

ISSUE 74

Spring 2018

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The Morris Ring *Circular*



THE CURLY-HEADED PLOUGHBOYS

Freeze the Plough

“A cold, damp and miserable Saturday in the centre of Birmingham—it must be the annual Jockey Plough Tour!”

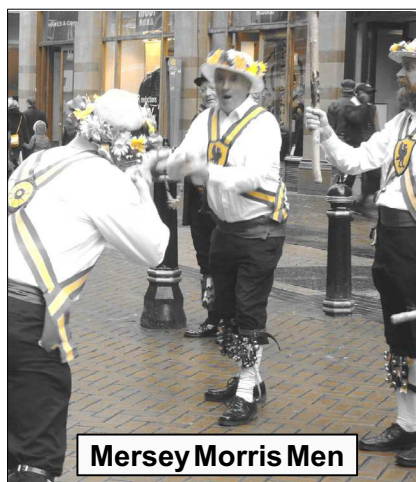
Jockey Morris Men's **Steve Holder** wraps up warm for Brummagem's chilly streets.

At 08:37 on Saturday, 6th January 2018, I added the above to my Facebook account.

Well, what else would anyone expect for that time of year in England!

For many years Jockey Men's Morris have marked Plough Monday, the traditional day of farm labourers returning to work, by dragging a plough (and dancing) in Central Birmingham.

A plough? In the middle of the UK's second city? Many a bemused Brummie has come up to us over the years to be told we're doing it to ensure the city's prosperity and growth. It must have worked: Brum has been transformed over the last twenty years, and there are a lot of very prosperous people in the burgeoning construction trades hereabouts.



Mersey Morris Men

For a long time we've started the day with the blessing of the plough at St Martin's in the Bullring. This was our plan for 2018; however, the church staff emailed the



Photographs by the author

bagman to say that as they'd not heard from him recently they had no-one available. If they'd only read the two emails attached to this missive they might have noticed they were both dated December 2017. Oops, straight to the first spot at Edgbaston Street, then.

Guests, the lifeblood of our tour; well, we've all had our turn at dragging farm-machinery around the shops, we're keen to share the experience with our friends.

This year's guest list ended up somewhat biased towards Birmingham and its environs. Apart from ourselves, we had Black Adder, Beorma and Glorishears, all hailing from Birmingham. From nearby Stourbridge we were joined by Bedcote Morris. We were delighted to be joined, also, by a full contingent of Mersey Morris Men. Finally, but by

no means least, a scratch side made up of members of Westminster, Ravensbourne, Leeds, Thames Valley, 1st Sedgley, Stafford and the recently demised Green Man completed the muster.

First dance, a massed *Highland Mary*, Bampton to the tune *Speed the Plough* of course (we Jockey boys rarely miss an opportunity to be obvious!). After a few dances we split into two groups to tour the city centre. Using a 'follow-me' tactic we were able to keep innocent bystanders on their toes; just as they breathed sighs of relief as the first wave moved on, the second hit from the rear! Despite the cold, damp start a good time was had by all. By the end the weather had even improved to just cold.

Thanks to all who attended. We hope you enjoyed it as much as we did.

Squire's Rantings



Squire of the Morris Ring **Ed Worrall** manages to find affordable ale in the capital, gets to dine in a Cambridge college and follows in Father Ken's footsteps.

The sharp-eyed amongst you will spot a none-too-subtle adjustment to the title of this regular item. Enough said!

The start of July found me in Reading for Kennet Morris Men's 60th anniversary celebrations. The event was organised as a day of dance, much like the national Joint Morris Organisations event. Sides from around the area from all three Morris groups were invited to help celebrate Kennet's milestone. Dance spots in and around the town centre were followed by a finale in the town's Forbury gardens. It was a great day out with over fifteen sides taking part. Special mention must go to Customs & Exiles, a mixed Northwest side whom I met earlier in the year at Osset Beer Cart. Excellent dancing and a credit to the Northwest tradition. A wind-down session next to the river Kennet at the Jolly Anglers pub complete with BBQ, ended the day in style. Many thanks to Pete and Ann de Courcy for putting me up.

However, my weekend was not yet done. I was up early on the Sunday morning to head for Stoke Bruerne near Northampton to meet up with Rose & Castle Morris for their

weekend of dance. If you have never been to the Boat Inn at Stoke Bruerne, you are missing out. A wonderful canal side pub and Rose & Castle's practice venue. I arrived just in time to play for my own side Saddleworth who were due to dance about thirty seconds after I got there. Bus tours had been out on the Saturday and another great set of sides were dancing from all three organisations. I counted about thirty Morris sides watched in two days! Dancing on home turf with Saddleworth at our local Folk Festival and a break from Morris to celebrate Carolyn's and my wedding anniversary were next.

The end of July saw me and my own side in London for Ravensbourne Morris Men's London Ring Meeting. The opportunity to dance along both the South Bank and outside the Tower of London was too good to miss. Saddleworth also took the opportunity to process Northwest style across Tower Bridge! *[See MRC 73]*

Ravensbourne deserve huge praise for putting together the weekend including some challenging spaces to arrange dance spots. Despite the rain, the show dancing was good,

started by Saddleworth, who then processed off to the Wetherspoons across the road. Well, it was the cheapest pint we had found all day...

The highlight, apart from a surprise visit from old friends Leeds MM who were added into the show, was Taylor's Men dancing into the Morris Ring. This is a tradition that goes back many years, and is a way for a side to 'arrive' as full members. Taylor's Men did not disappoint, performing a 9 man version of Longborough Trunkles. Excellently danced and excellently played by their musicians also. It will be always be a highlight of my Squireship to have presented Taylor's Men with their staff of membership at the feast that evening.

Incidentally, the staff presented to them had previously been held by Sheffield University Morris Men. They had danced into the Morris Ring in 1972 at a London Ring Meeting, which Steven Archer, our Treasurer, had attended as a dancer with Bathampton. Steven danced in the Taylor's Men set. By way of further symmetry a new mixed Sheffield University side started in 2017. I contacted them after





the meeting to pass on the story, and they were delighted to hear something of the history of Morris at Sheffield Uni. They hope to obtain some of the old kit and regalia from the old Sheffield Uni side and bring them back into use. It showed me that the passing on of traditions did not stop with Sharp, it goes on around us all the time. We should be mindful of what we ourselves can pass on.

My usual August break saw weeks of rushcutting leading up to the Saddleworth Rushcart Ring Meeting on the August Bank Holiday weekend. It was a special feeling to take part in my side's most important event as Squire of the Morris Ring. The Rushcart has become an important part of our local community and a focal point of the parish church's year. Many of you will have been to the Rushcart and know what it is like. However, it means a lot to us, as a side, that we are so well supported – not just by our own community, but by the Morris world also. The Rushcart in 2018 will also be on the Bank Holiday weekend and will see me dancing out as Morris Ring Squire on the Sunday afternoon, straight after the Church service. I can think of no better way to end my term of office.

The following weekend Carolyn and I went to Derby to help Ripley Morris Men

celebrate their 90th anniversary. Except after a re-count they decided it was their 92nd anniversary. What's a couple of years between friends? This was a day of dance in similar format to Kennet's and it proved again to be a successful formula for an event. City centre dance spots, easy transport links for sides to get to the event and plenty of facilities available for food and beer (and there are some excellent pubs in Derby!). All of this makes the day financially accessible for guest sides and it was a well attended day.

The next Friday night we both went over to help Grimsby Morris Men celebrate their 50th (I checked and they had definitely got their sums right). Also there was Paul Cross as their area rep and his wife Debs. It was an informal evening and lovely to spend time with a side I have rarely seen. In talking to their squire, he thought the last Squire of the Ring who had come to see them on home turf was Kenneth Loveless! Well, Father Ken is somewhat of a hard act to follow, but I did my best. In many ways, sides like Grimsby are the bedrock of the Morris Ring: active in their local community and perhaps taking in one or two events further afield in a season. It was a pleasure to share their celebrations and

to represent the Morris Ring in doing so.

The end of September saw me back in Cambridgeshire for Peterborough Morris Men's day of dance. It was a good day and I was pleased to present Ollie Simons with his staff of office after he danced in as the new squire. Having done the same for his predecessor the previous year, it's become a regular arrangement!

Early October took me back to Earlsdon for their annual Earlsdon tour, one of my favourite days out in Morris: a Northwest processional tour around Earlsdon with one of the best sides you'll see. One coincidence during the day was being introduced to the landlord of the Broomfield Tavern, who is the nephew of the late Colin Fleming (Squire of the Morris Ring between 1972 and 1974). It's a small world...

In mid-October I went up to Leeds for the day to meet up with the 18-30 weekend. There was some great dancing and I was made to feel very welcome (and old in a good way). The 18-30 weekend has brought together young men in Morris Ring sides for some years now and brought sides together also in the process. This can only be a good thing for us as an organisation.

The following week I was in Birmingham for Jockey Morris Men's day of dance. As an associate member of





Jockey, it was a chance to wear my Jockey kit and blend in for the day. Birmingham is a great city centre for dancing and Jockey are renowned for their hospitality – a winning combination for a great Morris day out. The usual wind-down over Belgian beer took place in the Post Office Vaults to end the day. As they say in Jockey, “Marvellous!” The following day was the Advisory Council meeting in Ryton-upon-Dunsmore at the home pub of the recently formed Knightlow Morris Men (Ollie is the landlord and a dancer). Much useful discussion ensued.

The Winter Ale season then kicked in. It started with something a little out of the ordinary, however: an invitation to Cambridge Morris Men's feast. Having spent my Morris life touring the Scout huts and Village Halls of England attending Morris do's it was quite something to attend one held at Trinity College Cambridge! It was an honour to be invited and to become an associate member of Cambridge MM as part of the proceedings. Students of Morris Ring

history will know that the impracticality of inviting large numbers of men to attend the Cambridge feast, and therefore to become associates of CMM to keep people in touch, was one of the reasons the Morris Ring was created. And so it became possible to maintain links in another way. This has given me a profound sense of the history of the Morris revival and the Morris Ring's part in that; it is something I am proud to help continue.

The Open Morris AGM was next up and, once again, along with Mel Barber (President of the Morris Federation), I made myself useful as a teller for their voting. I look forward to welcoming representatives of the Federation and Open to our ARM in March.

Anker Morris Men's Ale followed that and I was once again asked to present a staff of office to an incoming Squire. This time (and perhaps for the first time in the Morris Ring?) the presentation was made to a woman: Emma Melville. Emma is an excellent musician for Anker, and

many other sides. Welcome to the Squires' Union, Emma! My final Morris expedition of 2017 was to the Original Welsh Border Morris tour, an annual event on the Saturday before Christmas with performances in and around Worcester. The Original Welsh was one of the first revival sides to focus on the collected Border tradition and has met annually ever since the early 1970s. Seeing the collected dances in their own locality – White Ladies Aston, Evesham, Upton-upon-Severn, Pershore – was quite special. Like a Rushcart in Saddleworth, a rapper tour in Monkseaton or Headington Quarry at the Miner's Arms, seeing something in its original setting can offer new insights. The Morris traditions can and should be danced anywhere, but an appreciation of the source can help us better understand what the essence of a tradition is.

See you at the A.R.M!

Ed

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.

Faithfully balancing Three sets for Fieldtown



Photos by Tim Kelsey

Faithful City at 50

Tim Kelsey reports on a memorable weekend

During 2017 Faithful City Morris Men celebrated 50 years of dancing in and around Worcester. The highlight of this season was our celebration weekend over 7-9th July. The Saturday comprised a coach tour round Bredon Hill, stopping at The Swan in Birlingham, The Queen Elizabeth in Elmley Castle and The Star Inn in Ashton Under Hill. On returning to our base at the village hall in Sinton Green we enjoyed a pig roast, archive

videos and reminiscing for the rest of the evening.

It was a hot day but everybody gallantly joined in at each of the pubs, even after the enormous lunch we had at The Queen Elizabeth. In fact, we had three sets up together dancing *Balance the Straw* Fieldtown straight after lunch! The whole tour was made more special by having so many former members as well as friends from other sides with us, including Jon Melville, current Bagman of

the Morris Ring. In the evening, even more friends arrived, filling the hall and causing us to spill out into the beautiful sunny evening.

The toast was proposed by Mike Garland, former member of Faithful City and former Squire of the Morris Ring. Our own squire's reply highlighted the strength of our side which spans the generations with ages ranging from 12 to...much higher! As a result, there's a wealth of experience within the side; we even have founding member, John Barker, as an active musician. We are also lucky to have new members helping to secure our future.

Current and former members of Faithful City Morris Men



Green Man's Morris and Sword Club: *the final chapter*

Paul Oldhams, Green Man's last bagman, tells the all-too familiar story of a side struggling with the competing challenges of everyday life – and *anno domini*.

It is now just over a year since February 2017, when the men of Green Man made the decision to close the Club. What follows is a purely personal attempt to chart the course of the Club in the last few years, in the hope that what happened to us, can possibly be avoided by others.

much, as we were still performing each week, and managing to put out two sides on most occasions.

In 2005, when the Club celebrated its 50th birthday, Colin Spencer produced *A Short History of The Green Man's Morris and Sword Club*. In it he expressed

the following offer: we would dance free of charge at an event of their choice, if they sent along parents/staff to our practices so that they could dance with us at the event. The idea was that we might gain some recruits. The letters were sent out in January and we waited for the replies to come in.

In the event, we had two replies! One, in May, asked if we could dance in July, (they would send someone to our practices in June to learn the dances), and one other school asking us to dance in June. They would send six or seven people to our practices from the end of January.

Of the men that they sent, three stayed with us throughout the practice sessions, and by the time of the event, two had indicated that they wished to stay longer. At this point we felt that the exercise had been valid, as they were proving to be able dancers, and when we danced at the school, several of the parents 'had a go', but ultimately, for a variety of reasons, this was unsuccessful.

Unfortunately for us, one of the guys already ran a scout group and sang in an amateur operatic society. When you added to this that he was also a consultant anaesthetist at a local hospital, it soon became obvious that something would have to give – and yes, it was the Morris.

The second recruit did stay with us for almost a year, but the financial crash put a strain on his business, and given the fact that he had a young family, meant that he did, reluctantly, leave.

We danced at a local secondary school, a local scout group, and gave some instruction. Very enjoyable, but again no interest.

We also tried dancing in local shopping centres, advertising in local papers, using the



Green Man's Morris at the 2006 Lichfield Bower

I first joined Green Man, in January 2000, at the young age of almost 50! I had never danced morris before, but I was made to feel very welcome. I didn't feel out of place either, age wise – at that time I think that there were only a couple of men who were younger than myself.

I knew little about the Club, but was soon to learn of its illustrious history. I'll not go into that here, but suffice it to say that during the late 1950s and 1960s the Club had performed at major festivals both in the UK and outside it, and had provided two Squires of the Morris Ring, John Venables and Ray King.

Over the next few years, we saw the addition to our ranks of one new and one returning dancer, but the lack of recruits didn't seem to matter too

concerns about the future of the Club, pointing out the lack of recruitment of younger dancers and the ageing of the existing members. This I think, was the first time that many of us had thought of these issues seriously. He mentioned in the book that at one time the club had had high hopes of continuing via the sons of existing men. Although this group did perform in public, it failed to bear fruit.

We soon decided that we must do something to try to recruit new members. We were already trying to persuade audience members 'to have a go' during our shows, and we decided to try to redouble our efforts in this field.

We also adopted a suggestion that we should write to as many of the schools in Birmingham as we could, with



Morris Ring publicity boards and offering a free drink to any one who would come along to a practice afterwards. Again, we had no takers.

Among other efforts were the printing of leaflets and beer mats, which we distributed freely and left in those hostelrys in which we danced, and a standing chart was professionally made which we carried with us. It goes without saying that we also took the details of anyone expressing an interest.

In 2015, informal discussions

however, Lichfield MM seemed to be in decline themselves, and although we suggested that they joined with us at our practices, they were unable to do so.

We met in a city centre pub, advertised in the local papers, and although again we offered various inducements, we had no takers. By now, in late 2016, our number of fit men had dropped so that we were unable to put out a side. We had already decided in 2016 that, apart from the Lichfield Bower, we would

Club lost the chance of recruiting sons of the then dancers. Certainly, in my time, I think that there was a degree of complacency, and by the time that we realised our problem, it was too late. We were unable to attract younger men, as we were no longer 'young' ourselves.

All I can say is that if we could have done more, we would have done, but how can being outside in the 'fresh' air and exercising compete with 24-hour television, computers, Xboxes and the like?



The dancers and musicians of **Green Man's Morris and Sword Club** relax at the 2006 Chipperfield weekend, hosted by Greensleeves Morris Men.

took place with Stafford Morris Men and Uttoxeter Hearts of Oak Morris Men about joint performances, but excessive travelling worked against us.

Our final throw of the dice, in 2016, was to decide to move our base of operation from Erdington in Birmingham to Lichfield. This idea had earlier been rejected, because it could offend the members of Lichfield Morris Men, in that they might feel that we were drawing on their pool of potential recruits. By 2016,

accept no fee-paying bookings, and in December 2016 decided that we were unable to dance out. Once this decision was taken, it was only a short step to decide that without performance, there was no real point in existing, and we decided to close.

Where did we go wrong? *Did* we go wrong? With hindsight, it is easy to criticise. Perhaps in the early days the Club set its standards very high, was not prepared to moderate them, and therefore lost recruits. Perhaps again, the

Since the decision was made, many of us have been in receipt of good wishes and to our friends in the Morris we thank you for these. Some of our men have joined other clubs, but for most, the end of Green Man has meant the end of our dancing days. The Lichfield Bower procession which we led for 60 years has been left in the capable feet of the ladies of Three Spires Morris.

Thaxted and the Morris Ring

Cambridge Morris Men's **John Jenner**, assisted by Mike Goatcher and Matt Simons, reflects upon the events that shaped the formative years of our organisation.

Since the Thaxted Weekend in 2017, which celebrated 90 years of the annual gathering, a number of important historical facts have come to light. Mike Goatcher, Matt Simons and I have pooled our research and knowledge of the early days of the Morris weekends in Thaxted, and this article is the result. (It also gives me the opportunity to challenge some earlier misconceptions and misunderstandings.)

This year it will be my 60th full visit to Thaxted, although I must have driven over on the Sunday in 1956 or/and 1957 as I have a very clear memory of Alec Hunter (who died in January 1958) acting as MC at the country dancing then held in the yard of The Swan.

In 1958, when Squire of the Cambridge MM, we danced *Orange in Bloom* at the mass show and again (by special request) in the vicarage garden where the Sunday country and Morris dancing was held for the first time. The following year we were also very greatly honoured to dance *The Rose* during the church service. This was the second such occasion and Father Jack [Putterill] told the congregation not to mention such an activity in case the press got hold of it: "The dancing is part of the offertory—please do not clap!"

Whilst congratulating the Thaxted Men (especially the current members who work

so hard each year to give us all a well-oiled, enjoyable weekend) and, indeed, all their predecessors in maintaining the tradition over 90 years, we must not forget how it all began. The men of Thaxted, Cambridge, Letchworth should also be remembered along with Cecil Sharp.

In the very early days of the revival, Morris dancing was taught in schools often, but not always, by women teachers, and for adults were catered for by local branches of the English Folk Dance Society. By 1910 such activity was well established at Letchworth, Thaxted and Cambridge among other places. Development was halted by the Great War, but by 1920 the dancing had restarted in all three towns

by groups primarily formed to encourage men to dance, as the Morris had of necessity been taken over by women. The men in each place wanted to get out of the grip of the EFDS, formed in 1911, and to give displays rather than just to continuously learn the steps etc. There was a great deal of contact between the groups, encouraged by Alec Hunter, then of Letchworth and later of Thaxted, and they held folk dance weekends together, which included men's Morris, from 1923.

In 1926 men from the three clubs, with some others, gathered for a very successful weekend in Ardeley, a small village near Letchworth, where the vicar was Rev Francis Harton, a lifelong friend of Alec and indeed known as "Father Folky". Harton, however, was subsequently appointed Dean of Wells; the new vicar not being interested in such activities, it was decided to hold the weekend in 1927 in Ashwell, about eight miles away. The incumbent there would not allow dancing on a Sunday but Conrad Noel, Vicar of Thaxted, welcomed such a gathering and sanctioned Sunday dancing, providing the men attended the Church service first. This tradition has shaped all Ring Meetings since, until very recently.

Hence July 1927 saw the first official gathering in Thaxted of Morris *men* from various sides; they attended as



Alex Hunter





individuals much as we attend present day instructionals. These gatherings were supported by the EFDS but the men, gave shows in and around Thaxted. The weekend finished on the Sunday afternoon with country dancing. So started the Morris weekend for men which, with the exception of the five war years, has been continued by Thaxted Morris Men ever since.

Joseph Needham, who knew Alec Hunter well and had also been for some years a frequent and active visitor to Thaxted church (but who did not take up the morris until 1930), was Squire of the Cambridge Morris Men in 1933 and wanted there to be a much closer connection between Cambridge and men from other clubs. The only method then was by personal invitation to the CMM annual feast, which also bestowed honorary membership. But there were now too many men who had connections with Cambridge and The Travelling Morrice, so it was suggested that other men or even whole clubs might become affiliated to the CMM. However, on October 5th 1933 Joseph and Arthur Peck, on their way back from checking out a venue for a projected Cambridge Morris Men training week in Norfolk, formed the basic ideas for a national organisation and called a meeting of other resident Cambridge dancers on November 2nd 1933. As a result it was agreed to write to the six clubs who had close connections with Cambridge, with the

suggestion to form an association to be called "The Morris Ring". Four of the clubs wrote back in agreement, but it seems that Greensleeves Morris Men never received the letter. After a letter of explanation (a copy of which is extant) they gave their full support. During the training week a draft constitution was drawn up by Joseph and Arthur with the help of suggestions from other men. There is even a photograph of Joseph and Arthur working on the constitution. It was thought that Alec Hunter, though not present, should be asked to be the first Squire; Walter Abson agreed to be the Bagman.

Consequently the Morris Ring was formally instituted at the 10th feast of the Cambridge Morris Men on the following Saturday: April 14th 1934.

It was agreed that the other clubs and individual Morris men should be informed that a meeting to discuss The Morris Ring as "something in being" would be held during the annual Morris weekend in Thaxted and an outline given of its nature and purpose. A copy of Joseph's letter is in the archives. A meeting of representatives from five of the founder clubs was held in Mrs King's house in Newbiggin Street, where Joseph, Arthur and other men usually stayed for the weekend, and the proposed draft constitution with small amendments was agreed. This was followed by a general meeting of all the Morris men in the vicarage garden on the Sunday afternoon, when the draft

constitution was explained and the Morris Ring was well and truly constituted.

The inaugural meeting of the Morris Ring was held later that same year (on October 20th) at Cecil Sharp House when Douglas Kennedy, the director of the EFDSS, itself formed just two years earlier, welcome the Ring as a fellow society.

The representatives of the thirteen clubs there present formally agreed the final version of the constitution and elected the first officers. Douglas then presented the staff of office, given by the EFDSS, to Alec Hunter who, as the first Squire, took the chair and The Morris Ring was finally established.

From 1935 the already well established Thaxted Morris weekend took on the mantle of a meeting of the Morris Ring, though initially still referred to as "The Morris Weekend", whereas other meetings until the war were organised by the Morris Ring bagman. With the hard work of Thaxted Morris Men and great support from the townspeople of Thaxted, this has continued every year and for the last two years has reverted to its pre-1935 name.

All this leads me to conclude that, at the very least, the names of Alec, Joseph, Arthur and others should be remembered (along, of course, with that of Cecil Sharp) for stabilising the Morris revival and for giving us the weekends in Thaxted, Ring Meetings and the club days that we all so enjoy today.

Just wondering... *for thirty years*

Joe Oldaker is in retrospective mood as he considers a truly unconventional set of Morris men.

This is a short history of the **One Day Wonders Travelling Morris**, which wound up in 2017 after 30 Annual Tours [see *MRC73 - Ed.*]. We think it's worth recording as the team had a unique combination of features.

The brainchild of Chris Barber, at that time Fool for Forest of Dean Morris Men, the team grew out of his frustration at the tendency for normal Morris outings to suffer from "one more man" syndrome, where an incomplete set waited to

dance while men got a beer in or had an ice-cream. After his experience at the Fools and Animals Weekend run by Wath-upon-Dearne Morris Men in 1987, where he found men were practically elbowing each other to get into the set, Chris had the idea of starting a once-a-year team of 8 men: 7 dancers keen to dance, with a musician. Having canvassed likely recruits, he got the 8 men, and with Tony Ashley of Anker Morris Men the first tour was planned for May

1988. Bob Collier of Forest of Dean sketched out the kit, and David Wintle, then also of Forest of Dean, suggested that the team should dance a single tradition on tour, rather than the more common miscellany. The first tour was based at the Sun Inn at Clun, and this venue, plus the "one day" nature of the team, led to the adoption of the logo of a Smiling Sun. At the end of the first, successful, day the men discussed and settled on a set of basic principles for the team to continue. ☞



David Wintle leads the **One Day Wonders Travelling Morris** in an Oddington dance at The Plough, Wistanstow, on their farewell tour in 2017. Tony Ashley obliges on melodeon.

Photo
Dan Frooty



The name “One Day Wonders” was of course an echo of Will Kempe’s famous exploit, with “Travelling” incorporated because the team did.

The men would meet on a Friday evening and practice the dances, tour on the Saturday, hold an AGM on Sunday morning, and reconvene twelve months later. The roles of squire and foreman would rotate through the membership, with the squire responsible for the tour organisation, and the foreman for the dancing. The squire could choose where the tour went, and the dance tradition was to be decided by the foreman, taught on the Friday evening, and danced during the tour. The tradition would not be publicised in advance to the team, except for the music being given to the musician. It was intended to avoid repetition of any tradition, though in the 30 years of the team’s existence this proved impossible to sustain, as not all nominated foremen felt able to research and teach something entirely different. If a member had to drop out, it was intended that he should nominate a replacement. This totally failed to work in practice, and replacements were nominated by other members when needed, following the rule that as original men retired, no regular Morris team should have more than 2 members in ODW. This was to avoid the team dance style becoming too fixed, and the membership too inward-looking. Generally, the tour organisation was to avoid the indoor camping common to Morris events, and this

worked, though a couple of self-catering bunkhouses did feature, as did the YHA, alongside the more usual pubs.

The rules proved a sound basis for the team’s activities, with minor adjustments, throughout the thirty years.

How did team membership work out? Four of the original eight attended all thirty tours. In 2009 the number was increased to nine men, due to ongoing problems with injuries and illness, but in 2016 numbers reverted to eight, again because of illness, and this did not change again as it was planned to wind the team up in 2017. On two tours (1994 and 2008) only six dancers and a musician turned out due to unavoidable last minute absences.

The following regular Morris teams were represented in the membership through the life of One Day Wonders: Forest of Dean, Anker, Whitchurch, Lassington Oak, Green Man, Coventry, Packington, Pinewoods (USA), Northampton,

Kennet, Handsworth, Cambridge, East Suffolk, Icknield Way, Wath-upon-Dearne, Helier, Brackley, and Lincoln & Micklebarrow. Some men were simultaneously or successively members of more than one other team. It will be obvious that over thirty years, in observing the “no repeats” rule for Morris traditions as far as practicable, the team would have danced a wide variety. In fact twenty-four distinct traditions were performed, with six having repeats: Longborough, Adderbury, Wheatley, Ilmington, Withington, Sherborne, Bledington, Bessels Leigh, Brackley, Bidford, Headington, Bampton, Ducklington, Lower Swell, Kirtlington, Derby, Eynsham, Snowhill, and Duns Tew were performed once, and with repeats: Badby (2), Bucknell (2), Stanton Harcourt (2), Fieldtown (3), Oddington (2). The repeat of Oddington was a deliberate team decision, as it was danced on the first Tour, and hence chosen for the last, with



The early years Longborough at Haddon Hall in 1990.



the same foreman, though the actual dances and style differed markedly. Likewise, because the foreman changed each year, the repeats never duplicated the previous versions.

Tours were located all over the place, from the Gower in the West to the Norfolk coast in the East, and from the New Forest in the South to the Yorkshire Dales in the North, plus overseas to Jersey. Among particularly memorable spots were the spectacular courtyards at Haddon Hall and Blenheim Palace, dancing below the keep at Gorey Castle on Jersey, at historic houses like Charlecote, Coughton Court, Calke Abbey, in towns like Warwick, Oakham and Wells, on scenic tours in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire's Wharfedale – the list could go on. Throughout there was always (of course!) a carefully chosen selection of pubs, some highly noteworthy, for refreshment and lunch. Certain elements of the tour became “traditional”: a tea stop (because in the early years pubs were not open in the

afternoon!), and a dinner and *après* Morris session at the end of the tour.

The combination of the above features made the One Day Wonders Travelling Morris a unique experiment, as no other Travelling or Once-a-Year team follows the same rules, particularly in choice of dance traditions, where the requirement to learn six dances on Friday evening to a standard fit to appear next day meant all members had to be experienced dancers; the tradition taught could be totally unfamiliar, or very different in style to the version a man usually danced. This is what made membership really interesting in terms of Morris. For the dancer it refreshed the habit of concentration on the technical aspects of performance, and for the foreman it presented the opportunity to research and teach a tradition not done by his own team, or to reconstruct from sometimes vestigial notes an otherwise obscure tradition and try it out. The whole experience

broadened the knowledge of the membership of traditions not usually encountered, and gave an appreciation of how a tradition apparently coherent in performance is actually the result of careful selection from very varied and sometimes conflicting sources and authorities.

If this sounds rather serious and academic, it should be noted that the annual tours were very enjoyable and sociable throughout – the camaraderie one hopes to find in Morris was always evident. There is a fund of memorable moments, some funny, some more serious, which there is no space to include here, and the *après* Morris sessions brought out some excellent music and singing.

This account is put forward not just for the record, but also in the hope that a new generation of dancers might think the ideas worth taking up and carrying on – the original plan of steadily recruiting younger “Wonders” as men dropped out failed to happen, but a fresh group might like to give it a whirl, as it offers something not available via the 18-30 Morris, and could lead into something else for those no longer eligible for that. There is a detailed Log and photo record of the team from the beginning, so further information about the One Day Wonders and what we did can be obtained from the author by interested parties.

Joe Oldaker served for many years with the One Day Wonders Travelling Morris. He is Bagman of Anker Morris Men.



Still going strong Dancing Longborough at Shrewsbury Castle in 2015.

The Australian Morris Ring Tour

Peter Austin slips away from Jockey Men's Morris for some Antipodean antics as our sister organisation reaches a landmark year. *Photos by the author.*

During the cold dark days of last winter an advert was placed on the Morris Ring website that the Australian Morris Ring would be celebrating their 70th anniversary in August 2017 with a tour taking in 3 major Australian cities as well as a variety of landmarks and places of interest. Not needing much excuse to go out to join this celebration, I made arrangements back in January to join them for this Odyssey.

August came around very quickly and I left Heathrow with no idea of what was coming and a suitcase stuffed with kit and various essentials. After two days travelling (including a stop in Singapore) I landed in Adelaide early on a chilly Thursday morning and had some time to sleep off the jetlag. The tour began on Thursday evening when I was taken to the Adelaide

Morris Men practice night. It was there that I met Ragged Robin Morris who represented the rest of the English visitors on the tour, and along with Adelaide morris dancers from various local groups was treated to a workshop describing three of Ragged Robin's dances. I was introduced to the Squire of the Australian Ring, Mike James, who had very wisely decided to go to England the next day to ensure that while the tour was happening he could claim plausible deniability if things went wrong... The following night was the launch party for the tour with a chance to pick up the tour badge and t-shirt, and also to meet many of Adelaide's morris dancers. The first weekend saw a large number of morris dancers gathered in the city of Adelaide to kick the tour off in fine style. Besides the usual scratch morris that occurs at these events, I was

privileged to be inducted into the Kellybrook tradition by the Britannia Morris Men of Melbourne to help make up numbers. Taking in a few pleasant pubs in the city on the Saturday, we had good weather and made the most of it. We were officially welcomed to the country by an elder of the local Aboriginal nation at the feast on Saturday night, which was a very important reminder to us all that while we were celebrating one tradition, the traditions of the land and its people went back much further. Sunday saw us ascend to the top of Mount Lofty, the highest point in the local area, and with a beautiful panorama of the city of Adelaide below, we impressed the groups of tourists who'd come to admire the view with a wide variety of dance styles and traditions. We also called in at a couple of vineyards to sample the local wines.



Smile! The Australian Morris Ring Seventieth Anniversary Tour Members assemble.



Serafino in particular is well worth a visit as its Tawny (port but without the litigious labelling) was very delicious.

We moved to Halls Gap in the week to enjoy the delights that one of the most spectacular National Parks in the state of Victoria has to offer. Alongside dancing at local hostelrys and notable places (including a former asylum in Ararat), we were able to view some of Australia's most recognisable wildlife right outside our accommodation including kangaroos, kookaburras and blue wrens. Several of us took the opportunity to climb the up to the peak of Mount William, known locally as the Pinnacle, which at 3832 feet above sea level would have provided a spectacular view if the cloud had not chosen the moment we reached the top to descend and obliterate most of the panorama. The YHA in Halls Gap is good accommodation for anyone passing through the area as the proprietor is a born and bred Mancunian and the facility provides an excellent self-catered base for exploring the national park.

Towards the end of week one we drove down to the coast to the town of Anglesey (yes, you read that correctly) but not before stopping off in the town of Lorne on the Great Ocean Road to dance on the end of their magnificent pier, a real highlight of the tour and one the best spots I have been privileged to dance at. After a night in the YMCA at Anglesey we moved



on to Melbourne. A day of workshops on Saturday provided a nice opportunity to socialise and try out new traditions (including the Sydney tradition, taught very ably by Veronica Wagner of Black Joak Morris, Sydney). The feast in the evening was followed by some very lively dancing and special mention must be made of Brandragon Morris who, alongside being the host side for this leg of the tour, also performed some lovely North West dancers both at the feast and during the tours of the Yarra wine region and the City of Melbourne over the next 2 days. The Sunday tour

included a stop at Beechworth Bakery, which is worth a visit if only to try the popular Lamington cake (or a Dame Edna if you feel exotic!). Monday took us into Melbourne and some very pleasant drinking spots. The *Upton* hanky dance in the Sherlock Holmes will particularly stay with me for a while given we had very little practice and not much space to perform it in. But we carried it off in fine style which just goes to show that rehearsal is vastly overrated! A reduction in numbers after Melbourne meant that we saw some interesting jigs come to the fore including Longborough *Princess*





Royal and Cuckoos Nest Fieldtown. Mention must be made of Geoff Wark (Adelaide) and Alan Whitbread (Ragged Robin) who were the mainstay for music for the majority of this week until we reached Canberra. Indeed, Alan entertained us with some beautiful concertina tunes while we enjoyed the sunset on the hotel balcony with a great deal of wine and cheese. The week saw us visiting various places of interest including the town of Glenrowan where notorious outlaw Ned Kelly had his last stand. We stayed for two nights in the town of Rutherglen and were delighted to be able to perform *Fieldtown Valentine* outside Valentine's bakery in the main high street.

We joined up with our hosts for the final leg of the tour, Surly Griffin Morris, on Thursday and went into the outskirts of Canberra to settle into a very nice YMCA hostel for the final 4 days. A *Broad Cupid* Badby on top

of the submarine HMAS Otway provided a nice break on the journey at Holbrook Submarine Museum (over 300km from the sea!). Friday 1st September started with a workshop on traditional Aboriginal dance hosted by Wiradjuri Echoes, a very interesting insight into the culture and history of the Aboriginal people. The 1st day of September is Wattle day, which is officially the first day of Spring in the Southern hemisphere and a time when Australia's national flower is very prominent in gardens and along the roadsides in many areas. Dance spots included Parliament House and the National Library, and a glorious view of Lake Burley Griffin which runs right through the middle of the city. Saturday took us up to the hills and more wineries to sample, and also took us to a meadery. Traditional honey based mead was served alongside pizza and salad which was a very agreeable combination for lunch. Another memorable moment occurred here as we were asked to perform a dance for a birthday party that was also eating there. I suspect that no performance of *Jockey to the Fair* Brackley has ever had the figure 'Interline, odds turn, form around Lisa!' called before (unless someone with longer memory can correct me...). Nevertheless, the dance was well received which makes impromptu performances like that all the more memorable. Sunday took us a short distance from our

accommodation to the historic suburb of Hall and our last official engagement at the farmers market. Highlights included a Longsword dance by Surly Griffin and a Jockey Brackley led by myself which raised a lot of dust to the point where my black shoes turned orange. A final massed dance was followed by a general feeling of pride in a job well done and a great sense of camaraderie amongst those of us who had seen the whole tour through start to finish.

It was noted that not many people from Britain took up on the invitation to visit Australia and I have suggested to the organising team that perhaps a future event in March/April or September/October might be more advisable given how busy most sides are in August with festivals and similar. But in the main, the tour could not be described as anything other than a success and a very enjoyable time. I must express thanks to Geoff, Di and Simon and the army of people who helped to ensure this was the case. I strongly recommend that anyone visiting Australia takes the time to get in touch with the Australian Ring to try and arrange a 'foot up' with a local team as there are many people who are passionate about morris down under who would be delighted to welcome a visiting dancer/musician. As for me, a return trip next year may well be in the offing so watch this space.

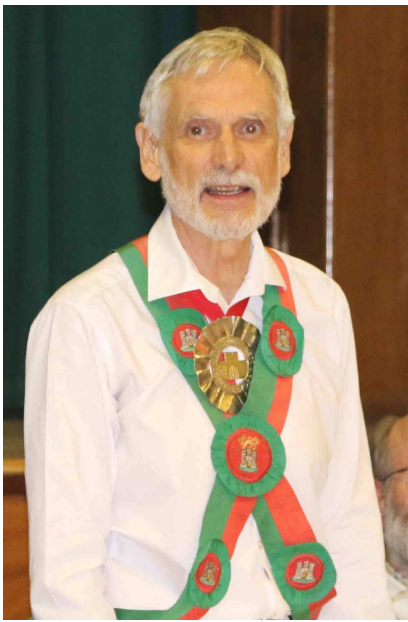


Obituaries

Stroph Rayner

Winchester Morris Men

1946-2017



Stroph Rayner, a long-standing folk, social and international dancer, joined Winchester Morris Men in 1995, together with his son Tristram. He was elected a full member the following year, and, despite being a member for such a short time, he volunteered for, and was elected unopposed to, the role of Bagman in 1997. He thought he would only stay as Bagman for a couple of years, but he made such a good job of it that he served nine years before stepping down. He was re-elected as Bagman in 2009 and continued for a further six years until his cancer diagnosis caused him to step down in 2015.

During the summer of 2016 he was making a good recovery, and felt able and willing to stand as Squire; he was duly elected in September. However, within a short time the cancer returned and had spread.

Despite the chemo he was still actively involved in running the side and turned out regularly to practices. In due course he declined further chemo and was able to turn out to all our summer programme events and dance at least one dance at each stand. He last danced out with Winchester Morris Men in July 2017, at the last stop of the tour, and surprised many of us by getting up to dance *The Furze Field* from Bampton, one of our more energetic dances. Sadly, he was unable to attend any more events, and died peacefully on 6th October.

A funeral Service of Thanksgiving was held on 25th October with the Mayor of Winchester and numerous representatives from many Morris sides in attendance.

Stroph even contrived to sing two songs at his own funeral: the music hall songs "My Old Dutch", dedicated to his beloved wife Lin, and "Ain't It Grand To Be Bloomin' Well Dead"; both typical of his wry humour and recorded in his last few weeks. Winchester Morris Men danced *Shepherds Hey* from

Fieldtown during the service, and there was further dancing and singing at the wake.

In his time as Bagman, Stroph managed to accumulate many roles within the club, because he was willing to take them on and always did such a good job. As Squire, he recognized his limitations as a dancer, but was very particular about how the side should perform, seeking to raise standards both in dancing and presentation.

He remained alert to the end, sending out a number of emails during his last few weeks, passing on his wealth of experience and sharing thoughts on what the Winchester Morris Men should be doing next year and what areas could still be improved upon.

In addition to the Morris, Stroph was active in other forms of folk dancing and singing, often taking on administrative roles in the clubs he joined. He was Treasurer of the Fo'c'sle Club in Southampton for many years, was active in introducing new dances to the Hursley International Dancers, and he used his distinctive singing style to great effect in the vaudeville songs from the early 1900s.

Stroph was a very strong advocate for Winchester Morris Men, an officer of the club for 16 of his 22 years with the side and always determined to improve our standards and performances. He will be sadly missed.

Derek Stewart

Antony Motley

Mayflower Morris Men

1944-2017



Tony Motley of the Mayflower Morris Men passed away in the early hours of 24th November 2017. Tony joined us in 1986 and became a reliable, respected, knowledgeable member of the side. He was Squire three times, from 1992-94, 2003-09, and 2013-14, Bagman once, and Fool three times, a position he currently held. He'd done all the things for our side that you would expect a man devoted to the Morris to do, from organizing days of dance to performing the Morris abroad, from taking a lead role in all our staged events (including his infamous 'Slasher the Turk' in our Mummies' play) to singing or reciting on behalf of the side. He was always in the thick of whatever the side got up to. Some years ago, whilst still dancing with us, he also joined Thaxted for two years simply because he admired their skill and wanted to join them. He was always deadly serious about performing the Morris well for the public whilst ensuring it was still fun for the side and he always gave full support to whoever was Squire. He told me shortly before his death that taking up Morris was the

best thing he'd ever done. He was truly a stalwart of the side, of the Ring, and of the Morris in general.

In his 'other' life he'd been a member of the King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery (which he loved) and a policeman (which he did not). He'd worked in various jobs with Shire horses and Suffolks from driving waggons for brewery show teams to supplying saddlers. For the last twelve years he'd worked for an undertaker's which gave him ample opportunity to exploit humorous situations (afterwards); he was always ready to crack a joke and was aware of the potentially comic.

He was diagnosed with cancer at the end of September and given but a short time to live. The dignity and courage he showed during his brief illness were the mark of the man yet he was also philosophical about what was to come.

He was indeed a fine dancer mixing agility and vigour (he had practised karate) with strength (he could control a fully-loaded brewer's dray), gracefulness (he rode and jumped with poise) and precision (he was a natural but untrained artist). It is a privilege to have known him and an honour to have danced with him.

He died peacefully and was in no pain.

On 9th December 2017 he had a 'Morris' funeral – that's how he wanted it – bells, hats, colour (even with Mayflower's black and white chequerboard), noise, banter, energy, exuberance, good cheer, vitality, dancing – and that's how Mayflower with friends from other sides and the Ring said our farewell. We shall miss him sorely and remember him fondly, as will all whose lives he graced. He

leaves a widow, Jan, and a daughter, Danyelle. Merry meet, merry part, Tony.

Julian Whybra

Simon Upton

Gloucestershire Morris Men

1953-2017

It is with deep sadness that we announce the death of our beloved Squire, Simon Upton, who passed away peacefully at the Sue Ryder Hospice in Leckhampton.

All those who firmly believe that he somehow held on, until after we had danced there on Saturday 9th September, following our traditional day of dance, collecting funds for them in Cheltenham.

On this day we collected over £1000 for the Hospice and it is our 2018 chosen charity.

Until his retirement shortly after his 60th birthday, Simon was Head of Languages at Chosen Hill School, near Gloucester, being fluent in both German and French.

As well as being Squire of GMM, Simon was the Squire, mentor and teacher of a new mixed side, the Gloucestershire Mixed Morris (now called The Miserden Morris) in a Gloucestershire traditions, legacy project which started in September 2016.

Simon was a great man, a fine friend and a wonderful dancer and teacher, having danced with the Gloucestershire Morris Men for over 50 years, firstly as a boy with his father, the late Ron Upton (also a former Squire of the side).

He was a wonderful husband, father and grandfather and is sadly missed by all.

Tony Poulter

Ed Bassford

Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men

1948-2017

Ed Bassford, who has died aged 69, started Morris dancing in 1967 as a 2nd year Social Anthropology student at the University of Sussex. Following a Morris Ring directive to try and get young people involved in Morris dancing, Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men, led by Paul Setford, started teaching students at the University in the Autumn Term 1967, and Ed attended the first practice. This initiative led to the formation of the University of Sussex Morris Men and Ed was a member until he joined Chanctonbury in the early 1970s. The two sides developed a close relationship: sharing the same teachers, repertoire and stands. The University side has now evolved into the Brighton Morris Men.

In April 1975, Ed along with fellow dancers Ed Lyons, Eric Moquet and Dave Hood attended a workshop of North West Morris dancing organised by the Manchester Morris Men and held in Pershore, Worcestershire and led by Derek Froome and Roy Dommett (our four attendees are now known as the Pershore Four). This enthused Ed, and he started Chanctonbury's North West side. This type of dancing was different from the Cotswold style that was generally seen in Sussex at that time: the noise of clogs, colourful kit

and the loudness of the music. Ed was proud that Chanctonbury was the first side south of Coventry to do this type of dance. Ed led the North West side until 1992.

Ed was the Squire of Chanctonbury from 1975-77. Ed was always keen to impart his knowledge. When the Knots of May started in 1974, Ed was there teaching. Again, when Cuckoo's Nest Women's Morris started in 1977, Ed taught them to during their fledging years. During his time, Ed made a real difference to the quality and variety of dancing locally over the past 50 years.

He faded away from Chanctonbury in the early 1990s, but would make welcome return to the North West side on special occasions, for example to lead us through the streets of Lewes on Bonfire Night. Later, when he became too ill to dance, he would maintain an interest and spectate whenever possible.

In the 1970s and 80s, Ed was a popular Barn Dance caller with the Sussex-based bands, "The Pump and Pluck Band" led by Vic Gammon, and "The Biggest Trio in the World."

Sean Goddard

Ed Lyons

Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men

1950-2016

Ed Lyons, who has died aged 66, joined Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men in 1971, initially dancing Cotswold traditions for at least seven years. In 1975 he

was one of the 'Pershore Four' who attended a workshop organised by Manchester Morris Men at Pershore, to spread knowledge of North West Morris; this became his passion.

In 2000 he took over as Captain of North West and taught the team until his death. There were many high points for the team under his leadership and tutelage, but possible the pinnacle was



taking the team to Thaxted for the 100th anniversary in 2011. Latterly he was instrumental in forming and teaching a local ladies' side, "Temporary Measured", whose debut at Lewes Folk Day 2016 was another *tour de force*.

His passion for Morris, his driving ambition for the team to be the best it could, his pride in his Yorkshire heritage and belief in honesty, and his dry sense of humour and rich smile will be missed by us all.

Sean Goddard

Are you organising a big (or small) Morris event this summer?

Send your choicest photos to *The Morris Ring Circular* to show the world what a great time you had. Brief reports are also welcome.

Full details on submitting such goodies, or anything else you think will delight our readers, can be perused below. Get cracking!

Deadline for the next issue:

30th May 2018



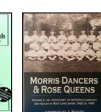
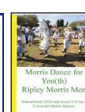
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The Morris Ring Circular is published by the Morris Ring, the international association of men's morris, mumming and sword dance clubs:
www.themorrisring.org.

Please submit items to thecircular@themorrisring.org.

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.

Editor Tony Foard 33 Cunningham Drive, Wirral, CH63 0JX (0151 334 4566)

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