

the MORRIS RING
founded 1934

THE Circular

Edited for the Morris Ring by Eddie Dunmore

Number 31



Rumworth on Mothers Day

Full story on page 3

Spring 1998

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The Squire

Greetings gentlemen. This is the last time that I am writing in this journal as the Squire of the Ring, and I can only say what a pleasure it has been to have served you in that capacity. I will always be grateful to you all for putting your trust in me and giving me the opportunity to have been Squire of the Morris Ring.

Since I was elected in March 1996 I have been to, and seen, some amazing things. I have travelled, to date, in excess of 33,000 miles on your behalf. I have visited six different countries on two continents and by the time I dance out I will have attended and officiated at thirteen Ring Meetings, and countless Ales and Feasts. To say that I have been a fortunate person is an understatement: I can't remember such a rewarding period in my life or when I have enjoyed myself so much.

It has always been a pleasure to have been in the company of like-minded people, to share in a host club's celebrations and generally to partake in a good time. The hospitality, friendship, and camaraderie shown to me wherever I have been has been second to none.

I take away with me some wonderful memories, like my time in New York with West Somerset promoting a new brand of cider; in the restaurant at the top of the World Trade Centre; dancing in Liberty Square in the middle of Manhattan; walking down 5th Avenue, being in Times Square at night with the free light show of neon signs all around. Then there was an international folklore festival in the Czech Republic, and being the only international con-

tent of the whole weekend: there are aspects of this particular weekend that I care not to remember, or even talk about for that matter. My lips are sealed on this matter, and I hope the Mendip men are as one with me on this.

My fondest memories though are of the many Ring Meetings I have attended. The dancing-in meeting is always special: any Squire will tell you that and I am no exception. I shall never forget watching Saddleworth dancing their Nine Man Morris dance very late at night, back at the school – it was electrifying just to be there. Also the procession to and from the church on a bright sunny morning, I can feel the sun on my back as I write. I remember too drinking ice cold Champagne on the Sunday lunch time with the men from Exeter after the mass dancing – how decadent we all were.

The Thaxted Ring Meeting I attended as Squire Elect was particularly memorable, with all the principal officers of the Ring involved in that horrendous car accident, but the Thaxted of the following year was a much different affair. The procession down into the Square on the Saturday night is the stuff that dreams are made of – I shall never forget it.

That same Thaxted Meeting was also memorable for another reason. After the mass dancing and lunch on the Sunday, Tony Parsons, Roy Yarnell and myself left early and dashed off to join Eddie Dunmore at the New Globe Theatre on the banks of the Thames in London. The object was to meet up with Shakespeare Morris and the rest of the Exeter men to dance in a celebration of British folk culture. This was the opening

ceremony of the Annual Meeting of the International Association of Ports & Harbours, so we danced for an audience of international delegates. After appearing there I felt that I had really made it!

Well that's enough ramblings and memories of a soon-to-be past Squire. I have just returned from the 1998 ARM hosted in Kent by the Ravensbourne Men. Though we were down on numbers this year, it did not stop us from enjoying ourselves on the Saturday evening. Thank you, Ravensbourne, for all the hard work that made the weekend successful and so enjoyable.

At this year's ARM we elected my successor, and I am pleased to welcome Daniel Fox into this position – Good Luck, Daniel! You have not just my support on your run in as Squire but the whole of the Morris Ring to back you up. The contest between Daniel and Gerald Willy (the other candidate) was a close one, and I hope Gerald will stand again in a couple of years time.

Also at this ARM we saw Tony Parsons stand down as Bagman after three years in the job. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Tony, not just for myself but from the whole membership, for the sterling job he has done on our behalf. Thanks Tony, and I look forward to sharing a few pints with you in the not too-distant future.

Tony is succeeded by John Frearson of Bedford Morris Men. I have appointed John to the post of Acting Bagman and he will have to submit himself for election next year if he wishes to continue in office. All that remains for me to do is to welcome John aboard – I hope you will enjoy the task you have taken on.

For those of you who have not yet seen his first Newsletter, the Acting Bagman can be contacted at:-

*John Frearson,
7 Birch Grove, Sandy,
Bedfordshire SG19 1NG;
tel ephone: 01767-681057*

I would at this point like to take the opportunity to thank all the elected officers of the Ring that I have got to know over the last 2½ years. Thank you all for your help and guidance through my term of office.

I can't finish without saying a huge thank you to BFB. Steve Adamson our larger than life Treasurer. Thank you, Steve, for all the fun and laughter we have had over the phone: when we have attended functions together, it was worth doing the job for that alone. Cheers, mate

I would also like to at this point say thank you to all the teams that invited me to their Ale, Feast, or Day of Dance. Unfortunately I have not been able to attend all the invitations that have come my way and I apologise for that here: it is so very difficult to fit everything in.

All that is left for me now as I pass into my twilight years as a past Squire is a two-year stint as Chairman of the Advisory Council, and then anonymity. They say you only know how popular you were as Squire, by the amount of invitations you get after you leave office. So, if there is anyone reading this out there, I am available for Ales, Feasts 21st Birthdays, and Golden Weddings.

PS. This is an appeal to all clubs. Due to the success of the Chipping Campden Ring Meeting this year, Thaxted has been left woefully short on numbers. Thaxted is of course one of our best showcases for Morris dancing, and a large crowd always turns out every year to watch the spectacle. So, please, can as many clubs as possible – either locally or from further afield – please make an effort to attend Thaxted this year, so as not to disappoint the large crowds we know that attend.

Tim Sercombe

Squire of the Ring.



The Squire elect

PAST holders of this office know that there is no job description or any manual on "How to be a Good Squire", so I start with an apology in advance for any thing that goes wrong in the next two years, although Rich-

ard Hankinson tells me that it is almost five years if you count in the two years as Chairman of the Advisory Council.

Since agreeing to be a candidate and since the election I have received many messages of support and encouragement for

which I am very grateful. My thanks to all who voted for me and my good wishes to Gerald Willey of Shakespeare MM. It is an indication of the health of The Ring that there is an election for the elected officers.

Now is the time to start thinking about candidates to be my successor. Do ask individuals that you think are potential candidates if they will consider it. I probably would not have put my name forward if I had not been asked to think seriously about it.

I have no earth-shattering plans for my term of office. I cannot hope to emulate Tim's capacity for touring the length, breadth and height of the morris world but I do intend to follow the advice of a number of my predecessors: "whatever you do, enjoy it."

I plan to attend all the Ring Meetings this year and will dance in at Exeter on Sunday 26 July. Thereafter I hope to accept as many invitations to ales, feasts, days and weekends of dance as I can.

Dates in 1999 to be avoided include June 4-6 (Thaxted Ring Meeting), September 4 (my wife's birthday and our wedding anniversary) and, if possible, June 26 (Thaxted Church Patronal Festival).

I am very much looking forward to an enjoyable two years as Squire.

Wassail

Daniel Fox

Squire Elect

PS To save embarrassment I am Daniel NOT Dan or Danny!

Halfvasten op Antwerpen

An account of the visit to Antwerp by 'The Rumworth Morris of Bolton' as guests of 'Lange Wapper'.

YOUR editor has asked me to write a few words about Rumworth's experiences in Antwerp, so that he has something to put with the pictures that he took!

The Lange Wapper sword dance team grew out of a folk dance group in 1970. The dance was choreographed by Renaat van Craenenbroeck who has been instrumental in the revival of various sword dance teams in Belgium and France. Records of sword dancing in Flanders go back to 1389, although it is not known if there was a linked sword dance or not. Pieter Breughel the Elder did a painting or drawing called 'The Fair of St George's Day' which included a group of 11 dancers, apparently dancing a linked sword dance. Also in the Antwerp area, a dance called the Trawantel has survived as a guild dance. This is similar to a sword dance but is performed with sticks and a hoop.

From these sources, together with information about other European dances, Renaat choreographed the Lange Wapper dance. The dance takes about 15 minutes and is at a very measured pace. During the dance there are 'set' pieces where the dancers get into a formation and hold the position for a while. There is a fool who is killed and carried off and a hobby horse that dances round throughout the performance. A 5-sword lock is made during the dance, but it is the finale that is its highlight.

Ten dancers form a platform with their swords, 5 swords interlaced with 5 swords at right angles. The captain steps onto the platform which is then raised to shoulder height, where he unfurls a large flag which he waves in typical Belgian fashion.

The invitation to join Lange Wapper at their annual Half Lent dance in front of the Cathedral in Antwerp came as a surprise. I had twice been to watch the team perform their sword dance, but never thought for one moment that I would become involved in the event. Previously, the invited teams had always been sword

teams such as Goathland, Handsworth, Snark and Grenside from England, and Überlingen,

Markina and Bal do Sabre from the continent. They'd seen us at the Scarborough Sword weekend



THESE FOOLISH THINGS...

(United Fools' Unconvention 1997)

This year the Unconvention returned to the Red Lion, Wath on Dearne. In recent years, we have met at the Red Lion every second year, with alternate meetings at other venues around the country. Next year it will be at Plymouth (courtesy of the irrepressible Julian Kohler and friends) so book early!

As always, we were made very welcome by the staff and regulars, and we were looked after splendidly. On both Friday and Saturday nights there was a session which went on into the wee small hours. There was the usual ritual turning back of the clock, followed by the compulsory extra hour's drinking.

The working weekend started with a dance out in Doncaster,

with Green Oak Morris Men bravely supplying a team around which we could Fool and Beast. These sessions are always a little artificial (one side and two dozen Fools and Beasts!) but they give us a chance to warm up, get to know each other, and display our credentials.

On the Saturday afternoon we returned to the Red Lion, and the Fools and Beasts separated to

work on their own projects. The Fools had a series of organised sessions, whilst the Beasts opted for a less structured open forum. This year, the two groups worked together much less than usual, which was a pity, as we have a lot to learn from each other, and many of the new Fools had little experience of working with Beasts.

The Fools started by discussing 'bottling' (collecting) in a wide ranging discussion led by Steve Ashcroft. Some Fools feel that they should not collect at all, as it is a betrayal of the trust which they have built up with the crowd; others feel that collecting is a great way to start interacting with the crowd. There was general agreement that it is a decision for individuals, and that each Fool should take into account his 'character' as well as the needs of the side.

We also discussed ways of maximising the collection, as well as techniques for allowing people to refuse to give without making them feel under pressure. If this sounds a little too sporting, ask whether your side needs the money more than it needs friendly audiences.

Pete Boyce then spent an hour demonstrating and explaining mime techniques. Even those Fools who will never use mime in its own right felt that they had learned a few ideas. Look out next season for every Fool in the land walking on the spot into a strong wind! Pete reinforced his message with a very enjoyable set piece routine at the feast on Saturday evening.

Mike Cogan and I conducted a discussion of kit/costume. Mike Cogan has a distinctive Cavalier costume which has changed little over the years, whereas I have changed my costume almost annually for ten years. However, we came to the shared conclusion that a Fool's choice of costume is

Halfasten op Antwerpen

(Continued from page 3)

in 1996 (we each did a spot at the evening ceilidh) where we'd been invited to show the continental sword teams a different dance form from England.

Lange Wapper arranged an informal session in a typical Antwerp café on the Friday night. This was slightly marred, or enhanced depending on your viewpoint, by a student event in the adjacent bar with a really good brass band. The dancing part of the weekend in Antwerp started with Rumworth performing by themselves at four sites around the city centre on the Saturday afternoon. The crowds were good, and the collections that Lange Wapper were making whilst we danced were obviously good, since they refused to let us buy the drinks! In the evening, both Rumworth and Lange Wapper performed at a Folk dance/concert. Lange Wapper performed social dances since they try and keep their sword dance in the Antwerp area for only Half Lent.

The Sunday show started early: we met at a café called the Hopsack at 7.30 a.m. (remember they're an hour ahead of us so it was really 6.30 a.m.). About 8.25 we left the Hopsack and processed to the square in front of the Cathedral. When I've watched this

event before, this first performance is really quite mystical. Standing in the almost empty square, with a touch of mist, and then hearing the first strains of the Flemish bagpipes and drums echoing down the streets really sends quite a shiver up the spine. Actually being in the procession didn't have quite the same magical effect, although our bass drum probably woke up a lot of residents!

Lange Wapper went into the square first and formed up a circle which we danced inside. Lange Wapper then performed their dance and the two teams processed back to the Hopsack. This was repeated at 0930, 1015, 1130, 1230 and finally at 1330. As the day progressed, the crowd got larger and larger, and so did Lange Wapper's band. The band mainly comprised of bagpipes and drums, with a few flutes and violins. The day finished with a very pleasant meal for the two teams, the usual thank you's and a social dance.

I can thoroughly recommend a visit to Antwerp at Half Lent (it's always the same day as our Mothering Sunday). Next year will be Lange Wapper's 30th year and I understand that they will be inviting Markina from the Basque area to join them.

I have been involved with 'The Rumworth Morris of Bolton' since their formation in 1976, and I can't remember a weekend which had such good dancing and such a wonderful atmosphere. We were extremely well looked after, and there seemed to be a genuine rapport between the two teams.

If anyone in the North West would be interested in joining Rumworth, please contact me on 01942 816569. We practise once a month on the 3rd Thursday of the month with occasional Saturday practices.

Peter Bearon



THESE FOOLISH THINGS

Continued from page 5

of fundamental importance as it affects both the way that he feels, and the way that the audience sees him. Every Fool should try to dress in a way which matches the character he plays. Sunday morning started bright and early(ish) with a Fool's Jig workshop led by Bert Cleaver. He started by teaching us the basic Bampton Fool's Jig, before allowing discussion of embellishments, such as stick twirling etc. It was a fairly restrained session (the morning after the night before...) but very useful, especially for the newer Fools. Many will have found it a welcome return to basics after one

or two years where we have taken the idea of the Fool's Jig to various illogical conclusions.

The later part of the morning was taken up with discussion of silent Fooling techniques (not the same as mime) followed by a 20 minute performance by Tom Fun, a clown who specialises in silent performances, often to deaf audiences. Tom's performance illustrated many of the technical points raised in the earlier discussion, and ended the weekend on a high note. Many thanks to Tom Fun, who gave his services free of charge, and made himself available for questions and answers in the bar afterwards.

As always, I missed most of what the Beasts did, but I am told that they had several discussions, dealing with queries, problems and ideas as they came up. Subjects covered included: design and construction of the Beast; techniques for using the Beast; etiquette and general behaviour; the vital importance of NEVER being seen changing into or out of the Beast; and radical ideas for new Beasts. In this last section, ideas included Beasts with two heads, arms etc. Beasts have developed a long way in recent years, and, as with the Fools, there are some who enjoy exploring the limits of what can be achieved. Tremendous thanks to Eric Pressley for convening (and scrivining); Ivor Allsopp, for

filming; all the session leaders; and Green Oak Morris Men. The United Fools' Union is open to all Fools, Beasts, Betsies, Tommies, Green Men, Cavaliers and so on. Apart from the annual unconvention, we have a great network of contacts, and there is always someone who can help with ideas or advice, especially for new Fools and Beasts. If your Bagman denies receiving the advance publicity next year, ring me, Mike Wilkinson, on 0115 9401097 and I will put you in touch. The unconvention is always the weekend in October when the clocks go back, except when we have it in Holland, because the ferries are cheaper a week later.

Joe Mains 1925 - 1998

The history of the morris is illustrated with characters whose enthusiasm and dedication made them the keystone which ensured the longevity and success of a team over decades, despite the comings and goings of the rank and file members. Charles Benfield, Sam Bennett, and William Wells represent the more famous examples of this. For the morris in Wantage and the Vale of White Horse, Joe Mains was such a man. His sudden death on 13th January left the Vale mourning one of its best loved public characters, known throughout the region for his music and community activities.

Joe joined Icknield Way Morris Men during National Folk Week in 1967 and quickly learnt the tunes and dances from their mentor Mary Shunn. Although she was the motivator behind the team and a friend of the Kimber family, she kept behind the scenes believing the performance to be men's business. Joe instantly became the main musician and through attending instructionals given by Messrs Dommett and Reynolds in the '70's soon became

Foreman as well. He remained Foreman for 20 years, was squire from 1986 to 1988, and Chief Musician until 13th January. In May 1997 in a joint celebration with our friends from Oxford City MM, he was elected to a specially created position of Life President, a post we thought had at least another 10 years to run.

Joe was famous locally as the man with the accordion who played for charity and twinning events, parties, pubs, and barn dances. He was an accomplished musician who also played violin and viola with the Didcot and Wantage Orchestras for over 20 years, as well as playing piano, pipe and tabor on other occasions. He also had his own dance band, 'The Waylanders', who played for numerous country dances throughout Oxfordshire over a period of 14 years, with Joe calling the dances.

Joe was well known for his community work and was a Labour councillor on the Wantage UDC for 4 years in the early 70's as well as being a Governor of Stockham School. He was involved in many charity activities, most recently providing weekly entertainment at the Wantage October Club and

helping with the Community Information Centre. Amazingly he also found time to be a keen supporter of the Oxford and District Esperanto Society of which he was a member since 1983, and was an enthusiastic organic gardener in his younger days.

Born in London's East End in 1925, Joe lived next door to a neighbour in Joseph Street who paid a shilling for accordion lessons. Crafty Joe then paid his neighbour sixpence to pass the information on to him. He taught himself to read music at the age of 12 from borrowed books and at 14 played in his first band in Bow. After gaining a degree in radio engineering at the Northern Polytechnic he served for three years in the Navy. He married his beloved Christine in 1953 after meeting at the French Society. In the late 50's the family moved from Portsmouth to Wantage following Joe's appointment as Deputy Librarian at the Atomic Energy Research Establishment, Harwell where he spent the remainder of his professional life. For IWMM he will always be remembered as 'The Guv'nor' who, despite the emergence of other musicians and instructors, was always looked to for the final word.

His humanist funeral service in Headington was attended by representatives from Oxford City, Bampton, Ancient Men, Abingdon, Charlbury, St. Albans and Whitchurch teams, as well as Icknield Way past and present.

Joe was revered and respected by all who met him and especially by his family and fellow musicians. He is survived by his son Christopher, daughter and son-in-law Sue and Ian; and three Granddaughters. He was a truly remarkable man who will be greatly missed in Oxfordshire and by all who knew him.

*Sem Seaborne
27th January 1998*



From David Thompson

A DEFENCE

My article in the last edition of the Morris Dancer was the product of several years spasmodic work and as far as I am concerned was a rationally argued document based on a consideration of the documentary evidence. You can imagine my surprise when I received four pages of vitriol. I gather that I am not alone in this respect, being in the company of at least three others to my certain knowledge. On the other hand, perhaps, I should be flattered to find my article greeted with four pages of derision from the redoubtable Mr Chandler, at least someone read it.

I find little of substance in what Keith Chandler says and great difficulty in taking it seriously, particularly, because of the way in which it is written. Certainly there is nothing that leads me to change the thrust of my thesis: namely that there is no other reason why there should be the change from galley to hookleg. Since I wrote the article I have discovered that in Folk Tunes, Sharp gives 'hooklegs' for Longborough and something like 'skl', which I take to mean 'skewleg' for Sherborne. No one has ever to my knowledge suggested that Taylor danced anything other than a galley down the main street of Longborough to meet the Travelling Morrice in 1924 or that Sherborne should be danced in any other way.

Most if not all of Chandler's criticism results from his indignation at someone having the temerity to question his major work and is driven to seizing upon a single word, sentence and paragraph, when a cool consideration of the whole would have given another response, e.g. the quoting of Ashby's point about Bledington going back to Tudor times when what I say is "there is some evidence to suggest", which is rather different

to stating that it definitely is the case. He concedes that Bledington is at least 140 years old so add to that a long period, possibly up to as much again, for silence. Take the case of how long the young side danced: if the young side danced for a mere two years as might be inferred from the Robert's reference which only applies to him, I was being generous with my ten years. There had certainly been a long lapse in the dancing and given that the only person who actually danced for the collectors was John Hitchman, who danced the jig 'Princess Royal'; for it says in Sharp's Folk Tunes No. 2449, "Danced by John Hitchman at Bould, Dec. 31st 1909", Hathaway and Hall only taught dances to the Travelling Morrice. At least one member of the old side, then, danced closer to the time of lapsing than the young side.

I am afraid that I find it difficult to take seriously anyone who responds in this way but I am willing to give some response to his criticisms. Circular No 30 carries much criticism of Chandler along similar lines to my own. So let's turn to my sentence that was the bone of contention, namely that Chandler's work is wanting on grounds of methodology, motivation and belief. Since I have been asked here goes. I would expect a major socio-historical survey of the morris over such a widespread period to give some extensive outline of its methodology in respect of the treatment of the sources. Two and a quarter pages, I do not think either addresses the subject or speaks of the methodology adequately. The Schools History Project will provide a GCSE in History if students can handle the relative value, and reliability of historical sources and can consider the effect of bias. There is an assumption that the various sources are capable of bearing the burden that is laid upon

them. I have very grave doubts here. The truth of the matter is that Chandler is asking too much of his sources, since in most cases they were not seeking to gain or provide the information he is looking for, and what is more, there are great periods of silence. Much is made of parish registers and there is great reliance on newspaper articles: the unreliability of local newspapers is well known.

Modern folklorists are to be praised for their greater regard for historical evidence, but they are to be condemned for having abdicated the duty to interpret, where the historical evidence is inadequate, as it almost invariably is with regard to popular culture. This is in its own way just as misleading as what some may claim to be the inventions and airy castle-building of the old school. A recent much-praised work of historical folklore, Ronald Hutton, "The Stations of the Sun", has shown that there are no references to the Padstow Hobbyhorse older than the first years of the 19th century, and it is now being asserted that the custom 'is not more than two hundred years old'. But who was inventing hobbyhorse customs at the end of the 18th century?

Turning to belief and motivation, and the suggestion that they went and danced simply to make money. They would have had little left after expenses, which would include providing a suitable pair of shoes and keeping them soled. It is quite possible to dance through the sole of a pair of light leather shoes in a day's dancing. So this part of the argument is hardly sufficient evidence to provide the necessary motivation. There certainly would be insufficient to support wives and families but there might, however, be enough to provide some small relief to those in reduced circumstances.

There seems to be little mileage in suggesting that the dancing gave the men social standing. If ever there was a myth of its own making, it is that of class structure, being a construct of sociologists, whose underlying philosophy is Marxism and the flaws of dialectical materialism are well known. It is not surprising that there are few people of professional standing for in the countryside because of the sparse population you would not expect to get many trades or professions represented for there were few others than the predominant farm labourer, supporting trades and service of the local gentry.

As to Frazerian theories, the materialistic age seeks materialistic explanations that are far from convincing. One should be careful to accuse Sharp of this when there were others like Mary Neal who adopted the Frazerian thesis much more wholeheartedly than Sharp; cf. the article in English Dance and Song, Vol. 59, No. 3, Autumn 97 by C.J. Bearman, entitled "Up To A Point, Dr. Hutton: Fact and Myth in Folk Music Revival". To add further weight to such counter suggestions we must turn our attention to the writings of liturgists, philosophers of religion, comparative religion and psychologists. We are left with no doubt of the notion that if there were no God then mankind would have invented one. The ideas expressed by Sharp, if not true, mankind would have invented them. The Christian church throughout the world and ages has tried to fight paganism and has failed, instead it found itself accommodating it, e.g. the Abbots Bromley Horns are stored in the church, evergreen trees in churches at Christmas.

In Chandler's Gazetteer on page 231, subsection 6, where he purports to deal with methodological problems he says, "Sharp attributes tunes

and dances to 'Stretton on the Fosse' in his manuscript 'Folk Tunes' 12 (September 1909-March 1911), nos. 2001-3, 2073-78, but these were, in fact, noted from Ilmington dancers while in performance at Stretton Rower Show." This is quite wrong: in Folk Tunes at 2001-3 and 2073-8 there are only folk songs, not dances or information from 'Ilmington' or 'Stretton' but in Folk Words 2073-78 there are notations taken at Stretton on the Fosse.

In his response to me he uses the example of Ilmington to demonstrate Sharp's approach to stylistic divergence. Chandler, as has been shown in the previous paragraph, is confused as far as matters at Ilmington are concerned. Here, he seems to be confusing the 'first revival' side at Ilmington with the one raised by Sam Bennett c. 1905. There were at least three revivals at Ilmington so the position is far from straight forward. Sharp made his rude remarks about Bennett's side, and in this he was supported by most of the 1880's men; Michael Johnson

claimed among other things that they could not dance to his playing, "he gets across the time and makes it very 'okkard'" (Some Morris Dancers' Obiter Dicta, Maud Karpeles, Journal English Dance And Song Society, London, 1952, quoting Sharp's Field Manuscripts, 1911, Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, London). What Bennett did at Ilmington was eclectic. Bennett wielded some economic power, in Ilmington through his farming activities and certainly borrowed some elements of the dances and the hobby horse from Bidford. It is certainly possible to question whether Bennett was a reliable tradition-bearer, certainly, not more so than Sharp.

To suggest that Sharp needed to 'continue to be paid a School Board salary' is quite wrong. The only school which ever paid Sharp a salary was Ludgrove, which was a preparatory school from which he resigned in 1910 (cf. "Cecil Sharp", A.H. Fox Strangways, Oxford University Press, 1933, p.80). The only time he received payments

from the State education system was between 1919 and 1923, when he was working as an Occasional Inspector of Teacher Training Colleges. Sharp's Training College diaries for the period 1919-22 are in the Sharp Miscellaneous Box 7, in Vaughan Williams Memorial Library.

Finally the most telling admission of Chandler in his reply to me is this statement, in which he finally comes clean, "I would like to see the complete abandonment of morris dance performance altogether and the widespread admittance that it has no relevance to modern society, beyond being yet another form of physical recreation along the lines of a 'keep fit' class or line dancing." Such an approach is to commit the fallacy of circumlocution for you are begging the question by looking for the answer before you start. In adopting such a position any writer is bound to denigrate and to look for any suggestion of disorder in the subject of his study.

I return to where I began: any criticism that there might be, on whatever grounds, does not remove the substance of the article, that between 1924 and 1936 there was a change in what was considered to be Bleding-

ton This is even more remarkable as the dances had not been danced since the Fifield Fair about the turn of the century. The young side only danced for a very short time, (There appears to be no record), I was being generous with my ten years. I say, go to the traditional villages and ask the people if they want the dancing to continue and I think there would be just one reply, 'yes'. Ask any revivalist man who has been dancing for forty or fifty years and it is certainly for more than mere pleasure, at least they are doing it to maintain and demonstrate English tradition and on many occasions they will have been in a dance set when they have experienced that special something that one gets. Only when you have had that experience do you know what they are talking about. Do not say to them that they have been simply keeping fit or enjoying themselves and they will laugh you out of court. People are always too ready to take the mystical out of what we do and reduce it to the simplistic.

David Thompson,

Derby, January 1998.

Dear Correspondents

Okay, okay, I get it. You don't have to beat me over the head with a stick any longer. Chris Clarke, Julian Pilling and John Jenner, I bow to your agendas. It's your right to believe whatever you wish. The historical evidence is now in plain view and you are at liberty to accept, dismiss, ignore, or (most worryingly) distort it as you please. If you wish to argue semantics rather than historical fact then others must be found to engage you.

A number of the definitions requested by Messrs Clarke and Jenner are detailed in my two published volumes. As to Joseph Needham's 1936 article I find the conclusions less than convincing. And I don't recall seeing Rolf Gardiner's suggestion before. But having been made aware of it my comment is this: other than Sam Bennett's extrapolation three centuries after the event (which I have analysed in Volume 2 of my work, in sub section 6 of the

Ilmington entry), there are no references to morris dancing at Dover's Games during the lifetime of Robert Dover.

Other than a few things already completed and awaiting publication, I have now said everything I ever wanted to say about the history of the morris. The ongoing looking of horns can certainly continue without any further input from me.

My only request is, if quoted at all in the future, that it may be with some degree of accuracy. I certainly don't, as Clarke states (on what evidence is not at all clear), wish to see 'young men taking prominence in the morris.' My views on the whole subject of the revival morris were aired in English Dance and Song, 59, number 3 (Autumn 1997), pp. 27-28. Please accept this as my definitive agenda. I return now to further historical research (on an entirely unrelated subject, of course).

Keith Chandler

Editor's Note

Before I left for my visit to Australia in mid-December, I felt obliged to inform various people of my copy deadline for *The Morris Dancer*, Volume Three Number Five.

On my return in the first week in January, two projected items were missing, from Roy Dommett & from David Thompson. As these items were necessary, in my view, for balance, I phoned them both to enquire after the non-appearance of the copy. Roy's piece had apparently gone missing in the post and his replacement arrived within two days.

I had obviously not made myself clear to David because his piece arrived a week after my requested copy-date. So that the line of reasoning doesn't go completely cold, I have included his reply here rather than wait for the next publication of *The Morris Dancer* (projected for January 1999). It somehow seemed appropriate to couple that with this reply by Keith to the named correspondents (see the *Circular* Number 30, Autumn 1997, page 4).

Eddie Dunmore

DAN ROTHENBURG

10.ix.1911 – 6.xii.1997

Dan died suddenly on the morning of 6th December from a heart attack and East Surrey lost its oldest member, who had served the side faithfully for 44 years. He joined us from East Kent Morris Men, of which side he & Johnny Burke were founder members, and served us mainly as Bessie & collector – a talent in which he was (to the rest of the side's relief) particularly gifted. He was also Bagman for our 1976 Ring Meeting and for 20-odd years the organiser of our Whitsun Tour of the Rye area.

He had many other talents however, as he was able to speak seven languages fluently and had good mastery of as many more. He was nearly 80 when he sat, and passed, an A-level in Mandarin Chinese and had recently started to learn Erse. He used this ability in languages to

coax more donations from foreign visitors.

He was also actively interested in the National Union of Teachers, the English Schools Swimming Association and

children's charities. He was the current editor of East Surrey Folk magazine. In 1977 his voluntary work was nationally recognised by the award of the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal.



He had a perceptive wit – evidenced by his winning the Circular's Caption Competition on more than one occasion – and as he always wanted to learn something from everyone, he was welcomed by all. We frequently "took the Mickey" but he always managed to give as good as he got.

At his packed funeral were people from all his many interests as well as most of his own side. Many mourners were amazed at the variety of his interests mentioned. He had a large number of friends but, it appears, no enemies. I'm sure he would have loved to make a collection around such a large gathering.

As a postscript – with the loss of Martin Jolley (86) last year and Dan (86) this year, the side's average age has dropped by nearly 12 years – to what I will not reveal.

Bob Davies

FRED INGANNI

1943 - 1998

FRED INGANNI, last of the original members of Redcar Sword Dancers still performing with the team, died at South Cleveland Hospital, Middlesbrough, in the early hours of Monday 16 February 1998 after a short illness.

Fred was one of a group of keen folk-song fans from the Cutty Wren Folk Club in Redcar, who, in the early summer of 1967 took it upon themselves to revive the Greatham sword dance and accompanying play and gave their first Boxing Day performance the same year. He was a stalwart of the team to the end and never missed a Boxing Day performance and rarely failed to be available for the many displays we have been invited to give over the past 31

years. A notable exception being a festival at Bath during the early 1980's which he was unable to attend, owing to having fallen asleep on the beach whilst on his holidays with the result that the soles of his feet were badly sunburnt! Fred was also a supporter of Middlesbrough Football Club and during the football season the fixture list would have to be consulted before a booking could be accepted.

Fred's involvement in the folk scene also includes past membership of the English Folk Song & Dance Society's Cleveland & Dales District Committee and running Folk Song Clubs at the Coronation Hotel in Middlesbrough and the Cleveland Bay, Eston, the latter jointly with his wife, Marje. He could, infrequently,

be persuaded to sing one of his repertoire of two; "The Fireship" or "Bold Benjamin". This repertoire had, in later years, been extended to three with the addition of a Tom Lehrer song "The Irish Ballad". Eston Folk Club, even though its doors closed in the mid 1980's, will be fondly remembered by many as having both quantity and quality in terms of 'floor singers', a number of whom have gone on to become professional, or semi-professional, performers.

Heartfelt condolences go out to Marje and his children, Michael and Lesley. Goodbye, Fred; We'll miss you.

Brian Pearce

Redcar Sword Dancers

Dear Eddie,

Now that everything we have always 'known' about the English ritual dance has been 'disproved' by modern research, what is left of the myth? As one who believes that myth is often stronger than historical fact, I am reluctant to accept the morris dance as an invention of some Royal Court. Its magic is and will always be a reality, to be experienced only by those who are initiated into its mysteries.

I am currently writing an MA Dissertation on Rhythm, Movement and Spirituality, and would be glad to hear from anyone who has thoughts on the matter.

Yours sincerely, John.

*Rev'd John Hawkins
44 Castlemaine Avenue
South Croydon CR2 7HR
Phone: (0181) 688 9685*

Victory in China



In April of last year Victory Morris went to China. Why go to China? Why go anywhere? Well, we fancied visiting somewhere a bit different to mark our 21 years of dancing. Initial thoughts involved Czechoslovakia, Poland, the States, etc. and we happened to be discussing this in a pub one night when Dave (one of our number who is currently working on a civil engineering contract in China and was home for the birth of his second daughter) said "Why not come to China?" So we did. I suspect that without a man out there to deal with the red tape and oil the machinery, what we did would not have been possible. Thanks Dave.

The party consisted of 7 dancers, 3 musicians, an animal (a dragon - what else?), a stick walla and an

ex Hammersmith man who joined us on his way back home from Australia and did a great job of video recording the visit.

(Thanks Rob.) We flew from Southampton to Amsterdam and thence to Beijing and then by minibus to Tianjin,, stayed 10 days and came back the same way. Tianjin is where Dave lives - a tight-knit community of six million people, on the coast and 2 hour's drive from Beijing.

Whilst there we were put up by several Western ex-pats of suspect judgement (given that they opened their apartments to total strangers of somewhat dubious character). This, and the very low cost of living in China, made the visit just about affordable. Thanks ex-pats.

Apart from general sightseeing, the schedule included a lot of dancing in the streets, running four ceilidhs, a pub crawl, dancing at private functions, a hash and giving a lecture on the Morris at Nankai University.

Low points

- 1 The first sight of the utterly drab and depressing terminal block at Beijing airport.
- 2 The public loo near the Great Wall (not cleaned since the Tang dynasty).

- 3 As a result of his heroic exploits here, one of our number is now known as Squatter Jim.

Highlights

- 1 Dancing on the Great Wall of China (a first?)
- 2 Buying a round of drinks for 68p
- 3 A rather refined string quartet allowing our not-so-refined fiddler to join them for tune.
- 4 The same quartet suddenly breaking into William and Nancy.
- 5 The look of sheer enjoyment on the faces of the students during the University ceilidh
- 6 Appearing in print and photograph in the Tianjin Daily.
- 7 Every trip in a taxi.
- 8 The dragon falling of his bicycle and disappearing over a hedge during a performance Chinese hospitality (thanks China)

Continued on page 10



Morris Magic.

I read with interest the article entitled 'Fertility Rites' in the Autumn '97 issue of Circular which includes the story of a Morris party stranded in the Cotswolds who danced a jig for transport, and a coach duly appeared. This made some exciting connections for me which I would like to explain.

Firstly I need to explain some Magical Theory. The main obstacle to performing effective magic is our Psychic Censor that protects our conscious mind from being bombarded with illogical events. Most of our hugely powerful brain is lying dormant because it has been sacrificed to preserve a small area of clear, uninterrupted intellect. If you have a vivid dream you have to record it immediately upon awakening before it is erased from your memory. Synchronisities are occurring all the time but they are edited out of our sensory awareness. Sit and watch for a while in a public place and a smile of realisation will soon spread on your face.

The more you strive for a magical result, the more the psychic censor resists anything rum and uncanny happening. However, there are a variety of techniques which have been employed by practitioners of magic through-

out the ages for negotiating past the psychic censor and tapping into some of the vast unused power of the brain. With a bit of mental slight of mind you can wish for a result without directly focusing on it and activating the censor.

For instance, many cultures employ sigils by writing out their desire then making an abstract shape out of the letters. The sigil itself is a meaningless pattern to focus on, but your unconscious mind retains its meaning. Another method is to state your intention then perform a ritual or practice to raise energy, which bears no direct resemblance to your desire. Still with me ?, this is where Morris comes in. As with the Cotswolds Coach incident, state your intention and desired result (Be it an abundant harvest or more rosy-cheeked children etc.).

Once you all agree the purpose that the dance will be dedicated to, disregard your aim and generate energy by dancing. Turn your mind to concentrating on performing the dance with every detail executed to the very best of your ability. The onlookers need not concentrate on the result and can carry on drinking. They will reinforce the aim just by witnessing the ritual dancing. Results may occur im-

mediately as magic can act retrospectively. Only Mechanical time is regular and sequential. Real Time, or Morris Time as it is affectionately known, is warped, looped and pissed.

Is this how the ancients worked Morris Magic ? I don't know, but Morris certainly lends itself very well when applied to this method of magical work. This isn't mumbo jumbo, this is how we tick. The scientific establishment is beginning to catch up with Quantum Physics and the Chaos Theory which is adding credence to areas of Magical Theory. If it works, why not use it ?. Morris already declares itself to be danced for fertility and good luck etc., so maybe dancers have already inadvertently worked magic. Have any other sides a tale to relate ?.

Regarding items raised in the letters page:

Misogyny.

Anyone who attacks men only groups are ignorant and blinkered to the benefits of Men's Hut to the wider community. The next time that they are feeling intimidated by a group of young men who do not know how to conduct them-

selves in public, they should reflect that younger males may benefit from being in the society of a wider age group. They may then call the Police, who are young men that have been thoroughly trained in how to conduct themselves, and may or may not belong to a Masonic lodge.

Touchwood.

A touchwood is a piece of wood obtained from a tree by a practitioner of Tree Magic in such a way as to retain a sub division of the Tree Spirit. The advantage of this is that when help and advice are needed the person does not have to go back to the totem tree to consult the Dryad (Like Robin Hood) but can touch the wood, like a child holding hands with an adult, for reassurance and comfort. People widely believed and trusted in Tree Spirits. If you stand in a forest, do you not feel a 'Presence' ?. I hope that my life never becomes flat and one dimensional. Touch wood.

Haway the Morris

David Hicks

Victory in China

Continued from page 9

Quotes

- 1 "Why you laugh in my taxi?" (you couldn't help it. Every taxi trip was a real hoot)
- 2 Oh me dear I do feel queer, 'must have been drinking Tsengtao beer"
- 3 "Tianjin is very dull without you all" - from a letter from an ex-pat.
- 4 "Days have passed, but many people are still intoxicated with the spirit of that evening, and I can't help wondering when shall we ever have such a

- 5 good time again?" - Sun Saiyin. in the student magazine - referring to the ceilidh evening.
- "UP THE WALL? A Portsmouth team of Morris dancers celebrated its 21st birthday by flying to China and performing on the Great Wall" The Guardian.

What did the Chinese in the street think of the Morris? It's difficult to tell. The best summing up I can think of is 'Total bewilderment turning quickly to polite and ready appreciation"

Dear Eddie,

SQUIRE'S PAGE: OXFORD MAY MORNING

I was staggered and appalled to see (Autumn 1997, p 2) that the Squire appeared not to know (or the Editor had not corrected, or both) the spelling of the name of Magdalen College, on whose tower the college choir sang the May Morning carol he heard and watched, and from which I presume the adjacent bridge takes its name (someone will probably correct me and say it is the other way round).

And I hope you will watch out for the spelling of Magdalene College if you ever have an article about Cambridge.

It may be that maudlin is a corruption of Magdalen, but I hope this does not presage the corruption of men's minds.

Yours sincerely,

P.J. Welbank

St Albans Morris Men

THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR ENGLISH TRADITIONAL PERFORMANCE

UPDATE - February 1998

THE working party feels that now is the time for those who received our initial 'statement of intent' to be brought up to date with developments so far. We are also seeking your initial support towards the next stage of the project. A great deal of time has been taken up contacting Local Authority Development Officers - whose wheels seem to 'grind exceedingly slow' - and on attempting to make a decision on where we shall finally be based. Wherever that may ultimately be, we shall need the co-operation of local clubs and Groups. Such a Centre as we envisage cannot possibly function without them

The uncertainty about location is holding up the process of doing a feasibility study, which will be required before any application for funding can be made. George Monger, BSc (Hons) MA AMA FIIC, museums consultant and a long-standing member of the Folklore Society, kindly did an appraisal of our proposals and underlined the need for a feasibility study and a business plan. The business plan is currently being worked upon, following research into entrance fees and various national museums and into the running costs of one.

We have received letters of support from the committee of the Folklore Society, from CECTAL via John Widdowson, from Ron Shuttleworth (who has offered helpful comments) and from Philip Underwood. A number of others have expressed support by e-mail or by phone. A few have expressed doubts as to the feasibility of the concept or to the possibility that we might be covering the same areas as the EFDSS or as Doc

Rowe in his archive project in Bristol. Contact with Doc indicates that we can co-operate with each other in the archive field by providing storage for each other's back-up discs - necessary insurance in case of problems. Neither do we feel that we pose any threat to the EFDSS. Here again we feel that we can be of mutual assistance and that in providing displays of English Traditional material we can enhance the work of the Society.

We need now to gain the support and assistance of all who take part in any English Traditional activity and hope that they will all co-operate in either providing examples of costume/artefacts or allowing us to copy them for the display areas. We should also hope that, when the Centre is up and running, any Traditional performers who do travel beyond their home location would be prepared to visit and perform at the Centre on occasion. We should wish that Traditional Performers would feel that they have control over representations of their event.

We have had a visit to one of our meetings by John Wrightson, Development Director of the Heart of England Tourist Board, who felt that we had a good concept to offer and suggested a number of possible locations in his own region. He too underlined the need for a Feasibility Study and a Business Plan.

If anyone has any further suggestions or wishes to make offers of help, please write or e-mail as soon as possible. In order to have maximum credibility with any local authorities we might need to

approach, it is vital that we receive indications of outline support from as many individuals, groups and organisations in the Folk world as possible. It is stressed, however, that such support will not be regarded as unconditional but will simply be seen as a general expression of positive approval for the next stage of developments. No-one will be committed by these expressions of support. We shall continue to update everyone and intend to make presentations to organisations and groups in the future as progress is made.

Please contact any member of the working party:

Pat Pickles, 21 Thornhill Croft, Walton, Wakefield West Yorkshire WF2 6NU: telephone 01924 256407

Tom Chambers, 17 Westmorland Grove, Norton Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland TS20 1PA: telephone 01642 530437

Dave Rogers, 9 Hall Drive, Alsager, Stoke-on-Trent, Staf-

fordshire ST7 2UD: telephone 01270 876674; e-mail: bgmc.lib@dial.pipexcom

Bob Bushaway, 83 Woodland Road, Northfield Birmingham B31 2HZ: telephone 0121 476 9062

Pat Lee, The Castle, 347 Evesham Road, Crabbs Cross, Redditch, Worcestershire B97 5JA: telephone 01527 542424

Trevor Stone, The Old Vicarage, Downe Street, Drifffield, East Yorkshire YO25 7DX: telephone 01377 253431

Consultant Architects: Alan Smith and Partners - Chartered Architects, Salisbury House, 1236 Evesham Road, Astwood Bank, Redditch, Worcestershire B96 6AA: Telephone 01527 893967; Fax 01527 892568

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Dear Eddie

Bledington Traditional Morris — How traditional is it?

I am both surprised and rather flattered to find that Shag Graetz of Pine-woods MM. has granted research status to a modest piece of investigation that was done in about 1960 for Greensleeves Morris Men. At that time Greensleeves were undecided over whether they should dance Bledington using galleys (as I believe they did pre-war), or adopt the hook-leg

movement used by most of the Ring clubs today — so they omitted Bledington from their repertoire, and still do so.

In about 1960 the original author of Shag's material was a student who got hooked on the Morris (excuse the pun) and visited the V. W. Library and consulted other authorities in order to offer a solution to his club on this taxing subject. As you know from your occasional visits to Greensleeves, the author of this material is still to be found playing a concertina between dancing rather less ener-

Continued on page 13

Dear Sir,

I should introduce my side as one formed about five or six years ago with no local tradition of our own, other than a mummings play that is recorded as being performed in Newbold and Rugby. We are Paragon Pit Morris, I am the Prat. The Prat is what most sides regard as the Fool whose function is to cause mischief and, just as vital, counter the tyranny of the Squire.

We had no tradition of our own but wished to become Morris Men and being of independent spirit had no wish to join an existing side. That being so, where are we to draw our dances from? Perhaps we should have drawn on Ballroom, Break, or Native American Indian dance or just perhaps Masonic Lodge rituals to devise new dances. I get the feeling that we would have upset a certain few rather less until we used the trade protected title of 'Morris Dancers'.

Of course we did the obvious, we did what our most natural leader could teach us - Bledington with overtones of Lutterworth and Shropshire Bedlams, you could call it Cotswold with attitude. This is how generations before us learnt. When we learn new dances from any tradition, they can never be the same as the original. We don't particularly want them to be, we want to enjoy ourselves besides keeping the moving tradition of Morris alive.

The reality is that many traditions would be totally dead without the folk revivalists who recorded the dances and tunes years ago. The only difference is that 20th century technology does it more comprehensively. At least, should they wish it, our grandchildren can copy our dances to the point of tedious precision.

I can see merit in acknowledging the derivation of the dance and tune but just how many variations are there of Constant Billy, Black Joker, Maid of the Mill, Jockey to the Fair etc.?



Another action shot of Rumworth in action, this time with Antwerp Cathedral as the backdrop

Who pinched what off who? If we agree that the origins of Morris come from the Middle East via the Crusaders, perhaps all new sides should visit Baghdad. We could beat the place up a bit just for show and ask to be let into palaces and bars to be shown a dance or two that we can pinch - should keep the Gulf war going for years.

Yours faithfully,

Pete Hanby

(Paragon Pit Prat)

PS I have family connections with the Upton on Severn area. Did anyone ever record the names of the dancers who were originally seen to dance with one foot turned in. Because of an mild inherited defect both me and my brother dance this way and we'd love to know if there's a relation - could be via the female line (seriously).

Would we be entitled to insist that only we dance this way? Only joking!

Blood sports & the morris

The Observer, 23.xi.97,

'In dog we trust'

"... Mr Foster and his adherents are entitled to hate fox hunting and to try to persuade those who practise it to desist. What they must not do is to call for those who hold contrary opinions to be locked up. There are many activities I find objectionable, including Morris dancing, karaoke and synchronised swimming. I have no desire to lock up those who enjoy them."

John Mortimer:

The Observer, 30.xi.97, Letters:

'In pursuit of the indefensible'

"JOHN MORTIMER (Comment, last week) tried to argue that chasing and killing foxes and deer was a civil-liberties issue, and listed a number of activities that he found objectionable — Morris dancing, karaoke and synchronised swimming.

Now, while I would heartily condone the sabbing of Morris dances, there is one important detail that separates these activities from fox-hunting: the killing of an animal is not central to the enjoyment of the participants (Has he never seen Coventry Mummers? ED). If karaoke involved biting the head off a chicken at the climax of 'You've Lost That Loving Feeling', you can be certain that the RSPCA would want it banned. . ."

Billy Bragg, London

The Observer, 7.xii.97, Letters:

'Hanky panky'

"NEITHER John Mortimer nor Billy Bragg enhance their arguments (Letters, last week) or their reputations by their silly denigration of Morris dancing. It gives pleasure to many and harms no one. It requires stamina, physical co-ordination and mental agility. I recommend it to those of sedentary occupation and disposition like Bragg and Mortimer. I suggest they get together to join the Morris Men and learn to cast off their prejudice."

AW Day, Greenford, Middlesex
The Observer, 14.xii.97, Letters:

'Harmless fun'

"SO A. W. Day (Letters, last week) reckons that Morris dancing gives pleasure to many, harms no one, requires stamina, physical co-ordination and mental agility — exactly the case for masturbation. No wonder Morris Men are seen as a pack of w. . ."

K F. Leyland, Maghull,
Merseyside

Editor's note:

I'm not sure how this series evaded the eagle eye of Gordon Ridgewell.

Recording and Performance of Morris Dances

I read with interest the opinions put forward by Abingdon, Britannia Coco-nut Dancers, Camden and Colne Royal regarding teaching and unauthorised performance of their dances.

Saddleworth Morris Men were only formed in 1974 but we consider ourselves to be a 'traditional' team. Our dances are our own, not taken from collections and differ from other North-west dances. We do not object to anyone recording our performance but we would hope that any such recording would not be used as a teaching aid.

Saddleworth do not teach at North-west workshops because we don't know any dances other than our own and we won't teach those to non-members of the club. As far as we are aware, no other club currently uses any of our dances but were anyone to do so without permission, we would consider this to be bad mannered in the extreme. Permission to use one of our dances would be refused. "Joe Public" watching Saddleworth should be able see dances performed by no other Morris club.

Yours Faithfully
Richard Hankinson
Squire; Saddleworth MM.

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Roger Conway

27 Peter Street, Taunton, Somerset TA2 7BYM

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Continued from page 11

getically than in 1960! Shag didn't research that part too well, for I would have liked to offer him my notes before he went into print.

If research leads to the acrimony seen in *The Morris Dancer*, then the writers are in danger of obscuring our enjoyment of the dances and company of Morris Men gathering together. Cecil Sharp and his contemporaries noted what they found from often conflicting sources, doing their best to work out what was often the remnants of an old man's recollections and rather sketchy movements, to give us what we have today. If some of the sources, e.g. Gibbs at Bledington, gave a more complete description of

some dances (especially if this linked with another's description), this would have suggested this source was providing a more accurate description of how that dance was done at a point in time – probably when he ceased dancing. On publishing his findings, Sharp initially appears to have had considerable difficulty in getting anyone to try out these rustic remnants, so it is necessary to put the inaccuracies between the original collectors' notebooks and publications in this context.

The moral of the story (also given by Keith Chandler at exhaustive length) would seem to be that revival clubs should not take any one version of a dance or song as holy writ, for it is fairly conclu-

sive that the traditional dancers (and singers) didn't have it all written down and thus allowed the detail to change over time and as expediency required. In the same way, some older revival clubs are lucky in that they also have a degree of continuity from the early collectors and do not largely rely on published material – but their style will have changed considerably over the last 70 years.

However, although the traditional dances must be allowed to change for good reason and with current display requirements, the dancers of the last century were probably reluctant to deliberately change the dances. It appears that on occasions they had to compro-

mise to get six men out, to make up the number required (as we do today with decreasing new membership). I suggest that we also should not initiate change for its own sake, often trying to stamp the personality of a dominant individual on the dance, and then attribute the result to a traditional source – Sharp's efforts deserves better than that. Some collected material is clearly incomplete or from conflicting sources and variations are worth trying. Otherwise there is plenty of scope for making up new dances in the same style, often with very pleasing results.

Ian James

Despatches from Hertford



Despite his apparent ignorance of the blood sports controversy (summarised elsewhere in this issue) Gordon Ridgewell has not been inactive. I present here a précis of his submissions over the four months from December 1997 to March 1998 inclusive.

ON 1st December he wrote, concerning Dudley Binding's 'Big Apple' article in Circular 30, "One wonders whether a licence would not have been required if the said pigs' bladders were blown up and in use?! The transporting of bladders can, of course, cause problems due to air pressure at high altitude. However, this problem can be overcome and I am reminded of Morris Sunderland's method of conveying his pig's bladder to America in the following extract from the article 'One Man's Fool' by Bob Delucca of

Binghamtom Morris Men (AMN Vol. 13 No. 2, July/August 1989, pp 12-15):

A Note on the Pig's Bladder

On a hilltop in Maine, I had one of my initiations into fooling. Blowing up Pigs' bladders with Morris Sunderland, veteran English fool. The succinct warning:

"Don't inhale."

Bladders are difficult to maintain and a pain in the ass (I couldn't resist) but should be tried by an aspiring fool. Unfortunately it is difficult to get the large English bladder in this country. Morris brought his here on the plane in a salt water bucket. Don't use balloons. They are a childish imitation of the real McCoy. Thousands of bladders are disposed of every day across this country. An ecological

disaster considering the great potential use that they could be put to by the Morris fool. Can be preserved in salt water or the freezer. Your team will love you for it. Find a small, friendly slaughterhouse, or preferably a family farmer. The trick is trimming it correctly, then blowing it up while pulling the sealing string. If you don't wish to use bladders, go to another medium to express your punitive side: your foot, the broom, a bat.

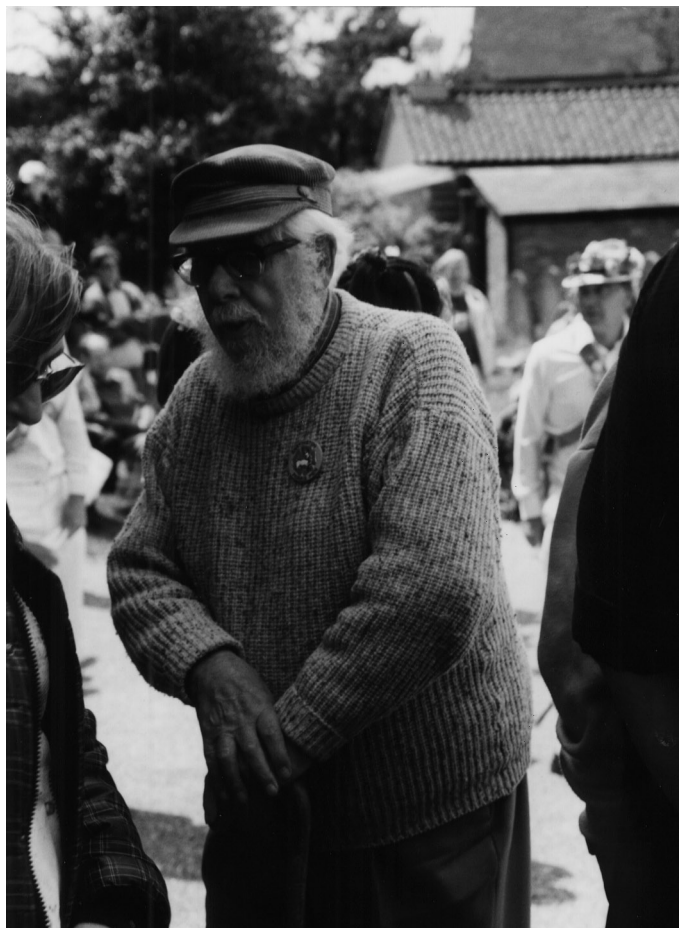
But the real pig bladder to the live rear end. Now that's a complete expression of the cycle of life and death, but remember:

"Don't inhale."

ON 12th December his subject was the demise of Arthur Caton

"the last survivor of the original Thaxted Morris Men". (An obituary appeared in English Dance & Song, Winter 1997). Gordon was good enough to include two photographs of Arthur, one of him in action as Betty to Clifford Yeldham's Fool (Town Street, Thaxted, Whit Monday 1950) and the other showing an 89-year old Arthur in Thaxted churchyard during the 1994 Thaxted Ring Meeting.

GORDONS' 9th January 1998 letter concerned the Ceremony of Carols and Customs at Cecil Sharp House on December 14th last and Barnsley Longsword's performance therein. His photographs shows them in the course of the Kirkby Malzeard dance, with a slightly out-of-focus Bert Cleaver on whittle & dub in the background.



ON the 28th January 1998, Gordon was concerned that my absence in the Antipodes might have caused me to miss The Guardian's review (22.xii.97) of Ashdown Mummers' performance in Crowborough:

Ale drinkers of Sussex say thanks for the mummerly

Stephen Plaice

The Ashdown Mummers, Coopers Arms, Crowborough
 "AN EVENING'S mumming in Ashdown Forest Sussex, may not be everyone's idea of a night out. But it certainly tests the modern idea of Christmas against traditional pagan celebration. Forget the fat consumer in the red suit with sack of presents — that all came from a Coca Cola ad. Father Christmas was originally green, and he waved a dibble-stick topped with holly. Once a year mummers reclaim him as a symbol of regeneration, a 107-year-old man still capable of blowing hot and cold.

The mummers return to the forest once a year to re-enact a ritual the meaning of which is now lost in the Wealden fog. They traipse from pub to pub, fully costumed, demanding free ale for their silver tankards, and falling upon hapless Christmas drinkers.

The original mummers blacked up to appear more exotic, and one young man kept the tradition this year, but it is the use of anachronisms, such as St George pulling a revolver to dispatch the Turkish knight after a tedious sword fight, that keeps the mood light and the audience on their side.

The mummers surprise visit shows up the local culture. In the first pub where I caught up with them, in the village of Withyham, the landlord delayed the performance to usher his precious diners into the res-



taurant, so they did not get ensnared in raucous mumming in the bar. Here it was received with polite bemusement and the please-don't-involve-us looks that afflict the English when theatre gets too close.

tory. Somehow the Crusades, the Civil War and the Trafalgar gun deck have all got cobbled together. The Valiant Soldier calls himself a Roman, but enters as a Puritan carrying a pouch declaring "Flee Fornica-

As Johnny Jack put it "No one knows why there are mummers, least of all us". But in the Coopers Arms at least, everybody seemed glad there still are."

By the 27th February, Gordon had obviously had time to review his archive, because he sent a cutting from The Independent of 23rd August which previewed the prospects for the Bank Holiday weekend and was topped with a full-colour plate of Saddleworth rush-cutting, Aaron Daniels being given star-billing.
(I'm not sure about the reference to "druidical times".ED)



But the performance was greeted with hilarity down the road in the Coopers Arms, an unpretentious local, and revealed how the play might have survived down the ages.

Each stock character appears like a ghost from the English unconscious, bringing with it a rag-bag of forgotten his-

tion". The Doctor looks plausible enough until he demands £10 for his hocus-pocus cure. Jester Johnny Jack has donned the cap and bells, but underneath he is a sinister cockney tar, boasting of how he made mince-pie crust out of his enemies.

On the 26th March, the subject had shifted to the harmonica and the establishment of a 3-year degree course for this instrument at the Anglia Polytechnic University. This was supported by cuttings from The Times (with a photograph of the first undergraduate), The Daily Telegraph (10.x.1997) and the Cambridge Evening News (24.x.1997).

The final letter for this edition was written on 30th March and took as its subject a letter to The Times on 1st December 1997:

Sir, Perhaps the best response to the haka is a spot of morris dancing. Yours faithfully,

John Bradley, London SW18.

(Do I not recall a TV news item concerning a bowling club team that had adopted the haka as a preliminary for their matches? ED)

Editorial

HAVING gone to Antwerp for the half-Lent display by Lange Wapper (read the account starting on page 3), I missed the change of the

guard at the ARM. Somewhat belatedly, let me add my thanks to Tim & Tony for their efforts and my welcome to Daniel & John.

In response to the many enquiries, Margaret & I had a thoroughly enjoyable time in the Antipodes, despite (or perhaps because of) a total lack of any sight or sound of the dance. We had a day out checking out the wineries along the Hunter Valley (I was the only one who religiously spat out the wine we were tasting) and returned with enough wine to satisfy us over the whole Christmas Holiday – a family affair with my brother and sister and their families in suburban Canberra. This was followed by a week on a block outside Tarago (“The Loaded Dog”, a railway station and a garage) which included a trip to Sydney for the New Year’s Eve concert at the Opera House. The interval show for this event was the fireworks display in Sydney Harbour – stunning!

Now, of course, it’s back to the usual round of keeping the momentum going at practices: ensuring that the new members (yes, we picked up a couple) are brought along so that they can dance out this summer and introducing new dances to the established members so that their interest is maintained. The season starts formally, as ever, with the May morning dancing – the Bedford Christmas Newsletter makes me envious of sides that are strong enough to start “as usual at 6.30

am . . . at Ickwell Maypole in good and improving weather. Together with Offley and Letchworth Morris Men we sang the May Carol and the Northill May Song and danced . . . After general dancing, the Bagman’s breakfast party followed at Sandy. . . thank our hostess, the Men undertook a ‘Schools Tour’ to Southill Lower School, Daubeney Middle School and Middlesex University [London college of Dance] in Bedford. We gave a show and ‘teach-in’ . . . we visited Ursula Taylor CVP School in Clapham . . .”

Ian James’ letter (page 11) does touch on an item of concern: there does, occasionally, seem to be unnecessary venom in some of the disagreements. It is possible to argue (in the philosophical sense) without resorting to personal abuse or the threat of litigation, particularly when discussing an activity which is peripheral to the essentials of existence.

Your accounts of events and letters, on any morris-related topic, will be welcomed. Please make a note of my preferred copy-date – as close to August 17th as you can manage. Any accounts of August Bank Holiday can be received later, provided I am given notice by phone and I know how much space to set aside.

Enjoy your dancing,
Morris on!

Eddie Dunmore.



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From Barbara Sunderland

Dear Eddie,

Many thanks for “The Morris Dancer”. Just to prove that I have read it! – Morris danced with Abingdon just before the war and often talked of Sam Bennett – but that (Wolfram, etc.) is a story I never heard – surely it was a leg-pull! After all, Morris was Squire when all the furore about women dancing was going on and surely it would have come up then if at no other time.

Who is left who was alive when the Ring was founded? Jack Thompson? Charlie Williams? Walter? Bob Ross?

Yes, what has happened to all those erudite young men? I used to hear an awful lot about Paul Davenport.

You will have gathered that I have only skimmed through but have noted a few points – and will continue to do so.

Love from

Barbara

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