

the MORRIS RING
FOUNDED 1934

THE Circular

Edited for the Morris Ring by Eddie Dunmore

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Glove Market Hoist

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The Squire

DOESN'T time fly when you are having fun? It is hard to believe that it is a year since The Ring elected me to be The Squire and now I have less than eighteen months before my successor dances in and takes over. The past nine months, since I danced in, have been filled with most enjoyable events - mainly feasts and ales. My first official outing as Squire was at the Saddleworth Rushcart - yes it did rain (southern English for liquid sunshine according to Richard Hankinson) - but as always a most enjoyable event.

The feasts and ales have taken me up and down the country and I am very grateful for the generous hospitality given to me by all the sides. They have been good opportunities to meet many different sides and to learn that many sides face the same challenges - an ageing membership with aching knees - but also to see many encouraging signs - younger members being encouraged to join and to keep on dancing.

There are many highlights to recall, many of which I noted in my report to the ARM, of which more later. I shall note here that it was a particular privilege to be a guest at Headington Quarry's Feast and to be able to present a Past Squire's badge to the son of Jim Phillips, who had been Squire of The Ring in 1958-60. It was interesting to hear their toast to The Immortal Memory of Cecil Sharp included William Kimber and was not made in si-

lence. It is a toast that I have been asked to make and have been pleased to make at many feasts and ales. Those of you who have heard me know that while I recognise the importance of Cecil Sharp, many others followed and continued his work after his death in 1924. This was particularly relevant when I proposed the toast at Winchester's Feast and remembered Lionel Bacon together with Cecil Sharp.

Collecting and notating of course has not finished. Many sides have made up their own dances and the ARM and Advisory Council have taken up John Tarling's offer to act as a co-ordinator of "new" dances. It is important for future generations that these dances are recorded. John's request is for a record of the dance to form part of a future archive, not for blanket permission for other sides to dance it.

Archives are an important part of The Ring's activities. I have been able to hear at first hand about the work done by The Morris Ring Archive Group. I am reminded that today's scrapbook is tomorrow's archive. Can I request that you send to The Ring Photograph Archivist copies of photographs of your side? Those of you who were not able to get to the excellent Archive Day held at Bedford on the Sunday after the ARM can get notes of the day from The Bagman.

Which brings me to the ARM itself, excellently organised and

hosted by Bedford Morris Men. Having attended ARM's for the past fifteen years as a side's representative, it was a new experience to be "on the other side of the fence". The minutes and reports will be circulated in due course. The major issue for discussion both at the ARM and subsequently at the Advisory Council was the question of women musicians. I am very aware that some sides only survive as a dancing side because they have a women musician. This is not a new problem but it is one that we need to face up to now. First I want to find out how many Ring sides do survive because they have a women musician and secondly I want to find out what the members of The Ring feel should be done. Two quotes from the discussion at the ARM: "We (The Ring) are not being asked to make a decision but asked whether to change our minds". "The Ring

is not the three Officers: the Ring is the member sides". I shall be asking Area Reps to find the answers to the two questions during the summer.

The dancing season is upon us. Some of us will have been out on Easter Monday - probably colder than Boxing Day. Where ever and when ever you dance, dance well, dance safely but, above all, enjoy it and your audience will enjoy it. I look forward to joining you at your week-ends and days of dance. I also look forward to your company at the four Ring Meetings being organised for The Ring by Thaxted (not too far to travel), Long Man, Silurian and Leicester.

Continue to flourish

Daniel Fox



Squire of the Morris Ring Daniel Fox

William Kimber — Father of the Morris

On Boxing Day 1899 Cecil Sharp was spending Christmas with his mother-in-law in Headington near Oxford. On Boxing Day, the local Morris dancers visited the house, dancing out of season because the very cold weather had led to many of them being laid off from their jobs in the building industry. Sharp persuaded the musician, William Kimber, to return the next day and play the tunes over again on his Anglo-concertina so that he could note them.

Almost four years later, Sharp started collecting folksongs, and the publicity that resulted from his lectures and publications attracted the attention of the Esperance Club, and its founder Mary Neal. Neal obtained folksongs from Sharp for her London working-class girls to perform, and then asked Sharp if there were any dances to go alongside the songs. Sharp referred her to William Kimber, and soon after, he and his cousin Richard 'Dobbin' Kimber, visited the Esperance Club in Cumberland Market, St Pancras, to teach the dances.

The girls were in demand to teach in many parts of the country, and Sharp was in demand to lecture at Esperance Club performances. After Sharp and Neal parted company (from 1909) Sharp was lecturing on folk dance using William Kimber to perform jigs and play the Anglo-concertina. Kimber then assisted Sharp in the teaching of the dances at Chelsea Polytechnic: amongst the 'pupils' were Douglas Kennedy, Helen and Maud Karpeles, George Butterworth and Marjorie Sinclair.

After the First World War, Kimber visited English Folk Dance Society events before and after its amalgamation with the

Folk Song Society to form the English Folk Dance and Song Society. He first broadcast on radio for the Society's 21st birthday celebration in 1932. Further radio broadcasts followed, as well as television in the 1950s.

William Kimber was a guest of honour at the inaugural meeting of the Morris Ring in 1934, and thereafter was a frequent visitor to Ring events. After the Second World War, he was introduced at Morris Ring events as "the Father of the Morris".

When the Headington Quarry Morris team was revived in 1947, William Kimber was their senior musician until his death in 1961 (at the age of 89) and travelled with them to many parts of the country. He was guest of honour at the 1949 celebrations to mark the anniversary of his first meeting with Sharp: in 1959 Headington Quarry Morris hosted a Ring Meeting for the Diamond Jubilee. In 1958 a street in Headington Quarry was named after him.

His superb rhythmic playing of the Anglo-concertina was recorded by HMV in 1935, 1946 and 1948, and released on 78s, and his playing of Morris and country dance tunes has influenced generations of musicians.

These early recordings are now being re-issued on a new CD, *'Absolutely Classic: The Music of William Kimber'*, which will also include recordings of William Kimber's reminiscences made by Peter Kennedy. Additional reminiscences, plus recordings of his playing and singing made by Christopher Chaundy, but never before made publicly available, are also on the CD. All of the existing recordings were made under studio conditions without the dancers, but Christopher's re-

cordings also include Kimber playing for the Headington Quarry side in 1957 — a track is included on this CD.

To show the continuing legacy of William Kimber's playing, the CD also features the current Headington Quarry musician, John Graham, playing for the team's dancing, as well as modern interpretations of two of the tunes, recorded by John Kirkpatrick and by Chris Wood and Andy Cutting.

The CD is an 'enhanced' CD, which means that, in addition to playing it normally on a CD player, it can be played in the CD ROM drive of a computer. This has allowed the inclusion of archival film of William Kimber from the 1950s and film of the current team's dancing, as well as the reproduction of many photographs. It is being released by the **English Folk Dance and Song Society** in May, with sponsorship from **The**

Morris Ring. The CD comes in a slip case, complete with a substantial booklet detailing the life, music and musicianship of William Kimber. The CD has been compiled and produced, and the booklet written, by Derek Schofield.

Members of Morris Ring clubs were given the opportunity to buy the CD at a reduced price providing orders were received before the end of April. Thereafter, the CD can be purchased from the EFDSS, Cecil Sharp House, 2 Regent's Park Road, London NW1 7AY at £14.99 plus £1 postage and packing. It is also available from the Morris Ring's sales outlet through the Ring Treasurer.

The CD is a unique record of the man without whom none of our Morris dancing would have been possible!

Derek Schofield



Antony Heywood sent me this photograph with the following information: Jo Kuypers, teacher and leader of Helmond Morris Men for many years until his recent retirement, has an original weathervane mounted on the roof of his house in Helmond.

Thaxted, 1998



Past Squire (1970 – 1972) Bert Cleaver



Past Squire (1972 – 1974) Colin Fleming



Past Squire (1988 – 1990) Mike Garland

Dear Eddie,

John Frearson, in his report of the 1998 Thaxted Ring Meeting (*Circular* 32, Autumn 1998) mentions numerous Past Squires as being present. A count revealed that Squires – Past, Present & Future – totalled eight and makes one wonder whether such a high attendance by men of that ilk at a Ring Meeting constitutes a record.

All eight gentlemen kindly consented to being photographed and I hereby accompany this missive with eight images of Squirearchy! For the record, the eight men present were:-

8 Daniel Fox, then Squire Elect (see page 2)

Enough, in fact, for a side of six and a film recordist to boot! Finally, allow me to pose the question as to what is the most fitting collective noun for a group of Squires? Perhaps a competition could be launched in *The Circular* to discover such a noun? As the word “gallery” is an alternative for “galley”, let me set the bells ringing with “A Gallery of Squires”
Wassail,

Gordon Ridgewell.

- 1 Bert Cleaver, (1970-72)
- 2 Colin Fleming (1972-74)
- 3 Ivor Allsop (1978-80)
- 4 Barry Care (1982-84)
- 5 Mike Garland (1988-90)
- 6 Mike Chandler (1990-92)
- 7 Tim Sercombe, current Squire (1996-98)



Past Squire (1978 – 1980) Ivor Allsop



Past Squire (1982 – 1984) Barry Care



Past Squire (1988 – 1990) Mike Chandler



Past Squire (1996 – 1998) Tim Sercombe

Re: The Bagman's Newsletter No 3 - July 1998

This newsletter included several very interesting comments which have a direct relevance to the future of the Ring.

Commenting on Minnesota Morris Men, John said "A different interpretation of the Morris is always thought provoking - and their hosts that evening, an Open Morris team, further widened my experience of the Morris." This leads me to wonder, how many members of the Ring actually meet non-Ring sides on a regular basis? Do many Ring sides dance out with Federation or Open Morris sides?

On a connected thought, how many sides out of the total Ring membership go to Ring meetings? Over the last 4 years there will have been space for 200 to 250 sides to attend a Ring Meeting. Does anyone know how many individual sides actually attended? Did the same 50 sides attend 4 times or did the whole membership go to one each? What percentage of sides have attended an ARM over the last 5 years?

The figures quoted in the section "A Survey of Morris Dancers - 1978" cannot be ignored. If I was running the Ring as a business or any forward looking organisation I would be very worried. If over the last 20 years there has been a growth in the total market of 162%, a fall in the organisation's market share from 80% to 35% and they had only recruited 30 out of 426 new outlets (in the UK), I would be forced to say it was stagnating, scared to change and in danger of becoming irrelevant within its market place.

I am reminded of the Morgan Car Company which still hand crafts its cars and has a very loyal following and a waiting list. It probably even makes

money but it long ago ceased to have any significance to the present day world of car production or even the real world of transportation.

The first thing I would feel forced to do by these figures is ask - Why?

- Why has there been such a large increase in the overall number of sides?
- Why have they joined other organisations?
- Why didn't they join the Ring?
- Why did the ones who did join the Ring do so?

The second thing is to ask what do we want to be, now and in 5,10 or 20 years time.

- Are we aiming for a niche market which may or may not be sustainable in the long term
- Do we want to be the organisation that signifies Morris to as wide an audience as possible.
- Do we want to be an organisation that accepts anyone for membership or do we want to continue with a principle of election.
- If we want elections, what criteria do we apply?
- Is it purely one of quality?
- What happens if the condition of the side changes?

The third thing that has to be addressed then is what has to be done to achieve it. Whatever happens it will be painful for some people and groups. It will

upset a lot of entrenched attitudes and care will have to be taken to ensure that the positive things are preserved while the negative are jettisoned.

These opinions are my own and do not necessarily represent the opinions of East Kent Morris Men.

Pete Thomas

East Kent Morris Men

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http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/p_thomas2/ekmm.htm



Jack Sleeman 1917—1999

Squire of Bathampton Morris Men

1984—1986

Warminster area. The first major tour which he attended was to Hereford in May 1967 (via Upton-on-Severn, where we performed the Stick Dance). This was before Bathampton was a Ring side.

In 1980 he took over the catering for Plough Sunday evening from Bet Jenkins, following Ioan's death. Soon after that he taught himself to play the concertina - coming into his own on Bathampton's first Welsh tour, when Tony Jackson was taken ill.

1984 saw Jack dance in as Squire at Bathampton's 50th Anniversary celebrations and later that year he led the side at the Golden Jubilee of the Morris Ring at Birmingham.

In 1985 Jack squired the first visit of the *Nörder Danzkoppel* from Ostfriesland, Germany and friendships developed which saw Jack join the Danzkoppel for their tours in Germany and Sweden. Also, with Philip Lambie, Jack was Bathampton's representative to Bath's twin city of Brunswick. In 1988 Jack had a yacht built in memory of his only son, Kit, who had tragically been lost at sea in 1983. He invited the side to dance at the blessing of his sloop *Kemp's Jig* by Rev. Roger Sharpe at Poole.

Jack, a widower since 1971, was also a member of Playford dance groups in Warminster and Westbury.

John Helsdon

Bathampton Morris Men

After a long spell in hospital, Jack died on Jan 4th this year. He was a ship's writer during the 2nd World War and became teacher at Warminster's *Minster School* after demob. The headmaster was Ioan Jenkins, musician for *White Horse Morris* and in time Jack joined that side which had occasional combined outings with Bathampton. In the mid-60's Jack joined Bathampton, whose programme included the

Doctor Who meets Headington Quarry

The villagers of Devil's End, along with their morris side, are the victims of demonic possession. On May Eve (Beltane) a meddling archaeologist opens the local burial mound and so unleashes unearthly forces controlled by Azal, a Prince of Darkness, and his lieutenant Bok, a winged gargoyle. The Reverend Magister, the local incumbent, is the Master in disguise.

The morris team are dancing on the village green when Doctor Who gets too close to the action and is captured by the side and delivered to the pub landlord, Bert, who takes him at pistol point to the Master. After the usual gains, reverses and escapes, Doctor Who and his team are triumphant, the Brigadier inter alia taking out Bok with a bazooka strike. Peace and sanity are restored and the restored dancers perform by the maypole in traditional celebration of May Day.

It turns out that the tumulus is a space ship which brought the Daemons to Earth in their mission of galactic conquest a hundred millennia previously.

(The complete showing of this peerless entertainment can be viewed on the BBC video "Dr Who. The Daemons", running for 122 minutes under Parental Guidance.)

Our involvement in episodes 4 and 5 was filmed in the half day of the 24th April, 1971 starting at 9.00 am. in Aldbourne, Wiltshire, where a happy juxtaposition of ancient church, archetypal pub and picturesque cottages facing the village green made for the ideal location. Not far away, on the downs above, are genuine prehistoric burial barrows used for background shots of the Daemons' spaceship. Out of shot in the village streets were parked the paraphernalia of outside

filming: pantechnicons full of props and costumes, gantries, lights, mighty fans (for the generation of the demonic wind that heralded the arrival of evil) and most important of all, the mobile canteen which by happenstance was cheerily run by a man with close relatives in Headington Quarry. Fortunately, the real pub behind its false "*Cloven Hoof*" sign was open and there we repaired between "takes" by genial cameraman Fred Hamilton.

We had no speaking part but nevertheless throats got parched with all the dancing and we were entertained with yarns from Jon Pertwee who during his naval career in WW2 had been present at the action between the battleships HMS Hood and the Bismarck. On an equally belligerent (but not so fatal) note Don McKillop (Bert, the landlord) regaled us with stories of his film appearance cast as a cavalryman in "*El Cid*". The invitation to take part in the show came initially, we think, from Cecil Sharp House, then under the aegis of Nibs Matthews, who had been approached by the BBC. The necessary detailed administrative arrangements were then made by our Bagman of the time, Barry Jones, and Director Chris Barry came down to the Quarry one Monday practice night and together we worked out a sequence of dancing that suited the plot. In a show of sheer exuberance Chris got tangled in the set as we danced a tentative "*Young Collins*" and a stick struck his nose causing some injury and loss of blood. This of course was not the first time that strangers to the Quarry had been so roughly treated and in his early visits Cecil Sharp himself had to be met at the main



road and escorted into the Quarry by Bill Kimber.

Thus, come filming day and our arrival on the village green, a long shot showed us dancing "*Winster Processional*" carrying a long stick apiece gripped at both ends and held aloft at each "throw up". Dr Who was captured in a close shot during "*Young Collins*" (Bledington) and as the side broke out into a hey the Doctor, goaded by the fool berating him with stick and bladder blows, was forced into the set which immediately encircled him and held him in a mesh of sticks which finished the take. The later restoration scene featured a set of Maypole dancers (film extras) on the village green and another long shot of H.Q.M.D. dancing "*The 29th of May*" (Headington). The incident in the pub was performed by a professional actor in Barry Jones' borrowed kit, as no one of us was prepared to indulge in that sort of rough behaviour!

Payment? Oh yes! There was the standard BBC non-negotiable fee for film extras which I recall was not all that substantial and anyway it went over the bar at lunch time as the traditional "drinks on the bag".

For the record, and for four of us at least this is already archival footage, the Headington Quarry Morris Dancers present were: *John Graham – Musician;*
Peter Scudder – Squire;

Roger Phillips – Foreman ;

Roy Parsons;

Francis Parsons;

Bob Turrel;

Bob Grant;

Terry Mills;

Robin Ainley – Fooling.

The BBC luminaries were
Scriptwriter – Guy Leopold;

Producer – Barry Letts;

Director – Christopher Barry

Dramatis Personae

Dr Who, Jon Pertwee;

Bert (Landlord), Don McKillop;

Prof Horner, Robin Wentworth;

The Brigadier, Nicholas Courtney;

The Master, Roger Delgado

Jo Grant, Katy Manning;

Cpt. Yates, Richard Franklin;

Sgt. Benton, John Levene;

Ms Hawthorn, Damaris Hayman;

Garvin, John Joyce;

Bok, Stanley Mason.

The show in five episodes was originally transmitted in colour on BBC TV from the 22nd of May to 19 June 1971. It was subsequently lost in its original form; apparently a black and white copy survived in this country and an edited partial colour version was later found in the USA. The two were then happily synchronised by electronic means and the colour restored by similar wizardry. This reconstruction was broadcast by the BBC in 1991 at about the same time that the video was released. Thus is history encapsulated.

Bob Grant, HQMD

Playing for the morris

Some personal reminiscences, views, observations and prejudices

I LIKE a good ponder. Two years ago I moved to south London and, after a hiatus, started playing for another club but in another way. Then I tried to remember how long it was since I first stood in front of a side of dancers; I could account for 14 years. It could be more. When I began I considered it appropriate, more “traditional”, to learn tunes by listening to other musicians; nevertheless I recall an early après-practice when I notated a tune (?Banks of the Dee) from someone’s grunts.

Circumstances would quickly promote me from apprentice to journeyman; when the squire or foreman required a dance that was unfamiliar to me, out came Bacon and dots had to be read – sometimes, even, instantly transposed. I had to consider more deeply the responsibility that had been thrust upon me. I learned the first tunes from a box-player and his incisive, crisp style of playing – “Touch the keys as if they were hot,” (I paraphrase) and I tried to do likewise on an altogether different sort of machine. I play what I call a whistle but, in fact, it’s often a wide-bore (renaissance-style) recorder, as heard on those **Munrow** recordings from the 70s. The device is far removed from your bog-standard plastic descant. It produces much the same pitch-range more strongly, especially at the bottom end. For variety I also use sopranino and garkein recorders.

The only credible way to make sense of what I had acquired was to watch the dancers’ feet and inflect the notes accordingly, individually or in phrases. I realised that, however good the intentions, six or eight pairs of legs never move as one except

on garden pests. I should have to concentrate my gaze on a specific brace, usually that of number 1. When a galley, hook-leg, RTB, fore caper or whatever was demanded by the peculiar village-style, I felt the music ought to do something to match or emphasise the gesture. Notated tunes have been passed down but (my musicologist’s hat is firmly in place) it’s naïve to believe that these are fixed and inviolable. However authentic the originals, they were written down after a limited number of hearings on an even more limited number of occasions. To demand a single way of rendering the melodies is as ridiculous as expecting every revivalist side to do every dance in their canon the same way and at the same rate as every other revivalist side. The morris cannot proliferate in a mothballed – nay, taxidermic – environment. Nevertheless, there are right and wrong ways to play music for the morris. (But I don’t say “a right way”.) I don’t worry too much about what instrument is used for the purpose although I observe major crimes being perpetrated by accordionists. To my way of thinking, the morris is basically (the qualification is important) an intimate dance-form imbued with magic and mystery. I don’t mean that in any silly, new-age sort of way; I mean that it has a quality not immediately obvious, a latent power and majesty that transcends the mundane, the daily round, the common task. Dancers and musician are in accord, they celebrate their common purpose. The movements of the dance possess a hegemonic superiority yet the music has to sense them, not as a servant (otherwise simply have a disco-style, metronomic

pulse) but as a regulator. It maintains the tempo (*especially in the stick-clashing, gentlemen, especially in the stick-clashing*) and collaborates with the stepping and figures to proclaim the character of the dance.

Some instruments deny this relationship. I think particularly of the larger chest-organs, the mighty pectoral Wurlitzers with an elephants’-graveyard-full of ivory pegs and huge keyboards built for the more gymnastic pieces of **Franz Liszt**. I recently discussed Irish fiddle-music with a friend: she impressed upon me the monophonic nature of the genre; how harmonies were, at best, superfluous and, at worst, anathema; and how individualised decoration within the monophonic line was the way to create textural diversity.

This made consummate sense in terms of the morris. How often has a tune, perfect in its direct simplicity, been subjected to a chordal barrage that denies no chromatic opportunity? The contrived cleverness of the perpetrator is then more on show than the dance he is supposed to service. I’m no shrinking violet when it comes to making the music and the way it is presented a noticeable element of the performance but some people have no sense of decorum. The situation deteriorates ad absurdum when, for massed dancing, three or four or (the gods preserve us) even more chest-organists have differing (and intransigent) views about how the tune should be harmonically violated. I know that, when I started playing for the morris, my master felt uncomfortable about playing alongside someone else. He wasn’t being stand-offish or resenting a new-

comer even if that’s how I interpreted it; only later did I understand his attitude because I developed the same one: having two players doesn’t make sense because their ways of responding to and musically shaping the dance are bound to clash.

In fact, I’ve only ever felt really comfortable about playing alongside one other musician and he’s a box-player too. He arrived soon after I’d assumed/been lumbered with the mantle of responsibility. We became friends and played other music elsewhere such that we got to know each other’s foibles and reacted accordingly. I think that such a phenomenon is rare and only develops over time.

The problem has been exacerbated by the changing face of the morris itself. It is now a public spectacle in a noisy world whereas it used to be (big assumption) an intimate declaration in a quieter one. I like to hear the morris danced to pipe and tabor and my recorder is already a compromise in this context. But when your side is drumming up an audience and you have to contend with the bustle of the shopping precinct, the sound of traffic in a busy street, the Scottish pipe-band that has also been engaged by the fête committee, or (memories of Uppingham on Boxing Days past) the bloody church-bells, it is sadly tempting to resort to something louder. When folk discover that I play for the morris, they immediately assume that I am a bellows-merchant.

My recorder gives me far more flexibility to interpret the music for the dance than is the case with some other instruments. I can add decorations to the line

that reflect the gestures of the dancers and I can modify the pitches more expressively. Embellishing the outline is an obvious technique when a melody has to be played four times or more. The augmented patterns in corner-dances allow for both musical and physical variation but look, particularly, at the notated Wheatley dances for what, to my mind, suggests an ornamented melodic style if only vestigially. The tradition in the 16th and 17th centuries was for ornamentation of the melody on repeated playings and *La Mourisque* (see **Bacon** p. 175 for a version of it) was not a new tune when it appeared in **Susato's** *Danserye* of 1551.

I try to play spontaneously and in a way that responds to a dance (and the individuals involved in it) but mannerisms inevitably stick and get reproduced. Some dancers enjoy the fact that no two renditions will be the same

while others like the reliability of the carbon copy. I aim to satisfy both opinions, I suppose, by keeping the clear rhythmic core of an established and recognisable melody while colouring it not just for its own sake but in sympathy with the inherent gestures. At my first Thaxted meeting our show-dance was *Dearest Dicky*. Afterwards, in what would otherwise have been an idle few minutes I wrote down how I played it. The 'Once to yourself' would be more-or-less straight but decorations would creep in later. I wouldn't necessarily use all of them until the last time which could go something like the accompanying example.

I've always enjoyed a certain friendly rivalry with the blokes for whom I've played. Sometimes they make it too easy for me. After all, more than once-to-yourself hands it to the musician on a plate. (I'd be quite



happy to call "this time" but having a gob full of recorder makes it tricky; I have invented a simple system of nods with No 1 that usually suffices, though.) My happiest moment came during the Rutland Ring Meeting four years ago. I was playing away as usual when I noticed a small tape-recorder nearby. I enquired what was going on. "Oh – I'm collecting you," said one of the dancers.

Brian Collins

"OLD MAURICE" - A New Folk Icon!

AT King John's Morris Weekend of Dance in April '98, an old dancer made his first appearance. "Old Maurice" arrived at the weekend wearing the kit of each of the Sides that were dancing that

weekend and immediately became a hit.

"Old Maurice" is an individually hand-crafted figure created and made by ex-King John's member David Hutchings. Made from an oven-hardened

plastic material, he can be made to wear almost any kit and arrives on a "grass" plinth. Since that weekend in the New Forest many figures have been ordered and there is now a waiting list for the figures.

Dave Hutchings previously designed King John's MM badges, posters and sweatshirts and has also produced Cornish fishermen ("Jethro on the Rocks") for sale in one of Cornwall's most picturesque fishing villages.

To order your own version of "Old Maurice" from David Hutchings, 4 Swift Close, Lee-on-The Solent, Hampshire, PO13 8LF, send fore-and-aft photos of the desired kit, state which tradition is to be depicted and whether sticks, handkerchiefs, etc, are to be shown and enclose an SAE. Dave will then send you a quote. Prices will start from £17.50 for a simple kit and include a wooden plinth, postage and packing.

Photo by Nick Gore of Moulton MM.



The Coventry Morris 12-tradition Tour

The idea originated in 1997, when I organised a day of dance for the West Midlands Folk Federation which turned into a mini-tour of the Cotswolds. While I was proving the route for that the idea occurred to dance all of our traditions in their home town or village. While we have dancers capable of dancing almost anything in the side, our regular repertoire is more conservative, reducing to 6 Cotswold, 5 border, Lichfield and 3 sword traditions (but Sleights, Ampleforth and High Spen were left out of the two-day tour!).

With recent serious flooding in the area, and a dire weather forecast threatening rain all weekend we set out on Saturday morning for Badby, our first stop. There to meet us at the Windmill was Griff Jones from Lutterworth, and bright sunshine. Here we danced Beaux of London City, Old Black Joe and Cuckoo's Nest (Badby), adding Country Gardens (Ascott), Princess Royal (Sherborne) jig and Bonny Green Garters to fill out the show.

The next stop was the interestingly-named Trigger Pond pub in Bucknell. To a traditional audience of one lady and two small children we performed Queen's Delight, Room For The Cuck-

old, Bonnets So Blue jig and the Willow Tree (Bucknell), with Black Joke Ascott to finish off. After a photo session in the sunshine we moved on to Leaffield. At the Fox, Dick Wolff, our motor-cycling cleric who now lives in Oxford joined us. As Mike Matthew had decided to go round on his bike, and Griff was still with us in his estate car, we were turning into a convoy! Yet again in bright sunshine we danced Trunkles, Balance The Straw, The Rose, and Shepherd's Hey, with Mike dancing Ladies Pleasure jig (all Fieldtown) to finish. (As our oldest member he had taken it upon himself to dance a different jig at every stop!)

The next stop was at the Swan In Ascott-under-Wychwood, long our base tradition. After checking out the beer Dick sang the Ascott song to the locals in the pub, very poignantly telling the story of how the team were all killed in the first world war. We then danced Mrs Casey to the tune, followed by Orange in Bloom, Banks of the Dee and the four man jig Jockey to the Fair to finish.

We drove through some rain on the way to Bledington, but a large crowd of diners eagerly awaited us at the King's Head, where once again it was sunny. We started the show here Satur-

day Night, and continued with Idbury Hill, Young Collins, Glorishears and Over the Water to Charlie. After one of John Edward's picnic lunches Mike performed Highland Mary Ducklington jig.

The landlady of the Coach and

any Chipping Campden, but we put on a fine display including Balance the Straw (Fieldtown), Highland Mary (Ascott), Sleights longsword and the (Upton) Stick Dance. Nutting Girl (Ascott) was the jig.

As we were staying overnight at the Volunteer Inn we danced a



Chipping Campden



Badby, with Griff Jones playing

Horses, Longborough, was away on holiday so even the pub was shut. Outside Bounty Cottage we danced Swaggering Boney and Princess Royal jig, adding Shepherd's Hey and Balancy Straws (Ascott) for a surprised party of walkers, who thought they'd got the place to themselves!

The sun kept shining as we made our way Chipping Campden, and after a short tea break we danced in the square. We don't (and wouldn't!) dance

short show outside in the lower High Street while waiting for our dinner.- Trunkles (Bledington), Mrs Casey (Ascott) and the Ampleforth sword dance completed a very satisfying days dancing.

We enjoyed excellent food, beer and accommodation with Paul and Hilary at the Volunteer, and spent an evening of music and song joined by several friends, celebrating the Squires birthday which fell on the next day. We thought that the noise

meant that the music was being really appreciated by a nearby hen party, only to discover that they had a male stripper who held their attention rather more than us! Nick Wolff successfully showed how to fall asleep with your clarinet in your mouth, and still come in bang on time when his subconscious recognised a familiar tune!

On Day Two after a hearty breakfast, we set out for Peopleton. On the way we noticed further evidence of the

following weekend's folk festival and dog walkers we danced the Upton Handkerchief Dance, Bromsberrow Heath, Brimfield, and finally the Upton Stick Dance. All too soon it was time to leave for Bromsberrow Heath.

Here occurred our first communication problem, as I had neglected to tell Mike that as Bromsberrow Heath lacks a pub, we had arranged to meet the locals at Bromsberrow Parish Hall. As we turned right for



The famous Longborough slope

floods, in the shape of quite large boats sitting in the middle of fields – hundreds of yards from the river! Arriving at the Crown Inn we were met by a small crowd. As one of our men had had to pull out of the whole tour due to illness, we had to recruit a member of the audience for the 8 man dance. The landlady's sister-in-law (Sue) offered to join us, and draped in the Squire's rag jacket was taught the dance, which was then performed again to everybody's satisfaction: the Bromsberrow Heath stick dance to finish the show.

The next tradition on the itinerary was Upton-Upon-Severn, and we arrived at the King's Head there once again missing the ever threatening rain! To a small group of stewards for the

the hall we saw him disappearing up the road towards Bromsberrow Heath on his motorbike. After dropping the team off I nipped up to the post office to find him and return him to the fold. At the hall several volunteers were learning the Brimfield Stick Dance. We then demonstrated the Bromsberrow Heath stick Dance, and then integrated locals 50-50 with dancers to form two sets for the re-run. After refreshments we headed off through Ledbury and hop-growing areas to the A49 past Leominster to Brimfield. My remote researches had failed to unearth the existence of the Roebuck in the village itself. The landlord sounds very welcoming, so perhaps some local

dancers can give him a visit. We danced at the Salway Arms on the main road to a small crowd of diners. The Brimfield Stick Dance and the Upton Stick dance preceded our Sunday lunch, then it was back on the bus for Much Wenlock. Round the back of Clee Hill and across Shropshire we went, finally climbing up the famous Edge, enjoying the views until we descended into the picturesque town of Much Wenlock.

It was here on a Day of Dance some years ago that the late Dave Jones met Cyril Moseley who, although well into his 60s showed Silurian how the dance was done in his time, playing his harmonica, a tambourine and leading the dance at a speed that had to be seen to be believed! Coventry subsequently invited Dave to teach us the dance, a processional that we still use to great effect on our winter Sword and Border tour every January. After renewing our acquaintance with the George & Dragon

route to Lichfield, our final spot. The M54 was clear, and after a short delay in Cannock (a traditional traffic jam if there was ever one!) we joined the old A5 and arrived in the market square to find Ryknield Rabble awaiting us.

The slight rainfall ceased during their first dance, and so for the final show we were in the sunshine yet again! We danced the border-style Mr Dolly, borrowed a couple of men for Vandals Of Hammerwich, followed with Sleights Sword dance, Swaggering Boney (Longborough), Ring Of Bells, finishing by teaching Ryknield Rabble the Peopleton Stick dance. We then retired to the nearby George IV before our return journey to Coventry with the satisfaction of having completed our tour, made many new friends and seen some new parts of the middle part of England. My thanks to all who helped to make the event a success, especially the dancers; Brian Edgar,



Peopleton, The Crown

Inn at the bottom of the High Street we performed the brisk processional from the Corn Market to the Cross. Here we danced Brimfield and Sleights sword dance to a large crowd of shoppers and sightseers. As we bid farewell to Much Wenlock a low rainbow ahead of us led us on towards Telford and the

Simon Ehlers, John Edwards, Dave Marr, Mike Matthew, Bagman Martin Trewinnard, Dick Wolff and Nick Wolff. Well done all of you!

Pete Grassby,

Fool & Melodeon Repairer

Press Notices

GORDON Ridgewell has again produced a bumper crop of references to morris and associated activities in the national & local press. In chronological order of appearance, this edition's selection is

THE TIMES, 28.ii.1974: the Obituary for Dr Arthur Peck. This contains no mention of anything other than his academic career. However, on March 6th, the following appeared over the signature of Joseph Needham:

"The times obituary did good justice to Dr Arthur Peck's achievements in classical studies and the history of science and medicine, as also to his lifelong work in Christ's, but it said little of his unforgettable personality. Arthur was, in fact (like Fred Brittain of Jesus) one of our outstanding 'College characters' of our time, a man who would have furnished much material, for a John Aubrey or a Henry Gunning. Apart from his Greek he had certain passionate interests, one of which was folklore, folksong, and especially the cultivation of the traditional Morris dances.

Among the founders of the Cambridge Morris Men just after the First World War, he endeared himself to generation after generation of younger dancers, and as soon as the Morris clubs of the country had all become federated in the Morris Ring, he played a similar part nationally in that organisation. It was partly a matter of esprit de corps, some thing he had a genius for fostering. What was very special to Arthur however (always known as Alfred among the dancers probably by distinction originally from Arthur Heffer) was his originality of speech, his perpetual invention of words, and phrases and infectious way of talking, ways

which spread so steadily through the Morris men, and Christ's men, and a wide circle of other friends as well, that if anyone spoke of segastigation, for example, you recognised it as an outer ripple of the linguistic disturbance caused continually by Alfred at the still centre.

Another passionate devotion of Arthur Peck was to the life and liturgy of the Church of England. A staunch Anglo-Catholic (also like Fred Brittain), he generally served as sub-deacon on Sundays at the beautiful old church of Little St Mary's next to Peterhouse. He was active in diocesan affairs and greatly concerned about the problem of redundant churches. Religion was the mainspring of his poetry too, and for many years his Christmas "cards" which took the form of poems about the great Christian mysteries and paradoxes in free verse or sprung rhythm, were much valued by his many friends.

Arthur will be remembered by all who knew him for his delightful company, stoical yet always amused at life, serious or whimsically gay according to the occasion, with never a lapse of taste, and like the scholar-gipsy perhaps, able to converse on familiar terms with people of all walks of life, from the most simple countryman to the most learned don. And after the last remaining tie of personal affection, his translations of Aristotle and his commentaries on Greek biological and medical texts, will commend him to scholars hardly yet born."

THE HITCHIN Gazette of 25.ix.1980 was the next publication scrutinised – with the 25th anniversary of the election of Past Squire Morris Sunderland in mind, Gordon found:

"Visitors to Clifton Hundred Festival on Saturday saw double: the fool performing with the Morris Dancers was also painting and exhibiting in the street market."

NEXT, the INDEPENDENT of 27.i.1998 produced an article by William Hartston under a banner with a photograph of Westminster Morris dancing in Thaxted churchyard coming into the sights of a cartoon machine-gunner, which is (reportedly) the letterheading of the Campaign for the Abolition of Morris Dancing Altogether. The article is entitled "101 THINGS TO DO WITH MORRIS DANCERS" and finishes with an apology to

"the Interactive Garden Gnome Company for infringing their statutory rights to commercial exploitation of morris dancers."

THE EVENING STANDARD of 12.viii.1998 contained a re-creation of Three Men in a Boat which contained:

"We broke for lunch at Datchet, tuna baguettes for me and Pete, scampi for Geraint – who by now was plainly enjoying himself and regaled us with tales of his racy past including anecdotes about folk-rock and the internecine quarrels of various chapters of Morris dancers."

THE HERTS & ESSEX OBSERVER of 3.ix.1998 announced the formation of a new morris side at the Jolly Brewers public house in Bishop's Stortford:

"Bells were ringing and scarves were waving at the Jolly Brewers pub in Bishop's Stortford on Saturday as regulars took to the floor as morris men.

It was all in aid of charity and the dancers – seven customers and the landlord John Britten, who played the fool – put in spirited performances.

"It went extraordinarily well, everybody had a tremendously good time" said Mr Britten.

The group had been twice weekly in the pub garden for about two months under the guidance of teacher Barbara Murray and turned themselves into "fairly competent morris men", he said.

"Initially everybody was very embarrassed and a lot of the male customers were taking the mickey, but after a while everybody took it quite seriously."

It was a collective effort – locals at the South Street pub helped with costumes – and more than £500 was raised for the Home Farm Trait for adults with learning disabilities.

Participants kept their strength up for four performances with free beer, while barbecue food was provided by Mr Britten and his wife Dot."

A performance by Martin Carthy and John Kirkpatrick at the Purcell Room, reviewed in THE TIMES of 12.x.1998, contained:

"Carthy and Kirkpatrick are brilliant musicians, but neither is a natural frontman. Their relaxed and inevitably under-rehearsed style would have worked a treat in a club, but on the concert platform it seemed to have been plucked from its natural environment, like morris dancers in an urban shopping precinct on a Saturday afternoon."

“MY HOLDS”, a SUNDAY TIMES feature, was written on 25.x.1998 by novelist Marina Warner, who recounted:

"We had the Dartmouth festival in which we were completely swamped with morris men, and the whole village jangled and chimed to their bells. There was a band of morris men with blacked up faces who danced so vigorously that they broke their staves. This

dense, thick mythology is very much reawakening as an alternative to rave culture."

OUR own Squire appeared in print in the Guardian of 18.xi.1998 on the Notes & Queries page:

"How long should one wait in a traffic jam before turning off the engine?

Turn it off immediately. The traffic jam is bound to clear as soon as you do so."

"OBSERVER LIFE" in the edition of 22.xi.1998 on its "pubs" page featured The George, Borough High Street, and mentioned that;

"Morris Men occasionally pirouette outside on the cobbles, and actors perform Shakespeare from the first-floor gallery (it is claimed that the Bard himself once performed on the site of the original tavern)."

THE BUSINESS & FINANCE section of the CAMBRIDGE EVENING NEWS interviewed the Squire of Devil's Dyke Morris Men, primarily about his day job, on 1.xii.1998:

"I WAS born and brought up in West Africa, where my father worked in forestry. At the age of 16, I went to school in Sevenoaks, Kent, and in the early 1970s came to Cambridge to read biology at St John's College.

It was at the Societies Fair, held in the Corn Exchange, that I came across the Cambridge Morris Men. For some reason the idea of dancing appealed to me and I signed up. Over a period of about four months I went to weekly practices in St Luke's Church Hall on Victoria Road. The other members were very enthusiastic, and pretty expert. My interest faded away as I got involved in other university groups, particularly the Conservation Society which was a forerunner of organisations like Friends of the Earth. I didn't give Morris dancing another thought until the mid-1980s, when I was running Cambridge Centre for Sixth

Form Studies with Hilary Kirby and Alan Dawson.

A neighbour from Cambridge was joining a side called the Devil's Dyke Morris Men, and, on the spur of the moment, I decided to go with him to a practice session held in a hall in Exning.

The side's most senior musician told me the other day that he had thought initially that I was one of those people with two left feet who would never make it.

While some people learn the steps very fast, I'm not naturally very musical which is a distinct disadvantage. Once you have got your feet doing the right thing, you have to think about your hands, by which time your feet have lost it.

But I enjoyed it enough to persevere. And with a lot of practice – much of it in the privacy of my own home – I finally got the hang of the basic steps. Luckily, practice sessions are tremendously good humoured, and if you go wrong there are great hoots of laughter and much leg-pulling.

One of the best things about Morris dancing is that no-one is deadly serious. It's fun.

Something else that I like about Morris dancing is that it brings together a complete mixture of people. In the Devil's Dyke side, we've got a builder's labourer, a mechanic, a bed and breakfast proprietor, a university lecturer, an engineer, and an Egyptologist. You get to know each other really well.

...

EVEN the DAILY STAR mentioned a morris side in its edition of 12.xii.1998:

"A band of Morris Men have been barred from performing for charity in Farnham, Surrey, this Christmas – because they are so good that townspeople watch them instead of going into the shops."

(Perhaps the side responsible for interfering with the Christmas spirit should own up. ED)

ON 31.xii.1998, the Herts Advertiser carried an article describing the appearance of the St Albans Mummers:

"The play, based on one put together in Croxley Green more than 150 years ago, had fallen into disuse until it was revived in St Albans more than 30 years ago."

EVEN the specialist press mentions us occasionally. The CARAVAN CLUB MAGAZINE for January 1999 had the following, under the heading "AT THE CUTTING EDGE":

"It's amazing what a bit of pillaging can do. Who'd have thought that a boat-load of marauding Vikings eating and burning their way, across Yorkshire along the river Ouse, would plump on the little hamlet now known as Goathland and make it their headquarters? Pillaging away merrily, the new inhabitants of this 'Goths-land' soon settled, making excursions every now and again to practise the rampaging and rumbusting characteristic of the Viking way of making themselves at home.

That included much leaping about brandishing huge, sharp swords – and the occasional blood sacrifice.

It's amazing; even today the locals perform those very ceremonies and sword-waving customs each January. Well, nearly those very ceremonies. After all, we don't go round making human sacrifices these days – it just isn't British.

But back in the dark days of Viking rule, the fun would finish with the sacrifice of a choice morsel of local Yorkshire stock. First, select the sacrifice. Then seek out a suitably majestic tree, carve it with runes invoking the gods of war, harvest and fertility. Then out with the longsword, some yard or so in the blade, and all the finery, skins and horned helmets that our pillaging pals possessed.

Around they'd march, clashing swords in a rhythmic beating

guaranteed to drive away any and all evil spirits. Just in case any were left, the warriors would form a lock around the tree, swords clasped hilt to blade in an impenetrable barrier, the sacrifice in the centre, the lock slowly tightening, bearing down on the tree – brutally and bloodily strangling the sacrifice.

Goathland's Plough Stots ceremony was traditionally held on Plough Monday, a day dedicated to the young men (the stots) who would plough up the fields for the new crops and a week after Epiphany. Nowadays the Plough Stots hold a special church service on the Sunday before Plough Monday (10 January in 1999), when a little wooden plough carried by the stots is paraded round the village, in banner-bright procession with the older members of the Plough Stots team.

The longwords are there too, though they really come into their own on the following Saturday (in 1999, 16 January), when the ancient ritual-come-spectacular-pageant brings villagers and visitors alike out to watch and applaud 'Towd man' and the 'toms' who dance for charity.

The longswordsmen set out from the centre at 9am in two divisions, dancing to tuneful melodeons and fiddles. Starting point is the Reading Room, headquarters of the team and museum to longsword dancing, and the teams reunite at the Birchall Inn for refreshment around 2pm.

Dancers have forsworn Viking garb in favour of the more practical (and prettier!) mid-Victorian dress of pink or blue tunics: "Whig or Tory," quips the archivist. "Though we do dance in dusky yellow, too, for the Catholics; that dates from the Reformation, Nether garments are stout grey trousers with a somewhat military red stripe. "There are whole families involved – men only, of course – and we now have lads

as young as six learning the dances, alongside their granddads who have been dancing for the best part of 60 years," explains the archivist. "And they all come along on Plough Stots Night after the dancing to the Plough Stots Rosh."

I quake. Is this the gory bit, the sacrifice, after all, I wonder? Bravely I ask the archivist. "Nah," he says. "It's a plate of rare roast beef and good Yorkshire pud..."

GORDON referred to George Frampton's article on the Whittlesey Straw Bear (The Morris Dancer Vol 2 No. 9) and produced "This corn is killing me" by Mile Vucevic in The Times of 2.i.1999, which contains:

"Another colourful explanation is that it is connected to the wicker idols used by the Druids to confine and burn captives taken in war. The effigies were made famous in the 1973 film The Wicker Man, in which a Scottish policeman, played by Edward Woodward, meets a nasty end in the flaming belly of a gigantic wicker idol.

More prosaically, the same fate awaits the bears in Whittlesey. Next Sunday, the straw suits will be ceremoniously burnt in the grounds of the King's Dyke Club, paving the way for new suits to be made from this year's harvest."

THE best press mention in this batch has to be the page one picture and pages one & two article in the INDEPENDENT WEEKEND REVIEW of 2.i.1999. I did actually manage to see this one myself, before I received Gordon's letter. The article starts:

"In Keston Village Hall, just south of Bromley, Kent, the Ravensbourne Morris Men are about to set off for their annual Boxing Day dance. On one of the two tables in the room are soft drinks, all of which are entirely untouched. On the other is hot punch, around which sev-

eral men are cheerfully jostling with many a cry of "Seems a pity to waste this last drop!". Others are strapping on their jangling garters, and mustering their accessories, including a cake impaled on a stick which, like most things pertaining to morris dancing is "probably something to do with ancient fertility rites". The wooden horse's head — also probably something to do with ancient fertility rites — is not being used on this occasion.

Amid the kerfuffle, one of the men's wives warns me against the punch. "It's so strong," she says, "that last year it caught fire... They make their jelly with it as well," she adds. "Jelly?" "Yes," she says, and explains that the Ravensbourne Morris Men always make a "special" jelly for their yearly dinner, or Annual Ale as it is more correctly known. This year, the jelly is likely to be even more incendiary than usual, because it is a hundred years since the most momentous event in morris-dancing history.

Now, before going any further, a note of caution is required. It must be acknowledged that the histories of morris sides, as troupes of dancers are known, are bristling with anniversaries and traditions. The description of any innovation tends to be followed by the contented words, "this has now become an annual fixture". The Ravensbourne Morris Men, for example, speak of their annual Boxing Day meet as though it has been happening for about 600 years at least. In fact, their side was founded as recently as 1946, and the Boxing Day event began in 1972, and in strangely post-modern circumstances at that: the American actor Richard Chamberlain was spending Christmas in Kent and wanted to see something "traditionally English", so the Ravensbourne Men put on a dance just for him.

That said, though, what happened in 1899 surely merits the commemoration it will be receiving throughout the next 12 months. It was in that year, on Boxing Day (one of the few winter days on which morris dancing occurs), that the revival of folk dancing began with the chance meeting in Oxfordshire of a musician/schoolteacher called Cecil Sharp, and William Kimber of the Headington Quarry Morris Side. The Side performed their dances and Sharp, entranced, set about his life's work of collecting and propagating folk songs and dances.

Such dances — whose source most morris dancers put somewhere between "pagan" and "lost in the mists of time" — had been popular at all levels of society under Elizabeth I, and seemingly for a while thereafter. But they had dwindled throughout the 19th century, when there was a great movement of population from the land to the towns. As rural life seemed threatened, so it became increasingly romanticised by people whose views were perhaps coloured by the fact that they had never done a day's stone-picking on an empty stomach in a sodden field for next to no money."

FROM the CAMBRIDGE EVENING NEWS of 12th January came a report of CMM's Plough Monday tour of Balsham with a special guest appearance of Miss Plough Monday.

IN a letter dated 19th March, Gordon sent me "OH HERE WE COME A WASSAILING" from the HERTS & ESSEX OBSERVER of 14.i.1999:

"A GOOD crop of apples can be expected at Sawbridgeworth's River Orchard this year, if the traditional custom of wassailing bears fruit!

More than 100 wassailers turned out on Saturday to bless the apple trees at what used to be

the oldest market garden nursery in England, on land behind the private Rivers Hospital.

Though it closed in the late 1980s, the orchard where varieties of fruit including Conference pears — were grown, has been restored by the Friends of Rivers Orchard who organised Saturday's celebration.

Friends' chairman Diana Richards said: "We work very hard to regenerate the orchard but from time to time we have a bit of a celebration and invite others to join us.

"Wassailing is a tradition dating back to Celtic times and is to thank the trees for last year's crop and to remind them we expect more fruit this year."

THIS was followed in another four days by "ANCIENT TRADITION" from the front page of the same paper:

THE ancient Essex tradition of Molly Dancing made a welcome return at the Compasses pub in Little Green. The cheery and colourful Good Easter group, decorated with ribbons and with blackened faces, performed to celebrate Plough Monday.

That was the day when agricultural workers, with their identities hidden, would have negotiated new contracts with farmers.

The tradition is also linked with fertility, when the ashes of the yule log would have been sprinkled on the fields to make the crops grow.

The dancers also visited other Riddleys hostelrys during the day after leaving the Compasses, which is close to the company's Hartford End brewery.

Records of Molly Dancing can be traced back at least 150 years — with the last recorded dance in 1933 — until the Good Easter group, which has around 40 members, revived the custom in 1983."

A letter dated 30th March contained a cutting from the FINANCIAL TIMES of

2.ii.1999 concerning the entrepreneurial possibilities for development of a drug to enhance, inter alia, dancing ability.

TO add to Gordon's haul, I noticed three items myself. The first turned up in THE GUARDIAN of 3rd April:

"The Nutters will be dancing today: the Saturday before Easter is the biggest day of their year the day they dance for 10 hours from one border of the town to the next, taking in several pubs on the way. You couldn't invent the Britannia Coconut Dancers because no one would believe you. Each member of the 11-man team which sets off from the Traveler's, Rest in Bacup, Lancashire, at 9 am today blacks his face and done a distinctive costume: clogs, white stockings, black breeches, neat white mini-kilt trimmed with red bands, black sweater, white hat.

Accompanied by a small brass group playing tunes as obscure as the origins of the dances, the Nutters will trot towards the town centre, pausing frequently for eight of the group to perform one of five garland and two nut dances.

For the former, they carry semi-circular hoops wrapped in red, white and blue paper; for the latter, they make use of the nuts, wooden bobbin tops fixed to their knees, wrists and belts, bending over to tap out rhythms which conclude with a virtuoso circular flourish.

As they go through the streets, the locals turn out to applaud and elderly ladies weep as they watch again a ritual which, unlike almost every thing else, has not changed in their lifetime. The lads pause for a dance and cup of tea at the fire station before dancing on and taking lunch at the George and Dragon.

The dances are performed to do with the heritage charm of Olde England. Records show that

Nutters have been dancing in Bacup for at least 150 years and the tradition is seen as a vital part of the town's identity.

Tom Healey, an insurance broker, and his twin brother Joe, who works for a security firm, signed up four years ago when they were both 46 and when the team was running short of members. "We were both turning into couch potatoes," said Tom. "We heard they were looking for recruits so we went down and joined at once. We were



there to save the Nutters and ourselves.

"We weren't fit when we joined and the sweat used to pour off our chins. It's like a male aerobics class, really gruelling. I'd never done anything like this before. I think it's wonderful and the tradition has to go on."

The brothers turned up at fortnightly lessons at Stacksteads Conservative Club where, under the guidance of Richard Shufflebottom, the Nutters' 65-year-old leader, they learned both the ladies' and gents' positions in the garland dances. The men who are ladies have blue zigzags on their hats and wear their sashes over their left shoulders; the men who are men have red zigzags and their sashes go over their right shoulders.

The garland dances are tricky; the nut dances are even trickier. But no one ever seems to put a clog wrong on the big day.

Through the rest of the year the Nutters perform at fetes and festivals, both close to home and

abroad. Sometimes they will tell bemused onlookers that the dances were brought by the Moors to Cornwall (hence the blackened faces) and then carried to Lancashire by tin miners imported to work in northern pits. But that may just be a myth.

Sometimes the Nutters are invited to appear in television commercials but they wisely rejected a plea from Golden Wonder that they should join Rolf Harris in promoting sales of crisps.

David Ward"

ON the following day, the OBSERVER BUSINESS section carried

"ANALYSE your own weaknesses. Life is particularly unfair to people with Birmingham accents, for instance, wearers of dirndl skirts, people who talk at length about morris dancing and men with bouffant hair. Driving a clapped-out Vauxhall Astra will give you the appearance of a loser in some environments. Practice saying thank you to people and smiling if you have a dour demeanour; an apparent jollity and a sense of humour are increasingly seen as a necessary part of the senior corporate psychological uniform these days.

Neasa MacErlean"

FINALLY, our youngest member appeared at a recent practice with a copy of "BIZARRE" which contained the following:

North Wood Morris relaxing after filming for Japanese television (29.ix.98 at the Blue Anchor, Tadworth)



"MORRIS MADNESS
THEY DON'T WEAR white shirts and they're more likely to wave a rubber cock at you than a white hanky. But at least the Prince Albert Morris dancers have the bells and big sticks to hit each other with. Not to mention a lot of leather. "The Morris Ring, one of the three big Morris dancing organisations, are really up themselves about the whole thing," laughs lead dancer and professional whip-maker Alex Jacob. But the fetish community have taken to the idea of Morris dancing with two feet and, with the help of respected trainer Roger Molyneux, who's been jiggling on the village green for 30 years, the group are gradually being accepted. "We joined with some other teams on a tour of Blackheath on Boxing Day," Roger announces proudly. "It's now grown to about 14 people." So what's the difference between S&M Morris dancing and the normal stuff? "Everyone's own personality comes into it." Alex is more forthright: "We mix known steps with our own thing. For instance there's one step called Glory Shears. We call our version Glory Hole, which features leapfrogging and fist-f***ing from our gay dancers." For info on where to see the Prince Albert Morris dancers perform contact molyneux@netscape.net"

Parish Notices

These photographs from last year show North Wood at some off-season venues.

On the previous page is a memento of our documentary performance for Japanese television (only our Squire has seen the finished result so far!) Below left shows Santa's little helpers taking a breath and posing after escorting him in procession through the streets of Croydon. Immediately after the North Wood dancers were dis-

missed by Santa, the side boarded a minibus. The top right photograph is from the Rutland Feast, where I joined them after leaving the November Advisory Council Meeting in company with the Treasurer. The final picture, below right, shows our local Venture Scouts posing with Paul after performing two dances, taught to them by us, at a Duke of Edinburgh Award ceremony in the Fairfield Halls.



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Letters to the Editor

From Adrian Wedgwood:

THE Burton upon Trent Morris men I can see are (l-r) Cedric Insley (now just recovering from a hip replacement operation & gave up dancing when BMM folded in the 60's); Peter Page (up aloft); Mike Lacey (I think) in glasses - but I'll show him & check - he runs a transport Co. near here; and me - you can tell from the Bass & Worthington drip mats on my hat!!! What a surprise. If I can find out who the obscured faces of the other two are I'll let you know.

From Bob Tatman

Dear Eddie,

YOUR recent article about dancing at the Hare & Hounds, Godstone, on the occasion of the 74th. Meeting of the Morris Ring in September 1960 certainly triggered off a few memories in my mind.

I was there as part of a full London Rodney side, although only one of our number (the late Ron Love) is obvious in the photograph. I guess he was just filling in - nevertheless, his mixed group seem to have made a much better job of the final lift-up than did the Burton lads. I still have the original Souvenir Programme of the weekend (price sixpence) but, now that my dancing days are unfortunately at an end, I have no real need to keep it and would be pleased to pass it on to anyone who might value it.

The main reason I am writing, however, is to comment on the monumental scale and com-

plexity of the operation in question when compared with some of the weedy little Ring Meetings we sometimes see today.

There were 30 guest teams (listed below), including traditional dancers from Abingdon and Headington Quarry. In the morning and early afternoon of September 10th. there were ten separate tours, each involving four non-repeated stands (i.e. 40 different dancing locations), covering an area which extended well beyond Surrey - from Kent in the one direction to Sussex in the other. Between 3.30 and 5.00 p.m. there was a massed display in a Reigate park and then, presumably after a feast, off they all went again - with six separate evening tours, each having 3 stands. The last ones commenced at either 9.00 or 9.15 p.m. and therefore probably ended at closing time. It must have been nearly midnight before the exhausted dancers finally got back to Gatton Park School, where they were quartered!

Having taken a small part in arranging a couple of Ring Meetings myself, I can only marvel at

the dedication and stamina of the 1960 breed of East Surrey Morris Men, and must assume that transport in those days was cheaper and more readily available than it is today.

Cheers,

Bob (Tatman, of Hartley MM, originally of London Rodney)

The cast list

Abingdon, Bedford, Benfleet, Bristol, Burton, Chanctonbury, Colchester, Coventry, East Surrey Boys, East Surrey Men (Host side), Gloucester, Green Man's, Headington Quarry, Jockey, Leeds, London Pride, London Rodney, Luton Longstraws, Martlet, Mendip, North Downs

From Robin Wild

WHILE writing Christmas Cards to overseas I was reminded of a story you carried in the Autumn Circular (No. 32) which I passed to a friend abroad. The story was on page 15 & regarded North Wood

Morris Men & Selsdon Primary School. I'm wondering how many other Morris (Men) went to Selsdon Primary School? I know of at least 2 others beside myself - being Mick Long, dancer, concertina player & pipe & tabor maker & player, formerly of Gloucester MM, later of Chalice MM & now of Exeter MM; Julian Wild, dancer & fiddler with the Great Western Morris; and myself, dancer with Chalice MM. I'd be very interested to know of others - not that a scratch side would be forthcoming but just whether some aspect of Selsdon appeals to morris.

Furthermore, a subject not connected with the above bears thought - photograph enclosed - sorry it's dark, a sign behind the bar in some nameless pub in the Chalice dancing area. Are the initials of the brew familiar & is there any likeness to anyone in the drawing? Answers on a postcard . . .

Best wishes & Wassail,

Robin Wild.



Reviews

Ballads in Wales

A collection of papers from an International Ballad Conference is likely to appeal only to an esoteric minority. A collection concentrating on the Welsh context will probably reduce the likely market even further. A paper presented in Welsh, with only a summary translated into English, as is the case of Mereddyd Evans' contribution, is accessible only to Welsh-speakers. As one whose

Welsh ran to asking for a pint of beer, once upon a time, it seems a shame that a potentially interesting account of religious debate via balladry should be available only to the already converted.

Of the papers presented in English, three in particular engaged my attention. The first is a study of a family of ballad-sheet printers in a village near Merthyr Tudful which would bear com-

parison with the accounts of the more famous Catnachs & Pitts of Seven Dials for instance, Leslie Shepard's **"John Pitts, Private Libraries Association, London 1969"**. The second, by the collection editor, concerns the ballads that arose from a shipwreck off Anglesey in 1859 that was noteworthy enough to engage the attention of Charles Dickens. Finally, and most fascinating, looks at the use of

(FLS Books, £4.95)

Victorian "Drawing room" balladry in the raising of children in a South Wales family. In conclusion then, if your interests lie in the ballad tradition, whether Welsh or not, this collection will be of value. It is unfortunate that its value is diminished, for the overwhelming majority of potential readers, by the inaccessibility of one of the contributions.

Eddie Dunmore

Truculent Rustics

At the start of the nineteenth century the majority of the working class earned their living directly from the land. As the century progressed, the economy became more cash-based and supplementary sources of income were exploited. James Hawker, in *A Victorian Poacher* (OUP 1961) gives, in the context of his life story, an account of a concert party formed to

raise funds. Elaine Bradtke's booklet concerns the agricultural labourers of East Anglia, who developed Molly Dancing and used it to augment their low incomes until as late as the 1930s.

Sharp ignored Molly dancing, presumably because of the obvious derivation from social dances, and research had to wait for Russell Wortley and others during the fourth decade of this

century. "Truculent Rustics" begins to address that gap in our collective knowledge by presenting a readable introduction to the genre. The author considers the historical antecedents and puts up a feasible argument for its particular form and organisation.

That it is an introduction is evidenced by a text occupying no more than twenty pages (and those include two photographs

from Little Downham in 1932). Twelve further pages of the booklet are taken up with a tabular summary of the occurrences of Molly dancing, mainly from the Russell Wortley Collection, and a bibliography is included.

At only £3.50 (which includes postage) this volume should be on every thoughtful morris-dancers bookshelf.

Eddie Dunmore.

Molly Dancing in East Anglia before 1940 (FLS, £3.50)

The Traditional Morris Dance Music Album

This CD, featuring musicians associated with the Abingdon dancers, is not for dancing to. It is however, a good listen and includes a selection of morris dance tunes from Abingdon, Adderbury, Bampton, Bledington, Bucknell, Headington Quarry & Longborough, together with

a couple each of Northwest and Hertfordshire tunes. For traditionalists, one of the tracks features a cameo use of whittle & dub (Queen's Delight, Bucknell).

The Quaker is a good ensemble romp in Track 1, while Baccapipes (Greensleeves) is introduced by a dreamy bar or two

on a fiddle before setting off at a good pace. To my ears, The Ladies Pleasure (Bledington, Track 13) is a bit ponderous, but then my preference is for the Fieldtown version.

Provided you bear in mind my original caveat, this collection is well worth the asking price: an indication is that my majority

shareholder has commented that it seems to be playing all the time while I'm working at my computer.

Eddie Dunmore.

(Music Club, MCCD 376) Available from BFB at £8 (inc. p & p)

Truculent Rustics

Molly dancing in East Anglia before 1940

by Elaine Bradtke

148mmx210mm ■ 40 pages ■ illustrated

January 1999 ■ 0 903515 18 0

£3.50/US\$6.50 (p&p included) ■ Folklore Society ■ FLS Books



What is Molly dancing? Where did it come from? Who performed it and why? What did it look like? And where did the name come from? These are just some of the questions addressed in *Truculent Rustics*. Although it has undergone a revival in the past twenty years, the history of this little-known display dance form is not well documented.

This publication is intended to fill that gap. Molly dancing developed from the amalgamation of Plough Monday celebrations with other customary modes of community expression. The result was a boisterous celebration that combined intimidation with performance. Riots, rough music, house-to-house alms-seeking, Christmastime misrule and the traditional use of disguise are discussed in their role as antecedents. The text is followed by an appendix listing Molly dancers by their home village with brief descriptive notes concerning their appearance and performance.

ELAINE BRADTKE was born and raised in Florida. She has studied both classical and traditional music, and her interest in English traditional music is of long standing. She is not only a researcher but a performer, having played in (among other things) a semi-professional string quartet in Jacksonville, Florida, and a short-lived Klezmer band in Baltimore ("duration: one very exciting wedding party"), and performed with display dance groups from Washington DC, Baltimore, Northern Virginia, New York City and London. In March 1999, she will be playing fiddle for a rapper team at the Dancing England Rapper Tournament.

Dr Bradtke, who is also a qualified librarian, now lives with her husband in London, where she works as Assistant Librarian at the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library.

F
&
S books

Truculent Rustics

Molly dancing in East Anglia before 1940

by Elaine Bradtke

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Editorial

Once again I have to start with apologies: having originally planned an early April typesetting followed by despatch for early May, events conspired to wreck my schedule. A delay on obtaining some copy pushed the typesetting past my "window of opportunity" and it has had, perforce, to fit in around the boring bits of preparing lectures, marking and generally coping with life.

This year is an important anniversary for morris dancers everywhere and not because of the millennial nonsense. The celebration of an event which may have happened anywhere between eighteen years before and four years after the chosen date, complicated by the fact that the calculation was done by a monk who counted in Roman numerals (as did everyone else in this part of the world until the thirteenth century) is an opportunity for minority profit at general expense and not much else. However, on Boxing Day 1899, Cecil Sharp happened to be in Headington Quarry when HQMM came out to supplement their income and the rest, as they say, is history. Without that chance meeting, things would have turned out differently. Because of it, Headington Quarry will be

commemorating the event privately, and the rest of us might just feel that this coming Boxing Day is that little bit more special. The EFDSS, as the inheritors of Sharp's vision, have published "Absolutely Classic", about which Derek Schofield has written (page 3). I hope to carry a review of it in the Autumn Circular.

As we move towards a new century, it might be a good time to give Pete Thomas' letter (page 6) some serious consideration. He makes a number of valid points, particularly in his fourth paragraph. On that, as anything else, I await your letters.

I am hoping that other factors will allow me to produce the Autumn Circular to a timetable that allows despatch in September/October. For various reasons, I shall not be attending a Ring Meeting this year and will therefore be totally dependent on contributions from those who do for copy. North Wood are attending the Silurian Meeting and I can badger them at short range. Can I ask you to lean on your Area Representative to send me at least summaries of events in your localities? Text can be emailed to me at eddie.dunmore@ndirect.co.uk either as plain text or as a



document attachment (Word 6, Word Perfect 6/7/8 or Wordpro). Picture files I prefer as LZW-compressed tif at 150 dpi. If you still rely on the Royal Mail, please send typed copy that can be scanned in (manuscript looks nicer but my typing skills are fairly rudimentary) and prints of your

selected photographs – these will be returned safely to you after scanning.

Have a good summer, and enjoy your dancing.

Eddie Dunmore



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- page 1 Eddie Dunmore: Antwerp, 14.iii.99
- page 2 Gordon Ridgewell: Thaxted, June 1998
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- page 4 Gordon Ridgewell: Thaxted, June 1998
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- page 6 John Helsdon
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- page 15 The Guardian: 3.iv.1999
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- page 16 Eddie Dunmore: Rutland, 14.xi.1998
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- page 17 Robin Wild
- page 20 Eddie Dunmore: Groenplaats, Antwerp, 14.iii.1999
Handschoenmarkt, Antwerp, 14.iii.1999