather than as a 50-something year old, but if he could play an instrument, he could still be involved after his dancing days were over. I remember him quizzing me about whether the melodeon would be a wise choice and when I explained that it was just like playing a mouth organ, his mind was made up and that's what he went for. In a very short time, he became extremely proficient on the instrument, becoming one of Mersey Morris Men's mainstays for many years. Nev also lent his musical talents to Pat's own side, Mockbeggar Morris, and played for them for a quarter of a century.

We nearly lost Nev a few years ago—in a way. Although he was never a heavy drinker in his time with Mersey Morris Men, he decided to make an exception to that rule during a Morris trip to Holland. In the early hours of the morning

after a day of frequent and heavy dancing, just before dawn, he decided to get up from his bed, presumably to visit the loo. The trouble was that he was in a top bunk; clad in just his underpants, he left the upstairs room via an exterior-wobbly-spiral-staircase, then walked about fifty yards barefoot along a gravel path onto the small country road that had three-foot deep dykes on either side. The three of us who were awoken and realised he hadn't returned went to search, clad in our pyjamas, going in each direction along the road until a very bewildered local milkman pointed us in the right direction, and we discovered Nev further down the road. Just about in one piece, Nev was led safely back and the rest of the men were totally oblivious to the adventure until the next day.

Nev was loved, admired and respected by all age groups in the folk and morris world. At many a folk or Morris weekend, Nev would be found outdoors surrounded by youngsters, all happily playing with his large collection of juggling equipment or watching in awe as he launched his water propelled plastic bottle rocket toward the clouds, then holding their breath as they watched to see which car or tent it would hit as it returned to earth.

Nev is greatly missed by everyone who had their lives enriched by knowing him, and we miss him greatly.

Richard Stapledon

Dave Hughesman

Hartley Morris Men



On 6th July 2016 'Hairy' Dave Hughesman, Hartley's long serving Foreman sadly lost his battle with the cancer from which we had all hoped he would recover. His funeral took place at Kemnal Park Cemetery on Friday 22 July with the chapel full to standing with friends, family and Morris colleagues. Dave's coffin was borne by members of Hartley through an arch of sticks held up by a guard of honour formed by two rows of dancers in full kit. We remember his long term commitment not only to Hartley but also the Morris in general including his time with White Star Rapper, the Darent Valley Champions Mummers and his active involvement with Broadstairs Folk Week. During the latter event in August a commemorative singing evening was arranged at which, and subsequently, sufficient cash was collected

from friends and well-wishers for a dedicated seat to be permanently installed on the seafront in Dave's memory. Our thoughts are with his two daughters and granddaughter to whom he was so close.

Brian Tasker

Ernie Sissons

Lord Conyers Morris Men 1930-2016

It is with great sadness that Lord Conyers Morris Men inform you of the death of Ernie Sissons, following a chest infection, at the age of eighty-five.

We grew from the Folk Club at



the Lord Conyers Arms in the South Yorkshire pit village of Wales, where Ernie was the mainstay of the committee that ran the club. Those of us that knew Ernie's enthusiasm for everything music-related were not surprised that, when the Morris side first met to

practise, Ernie was among those present. He danced with us for a few years until his back forced him to stop. Not wishing to lose his company, we asked him to become the side's first fool and suggested a striped apron and boater in recognition of his former profession as a butcher.

Ernie took to the role with his usual enthusiasm, adding a few props of his own including a gorilla mask. When he wore this to walk around the village, everyone still recognised him! While he made a good job of the fool's role, Ernie, being Ernie, wanted to do more and he turned his considerable musical talent first to the piano accordion and then to the chromatic button accordion with which he came to be associated.

He was an ever-present member of the side and played for us until ill health forced him to retire a few years ago, after which he went to live with his family in Southampton.

He is greatly missed, both by the Morris Men and the Folk Club, and stories of his escapades will continue to be told for a long time. The term "immortal memory" is one familiar to morris men and it applies particularly to this larger than life character who is no longer with us, except in our memories.

John Ledbury

Letters

The Future of the Morris Ring

Dear Editor and colleagues,

Since I handed over the reins of the Morris Ring last September, I have had time to consider all that I saw and experienced during my two year stint. I have said before that I thoroughly enjoyed my time as Squire; it was everything I had hoped it to be but raised in my mind the question of where do we go from here? We know from records that Morris Dancing is at least 600 years old. We know that the initial records give us a picture of simple costumes and music being performed by pipe and tabor. We know therefore that this changed, and evolved over time to be the superb tradition we see today with wonderful kits, a range of squeeze-boxes, strings, pipes, and, irrespective of your own personal feelings on this, even some electric instruments.

Over time the developments included new dances and traditions, new sides of men, women, or mixed dancers, new organisations which were formed to protect different aspects of Morris.

Individual men and women came and went who took the bit between the teeth and led the Morris world in developing and evolving. Obviously some of these have long since been lost to history; who was the first person to play a violin for the dance? Who was the first person to bring the ancient animal traditions of hooden and

hobby horses into the Morris arena? Others undertook works which have been widely noted thus ensuring their own names are remembered with honour. When we consider this huge history of evolving dance over the past 600 years, it has to be understood that the Morris Ring is only one aspect of this tradition. Yes, an important aspect, but it is not the be-all and end-all.

Even the ring itself evolved and changed. Originally it was an organisation of Cotswold dance teams; North West being considered as "carnival dancing for children". Yet it changed and grew. We now support and protect teams performing cotswold, north west, border, rapper, long sword, mumming, molly and more. Changes in anything; political, organisational, religious, or leisure activities are driven by the society in which that action is performed. Current societal changes, such as equalities and multiculturalism, mean that the Morris world is continuing to change.

Male-only organisations are finding it harder to exist. This was the driving force behind the constitutional changes when the Ring welcomed women musicians. It was also the driving force behind my decision to ask the membership about Ring Meetings. Happily, the membership agreed that Ring Meetings should be open to all members of all clubs.

But, as yet our constitution still does not welcome women dancers. What message is this giving out? We are happy to evolve by accepting non-Cotswold dances, we are

happy to accept different forms of musical instrument, we are happy to accept beasts and animals, but you can't join if you are a woman? 20 years ago discussions re recruitment came upon a problem; how to encourage younger dances into an aging organisation? Now we still have the same discussions and the same problem, but the organisation is 20 years older! People do not want to join an organisation where everyone is their grandfather's age. They do not wish to spend evenings sitting round talking about the past, and then singing about it. They want to be dancing and meeting girls!

The change in the constitution to welcome women dancers as members of the Morris Ring is long overdue. Indeed, talking to individuals and member clubs over the last two years gave me the impression that most would be happy with this. The problem with written records is that they 'fossilise' reality and there are those who accept them as an absolute truth; how it was, is, and always should be. Yet, 600 years of the Morris has shown that evolution has occurred, development is ongoing.

Someone once said, "The best way to predict the future is to create it". I believe the future of Morris is not held within the fossilised records of a few men from a hundred years ago. The future of the Morris is being created now, by those of us in the Ring, Federation and Open Morris teaching and performing today's Morris.

When I took over as Squire someone who has been in the Morris world for many years told me to "remember the past,

but look to the future". Sadly, this is not a view held by all and I feel it is holding us back. Charles Darwin was right; everything has to evolve or risk extinction and the sooner the Ring accepts this, the better.

Adam Garland

*East Suffolk Morris Men
& Past Squire of the Morris Ring
(2014-16)*

Dance standards 1

Dear Editor,

In response to Cliff Marchant's letter (*MRC 70*) about what is Morris and the standard of dance, I agree: it is not good enough to dress outlandishly, have a few beers, skip around and call it Morris. It degenerates the tradition and insults those who work hard to dance well. But what is Morris dancing?

I think there are three elements for a dance to be called Morris:

1. The choreography. If the individual and side's movements in the dance have their origins in (for want of a better start) Lionel Bacon's excellent book, then it is fair to call it Morris dancing.

2. The music. If the tunes have their origin in "folk tunes"? (I'm not the one to say what is a folk tune), and it fits the dance in number of bars and style, then it is probably suitable for Morris. After all, the traditional Morris tunes (again to refer to Bacon) were often borrowed from the popular tunes of the day.

3. The dress or costume. If this has its origins in either the traditional Cotswold, North West, Molly, Rapper and the

like, or in a costume which can be related to the clothes of the present day or past times, then it's fair to use them for the purpose of a Morris dance.

However, given the above, admittedly debatable points, there are three other elements which do make the difference between a good and a poor performance:

1. Dancing as a side. I'm not saying we should be of the Tiller girl standard (remember them?), but it really helps the performance if the side presents a dance that maintains cohesiveness, the patterns, the shape of the set, and follows the style of each tradition (refer Bacon).

2. The individual's standard of dance. Some people are natural dancers and need little instruction, some need help/training. Knowing the choreography of the dance is often challenging and seems enough. But although knowing and practising how to dance is an enormous subject and can take years of learning. Even a small improvement makes dancing so much more satisfying, easier for the dancer and more enjoyable for the public.

3. Fitness. It's no use doing foot up and foot down and then being out of breath!

So, if standards do need improving, how can it be done? DERT has improved the standard of rapper performances, but I don't advocate a competition for best Morris side. Although the Morris organisations can offer "standards" there is no "law"? that says a side must join one of the organisations. When I started around 1970 a side

worked hard to be "proud" of its standard and its performances and the opinion of their peers. In turn that pleases the audience, creates a better public image and maybe attracts more youngsters coming in to the Morris because they see something worth achieving.

Last thought, the old saying, "the public only know of two Morris dances: stick or hanky", is so often true, partly because of indifferent performances. It is up to us to show the public how excellent Morris can be by dancing to the best of our individual and side's abilities and being proud of the uniqueness of our tradition. Then the "poor performers" might see the light.

Peter Morris

(Yes, that's my name!)

Mersey Morris Men

Dance standards 2

Dear Editor,

I want to respond to Cliff Marchant's letter in *MRC 71* about dance standards and related comments from Robin Springett and Adam Garland. As a recent past squire of a local club, I have seen the lowering of dance standards and display from our own side. This is not the fault of our excellent former and present foremen, but it is *definitely* age related! I agree with Cliff. Sides should choose dances they can perform to a proper standard - galleys are a particular grey area for us!

However, on a good night, to a good audience, we can still dance to a really good standard - but on a bad night? I've

sometimes been embarrassed and dismayed with the lacksadaisical performance. It all very much depends on who turns up that night; some of our members really should seriously be considering "hanging up their bells", but then where would we be? Down the pan! Finito!

So it's Catch-22: either continue with us oldies in the same old way, visit a rejuvenation clinic or do as Cliff suggests and adopt a more limited repertoire of more sedate dances. What a dilemma! What a quandary!

I'll finish this epistle by saying a big thank you to all past Squires and Bagmen of the Morris Ring.

Nick Lambert
Exeter Morris Men

On becoming a taborer

Dear Editor,

As a non-taborer I was interested to read Tony Pearson's article in MRC 72, particularly as I have had the privilege of playing alongside Mike Chandler at a Westminster Morris Men's Day of Dance and the Ring meeting at Dartington a few years ago.

However, the good news is that we *do* know the name of Will Kemp's "wingman": in Kemp's *Nine Dayes Wonder* he says he was '...attended on by Thomas Slyemy Taberer.'

David Asher
*Bagman & Musician,
Martlett Sword and
Morrismen*



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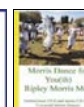
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Letters and articles may be subject to shrinkage; photographs should be at least 250 dpi at 180mm wide and accompanied by full details of date, location, photographer and identities of featured sides and/or individuals. Single photos are especially welcome, as are most forms of literary endeavour. Thanks.

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