

the MORRIS RING  
founded 1934

# THE MORRIS RING *Circular*

Edited for the Morris Ring by Eddie Dunmore, 118 Edgemoor, South Croydon, Surrey CR2 8AD

Number 44



## College Green Capers

See page 26 for an account of how we came to be dancing on this patch at midday on June 16th. It was all part of registering our unease & disappointment at the crass legislation that is currently before the House of Commons.

It will more than likely have a negative effect on our displays, while leaving the big-screen TV offerings totally unregulated. If you haven't written to your MP yet, do so. You can also try faxing the House of Lords, where this pernicious Bill is due for reconsideration shortly.

Tony Benn walked past us on the Commons terrace, looking very fit now that he is retired. He was waylaid by Tim, & opined that the English have a genius for banning any pastime where the common people enjoy themselves.

# The Squire

## Gentlemen!

Looking thro' my diary over the last months, I feel I should be a representative for the English Tourist Board. I travelled from Bodmin to Bacup, Lichfield to Letchworth, Dorset to Derby (plus all the sides in between), & to the Land of the Dragon for the ARM. All very interesting & most enjoyable, but I have to say that Leicester MM & Kennet do have something in common, holding a feast in a hall where the walls & the floor move in different directions!

The ARM was held at Monmouth, thanks to Isca for their efforts. I would have liked to see a better representation from the membership. It was otherwise a successful meeting, with topics discussed, & lessons learnt. Can I urge you all to support Saddleworth & Mossley, who are hosting next year's meeting, & make sure that your views are heard.

I put on North-West kit for the Horwich Prize Medal Day of Dance, a superb display of the NW tradition, from sagging

socks of Wrigley Head to the likes of Saddleworth & the unique Britannia Coco-Nut Dancers. I have also been meeting sides during the practice season, & their regular evenings of dance. So far I have been local, — Kent, Hampshire, Surrey & Sussex, but intend to go further afield when I can.

On May Day, I was in Essex for Cohn Fleming's funeral where, although we all felt a sense of loss, we celebrated the life of a lovely man. At the Thaxted Meeting this year, Jockey had their memorial to Moose at the end of the service, & later at Fools' Corner. I fear that, as sides & men grow older, there will be more services: which reminds me, this year there are seven sides celebrating 50 years of dancing (1953 was not just Coronation Year!).

The weekend of 7-8 June I was with Exeter for their 50th cele-

bration weekend, enjoying the delights of the Exmouth area - a beautiful part of England. The following weekend I am at the Ripley Ring Meeting: which, David Thompson assures me, is going to plan.

One of the most important projects I have been involved with, over the last few months, is the Public Entertainment License legislation. The Ring, Federation, Open Morris, & EFDSS have been working together, compiling a dossier for the Minister involved, Dr Kim Howells. We have been going to London on a monthly basis since March, meeting either the Minister himself, or his officials. Although there is some sympathy for our concerns, our questions have not yet been answered. The Government intends to issue a set of "Guidelines": for which, we have been told, we can have some input in respect of "Small Event" exceptions (although we are still waiting)

There are Members on our side in both Houses of Parliament: on Monday 16th June, we have been invited to dance on the Green by the MP for Bridgwater, Ian Liddell-Grainger, within whose Constituency both West Somerset & Chalice dance. I have asked John Bacon, President of the Morris Federation to join us, together with other members of the organisations. We will be trying to make the Government aware of the numbers of people affected by this legislation, & how damaging it could be to the survival of our traditions - such as the Thaxted Meeting. The MP for the Isle of Wight is trying to insert an amendment allowing "Small Event" exemption for shows involving less than 25 dancers & musicians. It is not certain that this will happen, but we are making ourselves, & our concerns, known. Keep contacting your MP! I have ensured that all Area Representatives are up to date, so you can get information from them. If any of you need more information, contact me by email.



*Ripley Meeting: the hosts dancing the last dance, Sunday 15th June*

# May Day 2003: Deptford Jack



THE start was not auspicious. I aimed to catch a tram that would get me to North Wood's usual spot at the top of Church Street by 0615. The early morning was fine enough to tempt me to walk to the tram-stop, a 15-minute walk

through a local Nature Reserve (*Brantley Bank*). Unfortunately, I was a minute late at the stop, just in time to see the tram arrive, & leave a minute early, & the school-cleaners alight for their morning stint at the local posh Secondary school. Just to add to my embarrassment, North Wood had chosen this morning of all to actually start on time!

The weather had already given signs of worsening with a light shower. After Church Street, we made our way to Queen's Gardens for the second show. The weather announced its intentions, with the light getting noticeably worse. We had booked breakfast at a local restaurant, & got soaked during the five or so minutes it took to walk there. The rest of the day looked to be heading southwards as we experienced almost a cloudburst while we ate our meal. I hitched a lift back home to change into some dry clothes before my second appointment of the day,

with Fowler's Troop in Greenwich. Given the density of the earlier showers, I decided to buy a replacement waterproof to go with my waterproof over-trousers, just in case.

One of the advantages of maturity in London is the provision of free travel within the Greater London boundaries - as long as it's no earlier than 0930. So my outward journey took me to London Bridge by ThamesLink, Canary Wharf by Jubilee Line &, finally, Greenwich via the Docklands Light Railway. I arrived at the Richard 1 some time after opening, to find a small but select company. One of them was Bill Harris, who had been North Wood's musician some years back. I passed the time of day with Sarah Crofts as we all waited for the central figure, the Deptford Jack-in-the-Green, to arrive. He eventually turned up some time after 1200, when the serious business of dressing the frame with laurel leaves & flowers began.

Eventually, everything was ready for the commemorative photo in front of the pub. When all the camera owners had captured the moment, the procession set off down Royal Hill to Greenwich High Road, en route to King William Walk & the first pub on the route, The Cricketers. This turned out to be seething with thirsty customers, making the prospect of getting a drink in a reasonable time extremely unlikely. There was a moment of drama when two local Wardens turned up to ask if the procession had been authorised. Some judicious name-dropping sent them away reasonably happy.

From King William Walk we made our way through the alley onto Creek Road, the Jack having to be negotiated carefully past some bollards & beneath some light festoons. Despite (or perhaps because of) my possession of foul-weather gear, the day brightened, & the walk along Creek Road was in brilliant sunshine. Passers-by stopped to stare, & motorists sounded their horns at the sight





of the procession headed by the banner-bearers, Roger Molyneux & the Jack, with the musicians straggling behind.

A right turn into McMillan Street brought us into Deptford Green, & then a left turn into Benbow Street ensured that the children of the local Primary School had something exotic to look at during their lunchtime. Then a wriggle through the alleyways brought us to Watergate & Prince Streets, & the second pub on the route, The Dog & Bell. Because of other commitments, I remained here for lunch while the procession continued its itinerary (getting later at every stop, I later found out). North Wood's Budgie (featured in the early morning photos) met me here, & we journeyed back to Croydon together: this time the route involved taking a train from Deptford to Greenwich, changing onto the DLR for Lewisham, another train from Lewisham to Elmers End, & finally the tram from there (although I had to change onto Line One to take me home).

My first experience of Fowler's Troop & the Deptford Jack was enjoyable, although I have to confess that the fine weather was probably a major factor. It

was extremely interesting to witness this modern re-enactment of an old custom (Sarah's Book gives the background, see MR Circular 41, Summer 2002, or contact Sarah at [S.J.Crofts@gre.ac.uk](mailto:S.J.Crofts@gre.ac.uk)), & I am grateful for the welcome I received from the Troop. The Jack itself weighs an awful lot, having an armature of mild steel: one can only admire the stamina of its minder.

I checked back in my copy of "Folkways in Thomas Hardy" (Firor, R.A.: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1962; original edition Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1931) to see if the great man made any mention of Jacks-in-the Green. The nearest I could find was Firor's description of the Dorset Ooser, which came out at the Christmas Revel: apparently this was also associated with the Skimmington Ride & rough music, but that event was normally a public shaming of cuckolds! Joseph Strutt's "*Sports & Pastimes*" (1833 edition, edited by William Hone) has a full account, of which I include an extract in the next column.

Eddie Dunmore



### MAY FESTIVAL OF THE CHIMNEY S WEEPER&

The chimney-sweepers of London have also singled out the first of May for their festival; at which time they parade the streets in companies, disguised in various manners. Their dresses are usually decorated with gilt paper, and other mock fineries; they have their shovels and brushes in their hands which they rattle one upon the other; and to this rough music they jump about in imitation of dancing. Some of the larger companies have a fiddler with them, and a Jack in the Green, as well as a Lord and Lady of the May, who follow the minstrel with great stateliness, and dance as occasion requires. The Jack in the Green is a piece of pageantry consisting of a hollow frame of wood or wicker-work, made in the form of a sugar-loaf, but open at the bottom, and sufficiently large and high to receive a man. The frame is covered with green leaves and bunches of flowers interwoven with each other, so that the man within may be completely concealed, who dances with his companions, and the populace are mightily pleased with the oddity of the moving pyramid.





# North Wood's Day of Dance, 17th May 2003



The weekend started as it has previously: after ensuring that everything was in place at our accommodation, Frylands Wood Scout Camp, (in my case, delivering the family microwave for use by chef) we reconvened at The White Bear. This pub has had a chequered history, originally consisting of six or so Seventeenth Century artisan dwellings before it was converted some time during the Twentieth. For a while, it became a hideous collection of

one-armed bandits & gaseous dead beer, but it changed hand: about five years ago & improved no end. As a result, Friday nights are immensely popular with pub-food devotees, so most of us stood around until a lamish party moved out of the enclosure.

Visitors turning up for the Friday opening of North Wood: "Day of Dance" included a contingent from Green Oak, a dancing team from Rutland, BFB, &

three Chanctonbury (one of whom was Cliff, our Leader). Having dumped their kit at Frylands Wood, they joined us at The White Bear in the interests of replenishing essential body fluids. To visitors from the provinces, White Bear prices are not cheap, so a move back to our accommodation came well before last orders. It is just possible that the price of the beer that we had installed for the

noticed a wedding party come out of the Register Office in Mint Walk, so a joint delegation of North Wood & Green Oak went over to recruit the happy couple to join them in a performance of The Rose Tree. Luckily, the groom was persuaded to leave the set just before the Rounds & All In (just as well, seeing Rutland's attempt at a hoist later in the day!).



weekend could have been the cause of this move (as a wine drinker, I made my excuses & returned home to sample the current house red).

The following morning I was up & on the tram, early as I had promised to bring a four-slice toaster to help breakfast along. Most of the occupants were already seated for their breakfast when I arrived, & as some of the day-trippers arrived in good time, we set off for the tram in good time. At Queen's Gardens, we found the remaining day-trippers waiting for us, & dancing commenced almost on time. During our time here, we

Having had our shake-out, we moved down Katharine Street to The Spreadeagle (previously Barclay's Bank). As it was past opening time, the dancing had to await the acquisition of refreshments, but we did manage to put on a short programme outside the Library (which is next door).

Then we moved on to North End, to perform the annual ritual of driving away evil spirits: in this case, the buskers who plug in their amplifiers (in defiance of their licence) & contribute to the noise pollution of modern urban shopping centres. Brian waved his magic am-



ulet (the official document granting us three contiguous busking pitches for ninety minutes before lunch, & sixty minutes after) at these forces of darkness, and all was sweetness & light. BFB moved amongst the crowd of Saturday morning shoppers, separating them from their cash with an expertise that us mere mortals could only applaud & admire.

Lunch involved walking through part of the Whitgift Shopping Centre, & along George Street East past East Croydon Station, to The Porter & Sorter. Lunch took some time to arrive, which allowed the beer-drinkers to concentrate on body-fluid replacement. My daughter had joined us for lunch, & found herself being introduced to the Squire of the Ring — at his request.

Eventually, we had all drunk & eaten our fill, & it was time to trek back to North End: this time we found that it was occupied by a group of evangelicals attempting to proselytise the



Saturday afternoon shoppers. They soon moved on, in the light of the lack of response from their target audience, who

were much more interested in us. During this session, Rutland attempted a multiple hoist of six teenagers that they had persuaded to join their set. My photograph shows the degree of success that they enjoyed.

Soon it was time to remove ourselves to The Royal Standard, a quiet, unpretentious working-class pub of a sort that is becoming increasingly hard to find. Here we stood or sat, & drank & sang — or even (in the case of Rutland), went out & danced under the Croydon flyover - until it was time to board the tram for the journey back to Frylands Wood. It was on this journey that our leader, by this time full of the milk of human kindness & bursting with bonhomie, persuaded an unsuspecting fellow-traveller (who was tolerant in the extreme) to share his earphones so that his choice of music could be experienced.

The Feast, as is now the custom at North Wood, was prepared by our resident chef (who has cooked for Mrs Windsor), & was up to his usual high standard. All too soon, it was time for me to take my leave & return home.

The following morning, I arrived early enough to share in the breakfast, but already our duty intellectual had been out to acquire an eclectic selection of Sunday papers for browsing. I repossessed the family microwave & toaster, & participated in the general tidy-up until it was time to return to The White Bear for our promised Sunday lunchtime display. Sadly, only Green Oak of our guests felt able to stay for this coda to the weekend: but the weather stayed fair & there was enough of an audience to make it worthwhile.

We hope our guests enjoyed themselves as much as we did: the weather did actually stay reasonable for most of the time, which is always a bonus. The only time it rained hard was during our Saturday afternoon session at The Royal Standard, but Rutland danced under the flyover, & therefore in the dry. Our thanks go particularly to Brian (Dr. Brian), the meeting bagman, & to Steve the Cook, for their efforts which were the major contributions towards the event's success.

*Eddie Dunmore.*





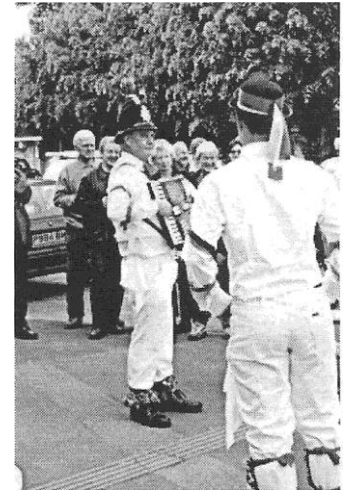
# Spring Bank Holiday Monday (Whit Monday, as was)



Woodley-Adams side, & dancing a jig. The visit started as it would continue, meeting, & renewing, old acquaintances & catching up on the news. That Mollie & Barry's grandchildren will soon be able to make a family team was one such item. There was time also for a chat with Keith Chandler before Lawrence Adams nobbled him, & I walked up to what used to be The Jubilee, where I bumped into a friend from Ravensbourne long ago, more lately with the Woodley-Adams side, Roy Franklin.

From there I moved to The Horse Shoe, in time to encounter what used to be the Shergold side, before rejoining Barry & the rest at The Romany. Here, the first point of interest was the junior members of the side, one

oured to be invited to join the



side at the meal. Conversation was lively, & it was good to meet the new Bagman. After lunch, it was back to The Romany & a performance of the "silent morns". By this time, the spectators

For various reasons, mainly to do with profitable (for the club) dancing engagements locally, the past two years have not seen me at Bampton or Headington Quarry. This hiatus was almost the first time in thirty years that I hadn't made the journey North & West. This year was different from most in



Care, own duty with the



that I was not accompanied by Margaret, she having opted for a week walking in Tuscany. Leaving the cat to his own devices, I jet out sometime after eight for leisurely drive to Bampton.

Taking the pretty way brought me to The Morris Clown just after ten, & my first encounter was with Past Squire Barry

of whom seemed young enough to have only just mastered the art of walking. Then, a pair of the duty police turned up, one of whom (male) was persuaded to surrender his helmet to the orchestra in return for a bowler, & join the dancing set.

Lunch was in the Community Centre as ever, & I was hon-

included John Maher & his family, Sarah Crofts from Dacre Morris & many other old acquaintances. Sadly, I had to leave fairly soon, to visit Wendy, Bob Grant's widow, who had invited me for a meal & a chat about items of common interest.



Then I drove down to the Six Bells & parked, walking down to The Chequers to greet HQMD & Westminster. This was the first time I had ever seen them without Colin, & some



time was spent talking with Mitch & others about that, & arranging for an obituary to appear in these pages. Then I spent some time in conversation with John Graham, discussing matters of interest before the show started & I could concentrate on recording the dancing. After they had jointly danced the HQ Morris

the numbers picked up as the day wore on, & the audience at the Chequers was reasonable. Once again I had had the privilege of seeing & feeling two totally different, but equally authentic, expressions of ancient & respected tradition.

*Eddie Dunmore.*



Off, I said my goodbyes & left.

Despite the fairly pessimistic forecast, the day had been fine & bright & thoroughly enjoyable, only hinting at rain as I drove home. My impression was that Bampton had been less crowded than I remembered, although





# 100 YEARS OF THE BRITANNIA COCO-NUT DANCERS



It was 9 o'clock on a cold and windy morning as the lads began to gather at the 'Traveller' Rest' pub just outside Bacup in darkest Lancashire. This marked the beginning of the 2003 festivities celebrating 100 years of The Britannia Coconut Dancers. After a short liquid breakfast, some emergency preparatory cobbling and a few words from the Lord Mayor, the days dancing started to the sound of several members of The Stackstead Silver Band.

It was not long before we were heading towards the middle of Bacup whilst being pursued by an ever-increasing enthusiastic

audience. The procession was conducted in the unique Coco-nutter's style of four dancers on each side of the road with the band between them. One of the early dance spots was outside the now closed Wellington Pub. I first thought this to be a pointless exercise until I discovered that the ex-publican had set up an outside bar on the nearby grass verge. The morning was saved!

We (in the royal sense) then processed until we were outside the house of a former member, Brian Daley, deceased 1986. The following performance was greatly appreciated by the

crowd and especially his widow. Next was a display in the scenic grounds of the Olive House Old Folks Home.

As everyone was struggling up the hill towards the mid-day performance at the local fire station, we were joined by the Squire of the Morris Ring Cliff Marchant. After a well earned cuppa the dancing started on the station forecourt. Ten minutes later all the alarms sounded causing both dancers and crowd to clear the way for a speeding emergency appliance to exit the station. This was not laid on for

wards the lunch spot at the nearby George and Dragon. I thought that this was a good time to follow the band. Once inside we were treated to a bowl of Lancashire hot pot and red cabbage. I was later informed that this culinary marriage was a traditional speciality.

The day had now brightened up in time for the continuing afternoon tour of Bacup and other lo-cal hostleries. The aim of touring the Bacup boundary limits was completed with a visit to the Glen House where the pints were accompanied by



our benefit or amusement.

After visiting another home for the elderly it was on to the centre of Bacup where the crowd more than doubled from its already generous magnitude. After a 'Pint & Pee' at the George and Dragon, there followed further performances at the Britannia Coconut Dancer's Jubilee Gardens, Under Bank House, Irwell Inn and then back to the town centre. Next was the Royal Court Theatre for a thirty-minute stage performance to the sound of the three concertinas. It was at this time that the Stackstead Silver Band had formed an advance party to-

copious amounts of Black Pudding.

Congratulations to all on a wonderful day, which resulted in a street collection of £600 that is to be donated to the Macmillan Nurses and the local Rossendale hospice.

*Steve Adamson BFB,  
Treasurer, Morris Ring.*

**NB** The photographs accompanying this article are © May Littleton. The colour originals show the yellow sashes worn to commemorate the Centennial. The Editor would like to record his thanks for the permission to use them.



# Correspondence

## Taking the Ring out of the Box

As a dancer in my early 20's, starting when I was 10, and as one of the organisers of the Morris 18-30 weekend (read the review elsewhere in this edition) I feel qualified and compelled to reply to the suggestion that all male dancing will be gone by 2010. This article may offend, but then so does some of your pitiful attempts at dancing.

My immediate reply is well, err, yep. It may well be gone if changes are not made. I once heard it said that the biggest reason for atheism in the world today is Christians...food for thought. The same may also be said about Morris; the best discouragement from dancing are the groups of boring, dodderly old men you see dancing: no, more like walking, more like shuffling through a dance, never once leaving the ground. Which is how the Ring is perceived by many. How do you know if your dance spot is flat? Answer: You dribble from both sides of your mouth.

The Morris is thriving now more than ever before, just not as we dance it. New sides are being formed all the time, probably faster than they are dying out. It's just that these sides are generally mixed or female, or they prefer the social culture of the Federation and Open organisations. It is purely the traditional all male Morris that is heading for extinction.

I personally do not have a problem with anyone of any gender dancing whatever they want, providing the individuals are having fun and that the dancing looks good (which many Ring teams can't manage!). Anyone who storms off in a huff when a female Morris dancer enters their sight muttering "ifs not right" is hindering all male Morris rather than encouraging it. Female and mixed teams are here to stay but hopefully not

take over totally! It you have a real problem with that then clearly you're very old, probably have a big beard and wear sandals and maybe it's time you stopped dancing. Things are not the same as when you were a lad - your problem, get over it. You need to work with female and mixed teams not against them. Cliff said in Morris Circular No.42, *"do you contact the Open and Fed teams in your area? We can all work together"*.

From organising the 18-30 weekend I found out that the simple fact of the matter is that on the whole young chaps don't see the point of the Ring and see it as a large Old Boys' club. Some hate the way local teams don't see eye to eye because thirty years ago [insert name here] used another side's stick and broke it. Or the neighbouring side's mascot trod on the dog at your local or some other petty dispute between two chaps who are probably now dead anyway. Another pet hate of mine is to see old guys at Ales who have decided not to dance (when they still dance for the paying public!) and instead wear a blazer and tie embroidered with the side's badge. What's that all about? This is the Morris Ring not Eton, or your local conservative club. It is not an institution, is a group of men who dance the Morris. Leave it that way.

How many Ring Sides does it take to change a light bulb? Answer: Change? What's wrong with the old one?

I can't dictate exactly what a side should do to appeal to younger dancers, because what works with my team may not work with yours — not all sides get thousands of students turning out on May morning for example. But also because what I enjoy in the Morris is not what all young guys enjoy in the Mor-

ris. The two of us from Icknield Way who organised the 18-30 weekend disagree on many things within the narrow constraints of Ring Morris. I do however, think it's very important to listen to any young chaps you have and seriously consider any ideas they have. It's pleasing to see some squires are in fact under thirty. Some, I'm told, were elected not simply because it's about time they took their turn, but specifically because they wanted young blood with fresh ideas in charge. There are some brilliant ideas being tried by some teams (please tell everyone about them in the Circular), it just takes a fresh approach. Thinking outside the box doesn't mean thinking outside the Ring.

The Ring has some plus points, beyond simply 'all male dancing', which makes it appealing to me. The idea of dancing as a scratch team or massed dancing is, I am told, alien to Fed teams. This to me is a huge part of the enjoyment of the Morris. Being a member of a massed show in Trafalgar Square, or just at an Ale is magic. We need to draw on these strengths and promote them. Get involved with ALL your local teams and some further afield not just the three or four you're old mates with.

Many ceilidh bands stem from Morris teams or at the very least have dancing members. If you have a funky band in your team consider using them, or just the rhythm section along with the usual massed musicians at your Ale. After all, Morris On (& offspring) were/are so very popular. A guy on the 18-30 weekend had an electric bagpipe, which without a bag was more of a stick, but it sounded so cool.

I think I know why you are all afraid to try new ideas. Because if they turn out to be bad (and some inevitably will) then

no-one will turn up for the next thirty years, I refer you back to somewhere above.

I know you are not all going to change overnight. The funny old guy who bores the pants off dancers, the public, dogs or anyone else who listens will still do so. If your knees are kipped then you are not going to dance higher or faster. But try to change some elements of your dance/program/general ethos even if it is not a majority decision. I have heard of young squires who select a display team on dancing ability and not years' service who then cause offence to the old boys. Please understand why they are doing it; for your side and Morris as a whole.

I have been told that Icknield Way has changed in many ways over the past few years in response to the suggestions from the many young guys we have, and I thank them for it. I don't believe it's by luck that 9 teenagers have danced with IWMM in the last three years despite having no father in the Morris. But through the efforts of teachers who run school sides, men who go out of their way to help teenagers get to Morris each week and the general support and tolerance from the whole side.

I sincerely hope that I will have the wisdom to know when the time has come to sadly stop dancing (at least in public). When I'm a granddad with over half a century of dancing, music and great enjoyment behind me it will be very hard to hang up my bells. But I hope that I will for the sake of my grandsons and their enjoyment.

*Morris On!*  
Ben Higgs.



## The Thaxted Morris of 1911

### - loose ends

Dear Eddie,

In view of the notoriety acquired by 'The Carpenters' Arms on page 272 of the last issue of your organ, I was prompted to take the accompanying photograph of this former ale-house at the 2002 Thaxted Ring Meeting. By coincidence, this is the former domicile of Richard Morgan, erstwhile Bagman of the Thaxted Morris Men, whose 'Bats in the Belfry' letter, published in The Times of 13.iv.1995 at page 15, was composed at the time when this whilom public house was his place of abode.

As the subject of Richard's letter is of chiropteran creatures roosting in Thaxted Church since Easter 1911, in spite of the use of incense, it provides an appropriate codicil to 'The Thaxted Morris of 1911'. I quote:

#### 'Bats in the belfry'

From Mr Richard Morgan

Sir. I read with great interest your report. "Anglicans have more 'bats in their belfry'" (later editions, April 12). In fact it is unusual for bats to roost in belfries, and here in Thaxted parish church they tend to roost above the organ in the north transept.

The notion that "the heavy use of incense was responsible for deterring bats" is false. We have had a "heavy use of incense" here even 'Sundae' since Easter 1911 and we *still* have bats.

Yours etc.  
RICHARD MORGAN.  
The Carpenters Arms. 24  
Newbiggen Street,  
Thaxted. Essex.  
April 12.

On the subject of mis-scanning I am wondering whether the scanner used by your goodself comes from the same stable as the one employed by the Public Record Office, which is providing similar amusement for researchers of the 1901 online Census data. The following letter from Donald Brett, published in The Times of 9.ix.2002 at page 19, reveals an entertaining example of this:—

#### 1901 Census slips

From Donald Brett

Sir The Public Record Office's 1901 Census online, not, partially available again, as a test site continues to provide amusement.

grandfather, a Corn roil Fleur merchant (clearly written in the actual Census page), appears in the transcription as a Cow and Flow merchant. Something; to de, machines, perhaps'

tours sincerely, DONALD  
BRETT, 6 Pines Close.  
Amersham, Buckinghamshire  
HP6 5QW.  
.d.brett@dsl.pipex.com  
September 4.

If you come across such gems in your genealogical researches of derived data, I trust you will share them with your readership!

Wassail,  
Gordon Ridgewell.

Allow me to congratulate Cyril Swales, sometime dancer with the Goathland Plough Stots, & currently trainer of the junior team of the White Rose Sword Dancers from Scarborough, on being awarded an MBE in the 2003 New Year's Honours List for services to folk dancing in North Yorkshire".



Patrick Barkham, in The Times of 31.xii.2002, p. 11, wrote "The achievements of individuals in cottage industries & obscure pastimes, from folk-dancing to bee-keeping, were also recognised ... Cyril Swales, a Scarborough folk-dance teacher & enthusiast, was appointed MBE for his contribution to the pastime in North Yorkshire".

Cyril was further mentioned in The Times' leading article of the same date where, on p. 19, in an article headed "Honour Bound", we read: "The Yorkshire folk-dancing enthusiast, Cyril Swales, must be greeted with garlanded dancing girls"!!!!

Cyril is a Gold Badge holder of the EFDSS, having been awarded this honour in 1997. The citation being written & delivered by Yvonne R. Coupe.

Wassail,  
Gordon Ridgewell

# Obituary

## Gordon Sibthorpe, 1928 - 2003

Gordon Sibthorpe of Offley MMM died on Shrove Tuesday (4.11.2003). He died in his sleep after a long illness, in the Isobel Hospice in Welwyn garden City.

He was a founder member of Standon Morris in 1954, & Bagman of that club from 1956 - 1959, before joining Offley in

1961. Gordon danced with Offley for some 40 years, & was a past Squire & past Bagman of that club. For his length of service he was rewarded with a celebratory pewter tankard.

The Offley club kept in touch with Gordon during his long illness, & danced in the road out-

side his home in Buntingford on their New Year tour in early January this year.

Gordon worked for 31 years in the Planning Department of Hertfordshire County Council, & for 12 years of that he was also a member of the Braughing Rural District Council. Following

early retirement, he was Town Clerk of Royston for eight years. He was a former Chairman of Buntingford Civic Society & a former Chairman of the Buntingford Citizens' Advice Bureau.

His funeral, on 13.iii.2003 was attended by the Mayors of

Royston & Buntingford, Standon & Cambridge Morris Men, & members of the Staples Folk Dance Club (of which Gordon had been a long-standing member). His coffin bore his straw hat decorated with rosemary, & was borne into St

Peter's Church, Buntingford, to the strains of "All Things Bright & Beautiful". The eulogy was delivered by Brian Limbrick, the Founding Squire of Offley Morris Men.

*Gordon Ridgewell*

## Pilling's Penny Dreadful

A good few years ago, I wrote to a long-established firm<sup>1</sup> about an exhibit that they were reputed to have in a small museum at the top of their rather large building. I received a reply from some bright spark, to say that they weren't interested in the past, but only in the present & future. I presume that this is what Henry Ford meant when he said, "history is bunk", i.e., he was only interested in today & tomorrow.

However, I could say that history is bunk, in that the traditional history of my schooldays was the part of Mercator's projection of the world that was coloured red in the Atlas, & that it was basically xenophobic<sup>2</sup>. (When it came to the Wars of the Roses, I knew which side I was on, although my father said that they were both as bad as each other).

Nowadays, history is more academic, but one wonders how truly academic it is when commercialisation becomes a factor, & one sees the proliferation of books on historical subjects, each one of which will have some axe to grind to make a difference from its fellows & also, they tell us, to make it exciting. Then indeed there is family history, which librarians would formerly dismiss as egocentric nonsense, but now provide countless facilities for dwelling in the graveyards of the past, as William Morris put it<sup>3</sup>.

The recent book on Pace-Egging by Eddie Cass has been well cried up in the Ring press, & it is indeed an interesting & well-written work. However, he

refers several times to 'pagan origin' as being an outmoded idea. I am a little uncertain as to whether fashion in ideas is accepted as a current academic qualification. I myself would have thought this a rather tenuous idea.

Admittedly, there was a time when anyone who cast a doubt on pagan origin for the folk-play or morris would have received a Gorgon's glare from members of the EFDSS hierarchy. It was not then just fashionable, it was authoritative.

I was once allowed to give a talk at a gathering of people interested in furthering the knowledge of traditions. I rather decried the pagan origin of morris - it was then not quite so "fashionable" so to do. Ron Smedley thereupon asked if we should then cease to illuminate our audience with this idea. Roy Judge immediately replied "Indeed no". I was therefore saved a reply. If I had answered, I might have said that I was often asked about the provenance of morris, usually by a bourgeois lady, & that I replied, "Do you want the truth, or a tale?" "Oh, the truth, of course", she would reply, & I would say "We don't know". A totally unsatisfactory answer, thus I carried on, "However, some people think ... etc." She would then thank me graciously, & depart happily. Nowadays, having been relegated to the musicians' faction, I am not so prominent, & am happily spared these embarrassing encounters.

We seem to have quite a few theories about the origin of morris :



John of Gaunt learnt it from the Albigenses (before he massacred them).

- a) Derived from Italian court dances
- b) Derived from the matashins. (The only example here is that of Arbeau, a four-man sword dance, although some references seem to imply only three dancers).
- c) Derived from Spain, as is the Mexican matachines. (There was reputed to be a notation in the Madrid Biblioteca Nacional, but it seems to have disappeared).
- d) Derived from Playford
- e) Brought by the Normans
- f) Moorish, from the etymology of the word
- g) Mores ... from the Latin, as in 'O tempora, etc.' (perhaps brought by Legion XX!)

Further contributions will be welcomed.

So you pay your penny, & you take your choice. I haven't included pagan: well, not again! We are, of course, also proud that it is most certainly English.

There is an interesting gap in the references to morris & the play in the Eighteenth Century,

& although earlier there are plenty of references to morris, we have little or no idea as to how the thing went. There is a little more information on plays, as some are written out.

May I say that we need to be good-natured about other people's theories, even if we have doubts about them: it is not sensible to dismiss an idea as being out of date, for that does not invalidate it; unkind people may yet say rude things about current ideas, so beware!

We may be able to put a man on the moon, or encircle the earth quicker than Robin Good fellow, but we cannot put a man in the past, even though Einstein could slip the odd minute<sup>4</sup>.

*Julian Pilling.*

PS John Jenner set forth a good summary of the pagan idea in Circular No 30, Autumn 1997.

1 H M V

2 For an earlier & pleasanter view,

see Tacitus on the Germanii  
3 Even if you can't find this remark,

it will do you good to read 'News from Nowhere', anyhow  
4 The clock paradox



# Ripley 20th Anniversary Ring Meeting

Ashover, Derbyshire., 13— 15th June 2003



*Winstar: Thelwall dancing Step & Fetch Ha*

We had intended to leave as close to Friday midday as could be managed. In the event, the first pick-up was 35 minutes late, & we eventually got under way for the Dartford Tunnel after 1 pm. The journey was not

The delayed start meant that traffic was becoming congested as we joined the M11 en route for Cambridge & points North to Derbyshire. Much effort was expended in combing the Good Beer Guide for recommended

that our route should include a passage through Rutland, & therefore a refreshment stop at Oakham. The Grain Store was

cause by this time we were feeling faint with hunger).

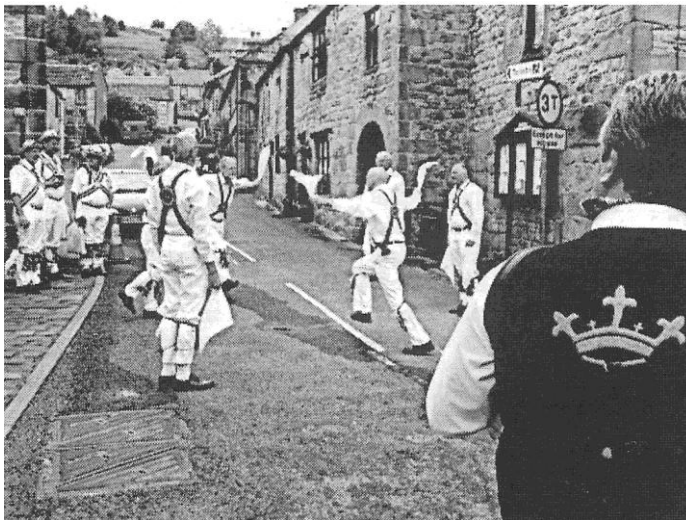
We eventually arrived to find all



*Winter: Ilmington, Shepherd's Hey*

eventually reached, & our collective thirst was being quenched, when Dave Casewell of Rutland & his wife came in for a quiet Friday evening drink. This, of course, delayed our departure (which was only as far as the nearest chippie, be-

the signs of a busy construction site. Apparently some lottery money had become available for refurbishment & extension, which would all be finished by June (except that it wasn't). However, this didn't prevent us from greeting all the old friends who had beaten us to the week-



*Winter: East Surrey, Lads a Bunchum*

helped by Steve the Cook insisting on bringing a second ("changing room") tent & two armchairs: all he lacked, in the end, was a suitably knotted handkerchief. Admittedly, Budgie, John H, & myself had stopped at a sportswear shop recommended by Steve the Cook to acquire new whites, & (for two of us) sunhats (also white).

pubs, only to find that they all stopped serving before we could get there. Eventually we found the Old Bridge Hotel in Huntingdon, only to discover that the beer was warm but they were willing to sell it at full price (which meant that three pints & a red wine came out a shade under £12!).

This extortion dampened our spirits a bit, until we decided



*Ashford in the Water: Durham Rams*



*Ashford in the Water: Wessex, Lads a Bunchun*

end's base, & cashing in our meal & beer tickets (those that were beer-drinkers). Then the campers unloaded their tents for pitching, which was the occasion of some irritated criticism when one of them discovered that his nephews had neglected to pack the guy-

ment, so we joined the crowd there. The singing was of a high standard, & some enjoyable music-hall songs were rendered to an appreciative audience. We were so engrossed in this that most of us totally missed that we were being locked in at about 10 past eleven. Despite all our ef-



*Ashford in the Water: Anstey, Constant Billy*

ropes. Once a work-around had been established, us softies set off for the Nettle Inn, the accommodation for the weekend.

Once registered, we sampled the liquid refreshment on offer (after all, we might come back thirsty!) Then we drove back to pick up the campers & sample the Ashover village pubs. The Crispin Inn appeared to offer most in the way of entertain-

ments, it was well past midnight before we could make our escape back to the Nettle Inn.

The following morning we tucked in to a "full English" breakfast (two of everything, with mushrooms & sautéed potatoes), before setting off to join our separate modes of transport. I had been allocated a seat on the "Tour of Tours", along with Cliff, BFB, JF, Jack Dawes

(whose wife drove us around all day, very competently & efficiently), the Ripley Squire, & Carole Curtis, the Ring's most faithful fan. Our first stop was at Winster, where we eventually met East Surrey, Ilmington (with their new recruit, Past Squire Gerald Willey) & Thelwall. Past Squire Geoff Jerram had been recruited to

Oak/North Wood (so I got dragged into a dance) & Wessex.

From Ashford we drove on through some of England's finest scenery (it all was: I remarked that Derbyshire had the locations, all it needed was the weather: this weekend filled that requirement). We arrived at Monsal Head, where the danc-



*Monsal Head: Richmond-on-Swale*

the East Surrey Orchestra, & he & I got into a discussion about the Log Books that nearly resulted in me being stranded in Winster.

However, Jack was looking out for me, so I didn't have to walk to our next stop, at Ashford in the Water. At Ashford, everyone had a peek at the dressed wells (& most of us took at least one photo). The teams here were Anstey, Durham Rams, Green

ing was in the car-park. Our lunch was in the restaurant, & the suspicion was that they were slightly overwhelmed, it took ages! However, when it arrived, it was substantial & enjoyable. The teams here were First Sedgely, Furness, & Richmond on Swale.

Because of the time occupied by lunch, we missed one or two planned pub visits, but did visit one fascinating establishment (the name of which escapes me).



*Monsal Head: Furness*



However, we caught up with the remaining tour at the Knockerdown Inn, when they had finished dancing & were just starting their lunch: it looked another substantial offering! The teams dancing here (they put on a show for us when they had eaten) were Lincoln & Micklebarrow, St Albans & Standon. After that, it was on to

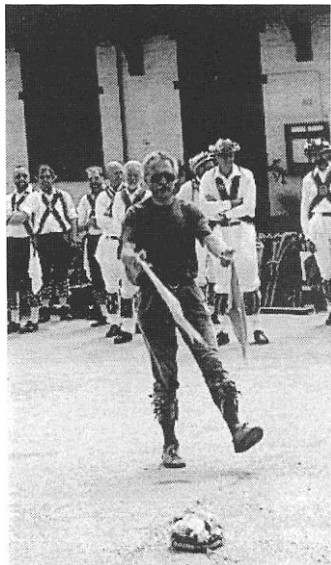
Then it was back to Ashover, in time to walk back to the Nettle for a shower & change before the Feast.

After an excellent Feast & the usual speeches (one item of which was the presentation of their Staff of Membership to Anstey), the singing commenced. This part of the eve-



*Knockerdown: Lincoln & Micklebarrow*

our final stop (after a hiatus when we sat around waiting for dancers who didn't arrive in time) at the Boat Inn at Cromford. This was our second sight of Tour D, so once again I got inveigled into a dance. This time we attempted Young Collins, but neglected to work out for augmented music for stick-throwing in the final chorus (it always pays to discuss these things with the musician).



*Monsal Head: 1st Sedgely?*

ning was finished by a fine (nearly) monologue from a step-ladder. The evening then continued in, & outside, the village pubs. For some reason, I felt tired enough to set off back to the Nettle at a fairly early stage. I am extremely grateful to the total stranger who stopped to give me a ride for most of the mile or so, a very charitable gesture.

After another enormous breakfast, I was preparing to set out when there was a knock at the door. Because of the need to be at the Houses of Parliament the following day, the North Wood campers had taken an executive decision to drive back that afternoon. This meant I had to load my luggage into the car, & check out. Back at headquarters, everyone was preparing for the hastily-convened Church service. Leonard Pepper of Whitchurch had been engaged to lead the worship, so the Procession was forming up. I made my apologies to Cliff, & settled down to sit in the sunshine outside the pub with the other non-believers. I had had the foresight to include a bottle of



*Knockerdown: Standon dancing Oddington*

Le Selection du President in my hand-luggage, so the hour passed pleasantly. The police arrived to direct traffic just as the church-goers re-emerged. There was the usual mix of show & massed dances, & Cliff allowed himself to be persuaded to insert a massed Banbury Bill

All too soon, we had eaten lunch, Cliff & I were discussing his page, & it was time to go. What might have been a disaster, given the various incidents & misfortunes along the way, had turned out to be a very enjoyable weekend. Of course the scenery is always there, & the



*Knockerdown: St Albans*

into the repertory: Steve the Cook had identified a prime candidate for hoisting The lady protested, but when her husband took her glass she gave in. It was a good clean hoist, so we were able to do the "Sunday Night at the Palladium" rotation before returning her to terra firma.

weather brightened conveniently for the whole weekend, but it was obvious that our hosts had done an awful lot of hard work. I would like to thank them all for their part in ensuring that this meeting would be a weekend worth remembering

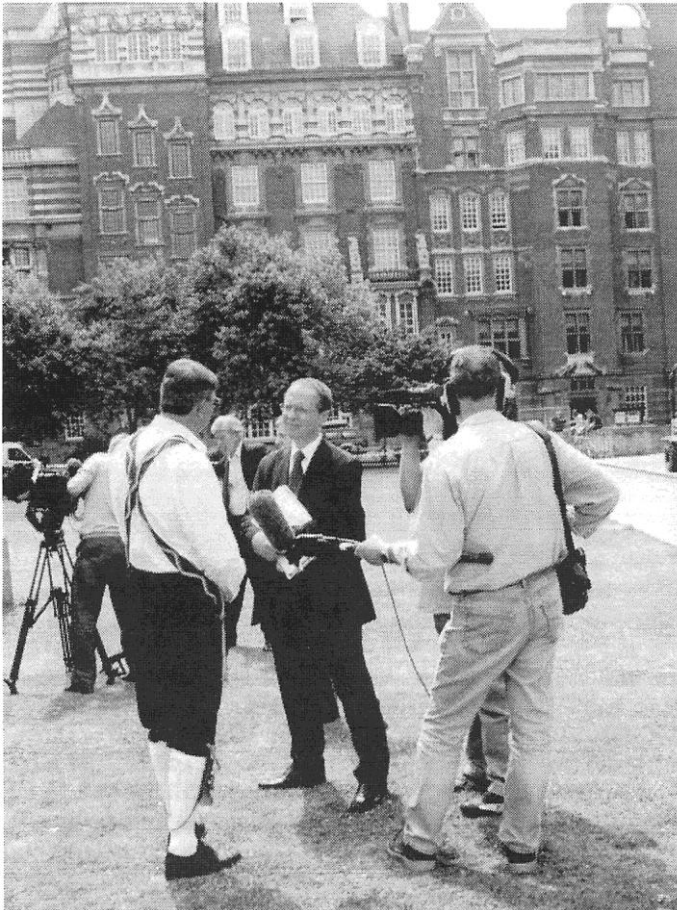
*Eddie Dunmore.*

# Public Entertainment: Lunch on the Terrace



Cliff had phoned me to ask if I was available for a show at the Houses of Parliament: on the Green, where all the important people are interviewed for TV. It was scheduled for Monday 16th June, the day after we got back from Derbyshire. As Steve the Cook is self-employed, & largely in command of his own schedules, I checked his availability as well. The map showed a short walk from Victoria to the corner of Great Peter Street & Millbank, but the warren of streets & turning right one street early meant that this South London bloke walked round a circle before sorting himself out.

*Lovely movers!*



*Westminster: Interview*



*'I stick dance: Constant Billy*

Changing facilities were furnished in the usual facilities of the building where all the shadow Ministers have their offices. This was courtesy of the MP for Bridgwater, Ian Liddell-Grainger, who had been quietly dining in the pub that West Somerset chose to visit for a show. They got talking, & the rest, as they say, is history. We were a motley crew, being led by West Somerset (including Dudley), with representation from Dartington, East Surrey & North Wood. The management was also there, Cliff being supplemented by Past Squire Tim Sercombe, & the Morris Federation & Open Morris.

Once gathered & changed we shambled along to the Green to find some television crews & photographers waiting for us. The dancing pitch was carefully prepared with a carpet of the Green Paper for the Public Entertainment legislation. I was persuaded by one of the photographers to stamp on several of these documents (I was wearing my dancing boots). Then we somehow got ourselves into dancing mode & didn't make too many mistakes, given that it

was a scratch side from at least four teams.

Some of the more exalted members of our party were interviewed by reporters for the local Regional News programs (nothing turned up on National or London News: obviously it wasn't important enough). Before we could leave, we did collect up the copies of the Green Paper, so that we showed ourselves to be responsible environmentalists.

The party was then led into the Houses of Parliament, causing no little excitement at the security check (Lionel's Beast had great difficulty going through the scanner!). We had taken the precaution of removing our bells, but even though I went through the metal detector without provoking any alarms, I was still patted down intimately by the officer on duty.

We had gathered on the Terrace for drinks (courtesy of Mr Liddell-Grainger) & photographs, when a female assaulted me. She turned out to be Ian Hamilton's (late, of Ravensbourne) oldest daughter Jenny, whom I had



*Dancing on the Green (Paper)*

last met at her father's funeral. She was up from Portsmouth for the day to see her MP & the coincidence was noteworthy enough for this lady to insist on meeting me & having my photograph taken with Jenny.

On returning, our host insisted on buying us lunch & presenting each of us with a House of Commons mug as a souvenir of the occasion. While we were sat there, several other politicians were introduced & chatted to. Tim Sercombe waylaid

Claire Short, who was obviously on an important mission as she had very little time to stop & chat. Tony Benn, looking ever so well now that he's retired stopped by for a chat as well.

Had there been more time, I'm sure that we could have earned some serious cash: the queue for entry was already large & growing, but we all had trains to catch. Cliff, Beryl & I caught the Brighton semi-fast (supposedly direct to East Croydon). Whether or not the exercise produces any result is a matter of deep scepticism, but at least we tried. I hope you've all written to your MP: if enough of us do, it might just result in some amelioration of the more lunatic restrictions.

*Eddie Dunmore.*

The group shot shown here was taken on Past Squire Tim Sercombe's camera. All the others (including the Page One photo) are my responsibility.



*Here we all are: the bloke in fancy dress is the MP*



# Colin Fleming (1938 - 2003)

I first met Colin (or rather, he met me) in the mid nineteen-fifties, soon after the formation, in 1953, of the Westminster Morris Men. I was playing, in Chelmsford, for a Playford dance and during the interval Colin invited me to be musician to Westminster Morris and I learnt my trade during a week dancing across the Cotswolds, with team and music practices each morning in Inn yards, terminating in a week at the EFDSS festival at Stratford on Avon. I shall always be grateful to Colin for bringing me into the Morris

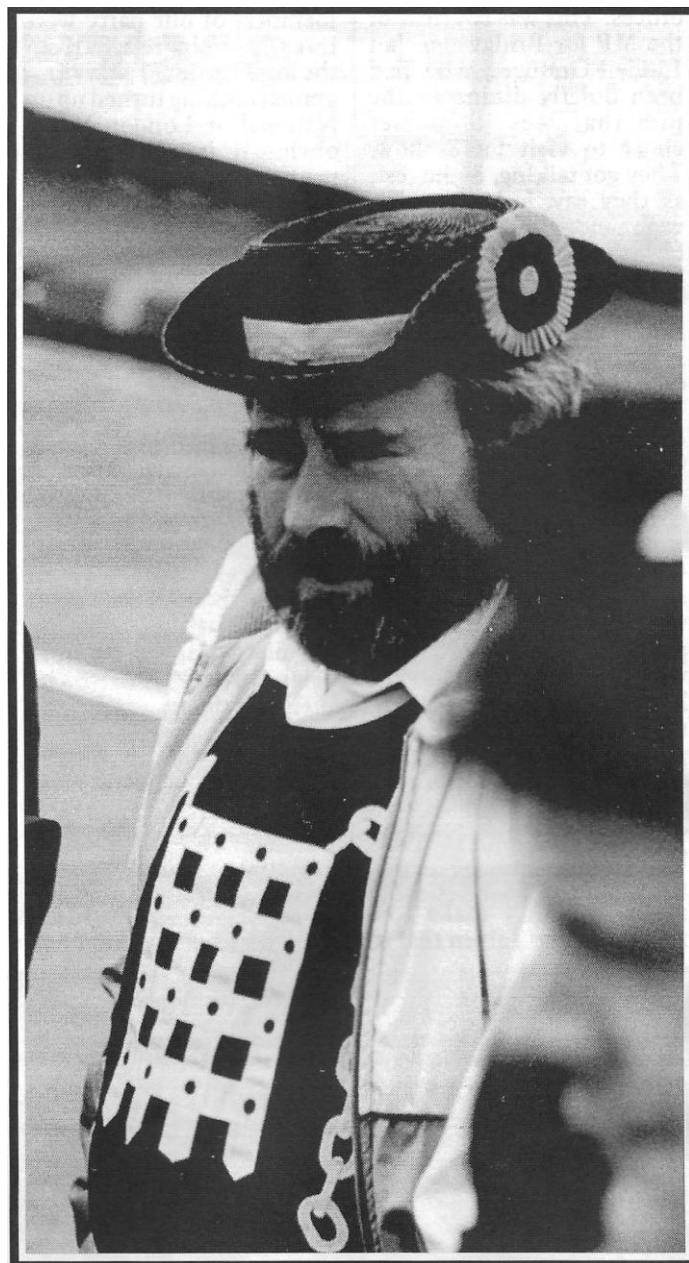
Colin's contribution to the development of the team over the years was both important and distinctive. He served the team, at various times, as Squire, Bagman and latterly as Foreman. In this role he maintained meticulous standards of performance with a real sense of handing on a tradition to the next generation. He was important in the period

when Westminster were studying the Longborough tradition, and played a significant role in devising new dances, albeit a group activity, in that traditional style.

But in some ways I believe Colin's main contribution to the Westminster performance lay in his sense of street theatre. He had an almost surreal way of involving the audience in our dancing, telling them how we found the Unicorn in the depths of Epping Forest, and how we 'discovered' the dance notation and the music of Yardley's Princess Royal in the rafters of a roof in Thaxted. And the public were delighted. To whip the public into continued interest he would, at the end of the dance ask them, Did you enjoy that? - and would not start the next dance until he had received the appropriate reply. He had that real sense of magic in the Morris. The Morris needs an audience and Cohn certainly made



*Cohn dancing with Westminster at the 1998 Exeter Ring Meeting*



*Cohn at the 1995 Thaxted Meeting*

them an important part of the show.

Both Colin, and the team, were honoured when he was elected Squire of the Morris Ring for the period 1972-74. During those two years he travelled many miles in attending Ring Meetings and club Ales. This period brought Westminster many new friends.

Westminster has some very special connections with other

teams, notably Thaxted, Headington and Moulton in Northamptonshire where Colin met Anne at a weekend festival.

This year we celebrate our 50th anniversary and it is particularly poignant that Colin will not be there. He leaves an enormous gap in the morris and we shall miss him more than mere words can say.

*Denis Smith*

# Castaways on a Devon Island To Celebrate May Day Morning



*The Sea Tractor*

Planning for the Dartington 2003 May Day Dawn started last year, while we were dancing at the Pilchard Inn on Burgh Island. We had such a good time during our night out at this particular pub that it was suggested that this might be the place to dance in the May next year. The landlady was propositioned & warmed to the idea. We would have to be on the Island the night before, so that we could be up in good time to see the sun rise (on an English May Morning?). So 15

Dartington Morris Men caught the sea tractor out to Burgh Island at 1900 on the 30th of April, to prepare for the 5 am call to dance on May Morning. The crossing to the island was a little rough, as the tide was on the turn, but we all arrived with dry feet. We were not disappointed with our evening out in the pub, which started with a short display for the few hardy souls that came to watch us.

Burgh Island, is a small Island just off the South Devon coast,

opposite Bigbury Bay. To get to the Island you cross the causeway by "sea tractor", a FWD vehicle on stilts, which runs at high tide from Bigbury Bay to the Pilchard Inn on the Island. The Island is best known for its 30's Art Deco hotel, made popular by the likes of Agatha Christie, and Noel Coward.

After our evening in the Pil-

cluded our supporters, the local press, & South Hams Radio. After we had all assembled, we made our way to the top of the island to start the time-honoured ritual of dancing in the May Morning in the teeth of a gale. We danced until our hands and feet were quite cold, & then had to hang around for a photo call, which the Western Morning News wanted for the follow-



*Dancing 'tup the Sun*

chard, we thought we try the Hotel for a good night's rest in a room with on suite facilities, a sea view, and room service. They provided us with accommodation with a sea view: two large tents, & the workshop/storeroom used by the caretaker, so we made the best of it and bedded down for the night.

The alarm clocks went off far too soon, & bleary-eyed men made their way back to the Pilchard Inn for early morning coffee, and there we awaited the arrival of those lightweight members who could not do without a night in their own beds. The landlady had arranged for the sea tractor to go over to Bigbury Bay to pick up the May Morn visitors, who in-

ing morning's edition. Then it was back to the pub, where they had laid on a cooked breakfast for the dancers — most welcome!

By the time we were ready to return to the mainland, the tide was at its height (well just on the way out). We boarded the sea tractor, full of breakfast and the thought of a hot bath when we got home, but at the half way point we were hit by a series of big waves, & we had to endure wet feet for the drive back to our respective homes.

*Tim Sercombe*

*Editor's Note: Devotees of Agatha Christie's "Hercule Poirot" may remember that Burgh Island (& tractor) was used for a TV adaptation of one of the stories*



*The Top of Burgh Island, with Posers*

# A Trip to Thaxted

## aka A Grand Day Out (-"Cracking cheese, Gromit!"

### Prelude

Digital cameras have a lot to answer for. Especially those little ones that even a piano accordion player can slip into his pocket for a trip to sunny Thaxted without thinking "Oh no! Not another item of baggage to carry around all day." And of course they are virtually free to use. No film to buy; no developing to pay for unless you really want to.

So what is their down-side? Perhaps it depends on circumstances. Maybe if the Ring Bagman remains healthy and does his usual excellent reportage of a Ring Meeting, you're okay. Maybe you're also okay if you don't rashly advise readers of the Morris Dancing Discussion List that you've put some photos of Thaxted on your website. (Well, some of those poor dears have never been to Thaxted - don't know what an attractive place it is; what a great day out it can be; how exhilarating it is to experience those displays in front of The

Guildhall, with massive, enthusiastic audiences.)

But if the above circumstances do prevail - and perhaps if Jupiter is in conjunction with Mars, or something - then someone like me is apt to receive an email from the Editor asking if they can make a contribution to the next Morris Circular on the subject of Thaxted 2003. "But look, Eddie," I said, "St Albans Morris Men were there as Day Boys only on the Saturday. And I was simply taking photos of A Grand Day Out, not with a view to their becoming a published record of The Meeting, What's more, a layer of alcoholic amnesia somewhat obscures the events of the day. How could I possibly do justice to the weekend?" "Look, JOHN," he said, "there's a drink in it for you..." So what could I do? You see it's as I say - these little digital cameras have a lot to answer for.

### Passacaglia

8am isn't an early start for a day out. In truth, it's only just early enough if you need to

fill your car with men and drive from St Albans to Thaxted in time to get on that coach for the 9.30 - "prompt" - departure. So with minutes to spare, the driver was throwing the car round those corners on the winding B184 (well, the B1051 is even more twisty), and child-like cries from the passengers of "Are we nearly there, yet?" and "Can we see the sea?" were replaced by the competition "Who will be first to spot the spire of Thaxted Church?" (Modesty forbids...)

Murphy's Law dictated that our coach started from the far side of Thaxted, so we were able to play the game of "What morris kit is that?" as we navigated our way to it through the streets and amongst the morris men who were streaming to their respective meeting points. By chance, our bus had not yet departed when we arrived: so that was our first surprise. This was closely followed by another - car parking was not only close by but FREE! The latter was confirmed by a grinning local

youth, with the explanation "Well, it's only a little village, isn't it!" A little village with a big heart, if you ask me, and a tremendous morris tradition which it has sustained for nearly a century.

Okay. We're now on the coach. We've counted ourselves to make sure we've arrived, and we've unscrewed our legs and stuffed them in our pockets. (Clearly, this coach spends most of its life transporting school-children with much shorter legs than ours!) That's enough scene-setting. I think there's just enough room to fit in some description of the morris events of the day as well.

### Fugue

We were on Tour D, which visited some lovely dancing spots in Essex/Cambridgeshire villages - all connected by roads resembling the B184. (How do these coach drivers manage?!?) We had excellent company. First (in alphabetical order) were Colchester Morris Men, with whom we have historic connections but little recent contact. Next were Dolphin Morris Men from Nottingham. (We must get along to "the Gate to Southwell" next year!). Finally, there was Silurian Border Morris, who hosted such a splendid Ring Meeting last July. We couldn't wish for a better or friendlier bunch of dancers, drinkers and travelling companions.

Our first stop, at The Crown, Little Walden, didn't attract a large audience. Well, what do you expect at 10.00 a.m.? But the pub was open and serving, we had a dancing spot largely unaffected by traffic, and we could loosen up in all vital respects at the start of the dancing day. (Photo left, featuring Silurian)





have it in my picture. These digital cameras have a lot to answer for! (Photo left: S.A.M.M.)



The Rose & Crown at Ashdon is situated on a T-junction which proved to be a little busier than the previous venues. Eventually the consensus was to block the main road. Watching morris men ensured that they did not stray too far from the beer pumps, and a small but agreeable audience positioned themselves opposite so as to get the occasional glimpse of the dancing through the passing traffic. (Photo below left: Dolphin Morris Men)

I don't have any photos from our stand at The Cock, Castle Camps. It's not that I have any-

The photograph shows Colchester MM leaping around with great vigour — something which was to be made more difficult by the substantial hot meal and quantities of ale which we put away at this spot. As an accordionist myself, I'd like to express a note (Ho! Ho!) of appreciation of the distinctive playing style of the Colchester musicians, which gave me a new slant on old tunes. One day, perhaps, I'll experience them as their alter ego — The Barnacles. (Photo centre right: Colchester Morris Men)

A fine singing session was had by some in the bar after lunch, whilst other more energetic



Then it was on to Hadstock. The King's Head is a short walk from their picturesque village green, and we had no problem deciding the order in which to visit those! We're not sure whether the bunting on the green had been put up specially to welcome us, but it certainly added to the festive atmosphere. As the photograph shows, we had an interested audience who were able to relax as we took turns to exert ourselves for their pleasure. What the photo doesn't show is how well St Albans men were dancing. This was primarily due to the round of chocolate muffins that our Bagman (aka Gunga Din) had just surprised us with. Where he got them from, we shall never know

Incidentally, if you're interested in buying a nice house in this location, the one in the back-

ground was for sale. The "for sale" sign has been manually excised because I preferred not to



thing against villages in Cambridgeshire, nor that there is anything to conceal. I just don't have any. I think there was perhaps no vantage point. We danced in an area — in front of the pub and off the road - which was small but perfectly formed, and the audience lined the pavement to cheer us on.

Our lunchtime/early afternoon spot was at Three Horseshoes, Helions Bumpstead. (Where do they get these names from? — I mean to say! "Three Horseshoes". How many three-legged horses have you seen?) Men were in fine form by this time, Silurian had stripped down to their tattered shirts, and the stage management of appearance of teams on the dancing site was honed to imperfection.

men continued their dancing in the rear garden of the pub. The photo shows St Albans' Sandy Glover in full voice, whilst some members of Silurian look on. Are they impressed? Amused? Disgusted? Who can tell? Blackface is a superb camouflage of facial expressions!

After lunch, things became a bit of a blur. Can it really be that the next thing was tea? I certainly remember having a nice cup of tea and some cake and biscuits — maybe even a little sandwich? — in the school hall. Served by friendly ladies — but sticklers for collecting our meal tickets. (Ripley MM, please note!)

Then we set out to the start point of the procession to the 6



p.m. massed show in Town Street. It was a beautiful evening, and the crowd was — as I said at the start of this piece — massive and enthusiastic. The photograph looking north (*below left*) gives an impression of how many people turned out to watch. Is it like this every year, or only on a really nice sunny day? I thought this display went very well, really! Certainly the audience seemed to enjoy it, and the various teams gave a good account of themselves. I would have preferred not to fluff the start of the tune for St Albans' show dance, but one can't expect perfection on a day out!

No report of the day would be complete without a note of appreciation and thanks to the Thaxted Men for their hospitality and organisational skills; and here they are (*right*), pictured late in the day with not a hint of fatigue or of the burden of their administrative responsibilities! Mind you, they are standing still at this point.

The Feast was held in the same school hall as tea, and I can report that it was tasty, well served and convivial. If you want details of the menu, the beer, the speeches, and the songs and who sang them, you'll need to ask someone else! Maybe if I'd known I would be writing this, I would have made notes. I do recall that the speeches — including one by a certain black-faced

Mayor of Ledbury bearing a striking resemblance to Keith Francis — were admirably short, entertaining and to the point.

Squire Cliff Marchant welcomed two American visitors — the legendary Roger Cartwright of Juggler Meadow (celebrating his 80th birthday, would you believe, and looking at least 20

1968-9 on the first ever fully-formed American team — the Village Morris Men, NY

After the feast, we returned to the Guildhall area for continuation of the massed show. The size of crowd had held up, the weather continued to be balmy, and the remaining sides performed their show dances with

This was only my second visit to Thaxted, and it was nice to know that both the enjoyment of the day and also the atmosphere — especially of that closing Abbots Bromley dance — were substantially the same as 11 years ago. Yes, over-flying aircraft were more noticeable this year (but somehow — was it by magic or by arrangement? —



years younger), and Ken Kearns of Binghamton Morris Men. I'm grateful to John Dexter, Bouwerie Boys NY, for helping me out with the latter name, as well as for an interesting potted history of the growth of morns in the USA fifty years ago. John was a team-mate of Roger's in

scarcely a sign of the effects of the fulsome feast.

The climax of the evening was, of course, the atmospheric performance by Thaxted MM of the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance. I marvel at how quiet the large crowd becomes — young and old alike — for this ritualistic event. Spine-tingling, to say the least, to hear the beautiful sound of the lone fiddle, punctuated by the occasional metallic "ting", and see the silent dancers moving in their mysterious serpentine manner. No photograph of this, of course. Even if I could have taken one in the dark, somehow I would not have wished to do so.

## Sortie

St Albans MM left before the final dancing session in front of the Guildhall, but it was good to hear the strains of Sir Sydney Smith's March from Michael Blandford, as we were leaving. It looked set for a further hour or so of fun!

none flew over once the dance started). Yes, there was a point where a young lad in the crowd got a mobile phone call at a critically quiet moment. (He couldn't bring himself to turn the thing off, but at least he hurried away to a less public place so as to minimise the disruption!) But overall, modern intrusions were few, and the event still seems to command respect from the whole local community.

I understand that Westminster Morris Men have attended Thaxted every year for — how long was it — 40 years? What an extraordinary record of loyalty and devotion! I don't think I would have either the stamina or the inclination to do that, but I think I will try to go back in ten years time and check that it's still as good!

*JOHN of St Albans*

PS. Colour versions of the photos used in this article can be seen on our website.



# The Ridgewell Files

Poste d	Publication	Issue Date	Title	Author	Synopsis
10.iv	Evening Chronicle (Newcastle)	2.i	Madcap Stunts ...	Rebecca Baxter	Monkseaton performance
11.iv	Herts & Essex Observer	2.i	Stort Folk Wassail	anon.	Stort Folk Wassailers
12.iv	St. Albans & Harpenden Observer	2.i	Mummers Boy	Pete Stevens (photo)	St Albans Muumers
18.iv	South London Press	7.i	Trunk & disorderly	Robert Dex	Bankside Mummers & Green Man
21.iv	Huddersfield Daily Examiner	8.i	Jubilee time for morris men	anon.	White Rose MM
23.iv	Hens & Essex Observer	9.i	Crowds join in wassail ...	anon.	Friends of Rivers Orchard
25.iv	Whitley Bay News Guardian	9.i	Brand new beat for women	anon.	Monkseaton's mixed out- ing
26.iv	Cambridge Evening News	14.i	Village's ploughmen ...	Duncan Lamont (photo)	CMM & Balsham Ploughmen
29.iv	Huntingdon & St Ives Evening News	14.i	Village celebrates ...	anon.	Unnamed molly dancers
30.iv	Herts & Essex Observer	16.i	In time ...	anon.	High Easter mollies
1.v	The Comet (Stevenage)	16.i	Could morris men be threatened...	anon.	Letchworth MM
2.v	Warminster Journal	17.i	Ploughing a Storton success	anon.	White Horse MM
7.v	Whittlesey Times	17.i	The bears	Lisa Clevedon	Pig Dyke, Gog Magog, & Sallyport dancers
8.v	The Times	18.i	Lucy Pinney column	Lucy Pinney	White Horse MM
9.v	The Times	25.i	Lucy Pinney column	Lucy Pinney	Apple wassailing
12.v	Cornish Guardian (from Trigg MM)	13.ii	Sorry, but the beer's run out	Ben Glass (!)	Trigg at a Real Ale fest
13.v	SAGA Magazin (from various sources)	May	Lead me to the maypole	Libby Purves	In praise of folk activity in general, & morris specifically
15.v	Yorkshire Post	13.i	Traditional blessing	anon.	Claro Sword & Morris
16.v	Whitby Gazette	31.i	Top of the Stots	Sheila Witton	Goathland Plough Stots performance
19.v	The Times	1.ii	Our affection for Maypoles	Jonathan Meades	The reason for inner city decay
20.v	The Guardian	8, 11.ii	Correspondence re PEL	"Attila the Stockbroker" & Jenny Howard	Reactions to the pro- posed legislation
22.v	Chichester Observer	13.iii	Boxgrove Fair revival ...	anon.	Martlet's performance
27.v	The Observer	16.iii	It's a load of old ballads ...	Sue Arnold	Radio broadcast of folksong
30.v	This England	Spring	A Country Cameo	Peter Worsley	Phot of unnamed side at Weston-sub-Edge
31.v	Essex Life & Countryside	April	Thaxted, a modern ...	Robert Hallman	Thaxted
3.vi	Evening Standard	10.iv	Bach with a bite	Fiona Maddocks	Interview with John Eliot Gardiner



Poste d	Publication	Issue Date	Title	Author	Synopsis
5.vi	Dunmow Times	3.iv	Kate's Century	anon	Obituary for Thaxted's Kate Butters
7.vi	The Guardian	22.iv	Masters of the Dance	Matthew Engels	Folk dance, etc.
9.vi	Radcliffe Times	3.iv	Coconutters' Easter date	anon.	Britannia Coco-Nutters
12.vi	Todmorden News	25.iv	Tradition bursts into ...	Francesca Turner	Pace Egg Play performances
13.vi	Herts Mercury	25.iv	St George's Day ...	anon.	Radio broadcast from pub, with dance & song
14.vi	The Independent	26.iv	The knee bells toll ...	Paul Kelbie	Banchory's recruitment problems

## Editorial

As you will have seen from the contents of this edition, I've been out & about quite a lot since publishing Circular 43. May 1st was a new departure to investigate what it was that a Jack-in-the Green actually did. Of course I've got Roy Judge's book, but I was curious to see how an essentially 18th-19th Century custom had transmuted to the 21st Century. Certainly the children in the Primary School were fascinated by this interruption to a quiet lunch hour, & the pubs were glad of the extra business.

I hope that the parochialism inherent in the inclusion of a report on North Wood's Day of Dance is excusable. We were delighted to welcome the Squire &

his team to our day to join our regular guests, Rutland & Green Oak, for a fairly relaxed day out. We think the Squire enjoyed himself, although he left extremely early on Sunday, missing the best weather of the weekend & a leisurely display at the 'White Bear.

My visit to Bampton & Headington came after a two-year blank. The crowds at Bampton were lighter than they have been, but the numbers seemed to be swelling when I left at 2 pm to go to Headington. The Quarry were as precise & good to watch as ever, as were Westminster

The Ripley was a fine example of difficulties overcome, & a po-

tential disaster averted. The designated centre is deep in the throes of a major rebuild, with intermittent electrical power & water supply. Despite all these difficulties, residents were able to enjoy hot showers, & the standard of cooking could not be faulted. Through all this, the Ripley team kept its cool & sense of humour, & are to be sincerely congratulated. It was nice to meet Past Bagman Chas Arnold again (see if you can identify him in the photo on page 2).

The Monday (16.vi) outing to College Green was enjoyable, but caused not a ripple, so far as I could discern, on the metropolitan scene. This despite the fact the the PEL legislation had a reading on that afternoon. I

hope that the West Somerset dancers who made the trek to London got more in their part t of the world. Still, I've got my House of Commons mug to remind me of the day.

Tihs is the first issue produced with new hardware & software since the Edgecombe Tragedy. I switched off my (six year-old, 200 MHz) system one night & it apparently expired in its sleep. This new system is over ten times faster, with twice the memory, & about twelve times more storage. The software is new too: version 10 of Ventura Publisher, working with Windows 2000. Very whizzy!

Although publication of Circular 45 is not due until October, can I ask for copy to be sent to me for mid-August, please. It is possible that I may be otherwise engaged for most of September, & I would like most of the type-setting to be done as early as possible.

Enjoy your summer: may your bags be full to overflowing. Morris on!

*Eddie Dunmore*

### Photo Credits

Pages 1 — 8, 13 — 17 (except the group shot), 18, & 24: Eddie Dunmore.

Page 9: May Littleton

Page 17 group shot & page 19:

Past Squire Tim Sercombe

Pages 20 — 22, & this page:

John Price of St Albans

