

March 2005

No 49

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# THE MORRIS RING Circular

## Boxing Day 2004: Definitely Monday 27th

### St. Stephen's Day unchanged at 26th

90% of clubs danced on Sunday

By F Christmas

### Controversy reigns

over what day actually was Boxing Day in 2004. We commonly associate the day after Christmas day with Boxing Day and it is also St. Stephen's Day. After I received Ivor Alsop's article about Boxing Day (see page 16) the editor contacted all member clubs (via email) asking if and when you danced on Boxing Day and if so, what day/date did you dance in 2004.

Of the 78 replies 42% did not dance on any day. Of the remaining 58%, only 4 - East Surrey, Headington, Richmond on Swale and Silurian - danced on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Colchester said they normally dance on Boxing Day but danced on 26<sup>th</sup> in 2004 and advised 'even the Radio Times got it wrong.' East Surrey commented that it confused everyone, so would dance on 26<sup>th</sup> next



East Surrey Morris Men dancing on the 27<sup>th</sup> Photo Peter Brunton

time it's a Sunday. Richmond commented 'we danced on Boxing Day, well almost, we actually danced out on Holiday Monday 27/12/04'. So, if 26<sup>th</sup> is a Sunday, then Boxing Day is 27<sup>th</sup>. Allegedly.

Of the 41 clubs that danced on the 26<sup>th</sup> many said it was 'the proper' Boxing Day, and also 'the day after Christmas Day is Boxing Day, and we always dance on it no matter what day it is.'

Who is right? The editor continues: At Winchester we dance on Boxing Day (fairly recent occurrence) and have always danced on 26<sup>th</sup>. Probably this year was the first time for us that Boxing Day had fallen on a Sunday.

Ivor: you have opened a can of worms!

I believe the general public think Boxing Day is always the day after Christmas day, on whatever the day of the week it falls, and whatever the alternatives are given for bank holidays. It doesn't make it right but it's a living tradition and most of you dance on St. Stephen's Day. Perhaps we should advertise it as such, but only when the 26<sup>th</sup> falls on a Sunday!

The next time it happens is 2010. Thank you to all who responded and for the photos. Following the confusion Barry Care is to write to the appropriate Civil Service Department to set out the correct interpretation.



Peterborough dancing on the 26<sup>th</sup>

Photo Mike Stevens

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# The Squire

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Dear All

**When you read** this, Spring will be well on its way and I'm sure most clubs will be finalising their plans for 2005 and I wish you all well in your forthcoming ventures.

As many of you will know we held a minute's silence at the start of business at the ARM in Harthill in memory of Walter Abson. Walter was the first Bagman of the Morris Ring and was really our final physical link with the founder members of our organisation. A separate obituary dedicated to Walter is included in this Circular. Can I thank John Jenner for his diligence in keeping everyone posted via the Bagman and for his organisation of the dancing at Walter's funeral. I know his family were very grateful for the fact that the Morris was an integral part of the day and that so many men travelled such long distances to be with them.

Subsequently the sad passing of Roy Yarnell, Past Squire, has been a blow to so many of us. Janet and his family have been carrying a heavy burden over the last few months and I'm sure that you will keep them in your thoughts during the days to come. I had known Roy for many years but we became very good friends during his Squireship and subsequently



**Bob Cross at the ARM**

Photo H Stevenson

spent much time together. He greatly encouraged me to stand as Squire and his advice, good humour and wisdom has been so helpful to me, and will be sadly missed. I know that Roy will not only leave an aching void at Jockey but also with the numerous other clubs he was deeply involved with and an integral part of.

At the ARM Charlie Corcoran (Leicester Morris Men) was installed as the incoming Bagman of the Ring. I welcome Charlie on your behalf and I'm sure that you will find him an efficient administrator. Those of you who know Charlie will agree with this and for those of you who have not met Charlie you will soon find this to be true. The new Bagman will dance in at the Thaxted Ring Meeting this year and John

Frearson will officially dance out. I wish to record my thanks and admiration for the way that John has represented the Morris Ring during the last seven years. He has been a tower of strength for Past Squires as well as myself and I salute him on your behalf. There will be a period of "hand over" from John to Charlie to make a smooth run in so if you do find some items duplicated this is the reason why.

Regarding Ring Meetings if you have not booked in for one there are places available at some so please contact the Morris Ring Bagman..

One of the high points in the visits I have made since becoming Squire was to be invited to Bampton to celebrate Sonny Townsend's "80 years in the Morris." Barry Care and the Bampton men organised a tribute evening which was very warm and welcoming. On behalf of the Ring I was privileged to present Sonny with an engraved tankard (The Clown's Pot) which he very much appreciated. Unfortunately as Sonny was leaving the hall he fell and sustained a broken hip. This has been operated on and I am advised that Sonny is on the mend. I am sure you all wish him well. I am looking forward to visiting Bampton for the Whitsun May Bank holiday dancing and I thank

them especially Lawrence and Nick for their invitation.

One of the stalwarts of our organisation, Eddie Dunmore, has over a period of nearly twenty years taken the publications, The Morris Dancer and The Circular and brought them into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He has been a tower of strength over this time and even though he is standing down as Editor he will be helping and supporting both Harry and Sean for the foreseeable future. I have known Eddie for all of these years and more and would like to give most grateful thanks to him for all his hard work, and to Margaret for putting up with the written minutiae of the Morris Ring during this time. Eddie has many irons in the fire that he would like to give time to and I know that you will agree with me — "an excellent job done".

2005 is going to be a very busy year with 5 Ring Meetings and so many events to attend. My diary is full to bursting but please don't let that put you off because if you are holding an event I am always very glad to hear of it even if I find I can't attend.

Bob Cross  
The Squire

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## The New Bagman

**Charlie Corcoran** was elected unopposed at the recent ARM.

Charlie first started dancing in 1962 at school, in Weston-super-Mare. He joined Mendip Morris Men soon after.

Having qualified

as a teacher, Charlie moved to Leicester, and eventually joined Leicester Morris Men. He has been their bagman since 1982, although took a sabbatical for two years while he was Leicester Morris Men's Squire.

Charlie is a member

## Charlie Corcoran at the ARM

Photo H Stevenson

of the Fools and Animals Union and an occasional fiddler.

I am sure you all join me in wishing Charlie and his family well in this new very rewarding task as Bagman of the Ring. I am sure Charlie will bring his own style to the job and be supported by all.



# Inducement To Travel From The West to the East

SOMERSET

EUROPE

9th-14th September 2004

By Dudley Binding

**The Question** was asked "Shall we go and dance in the Czech Republic?" Having been invited, it seemed like a good idea. Help with organisation for the visit was available from the Sedgemoor District Council via Bridgwater International and the chance to travel once more abroad to meet people from another country and to sample good beer at reasonable prices put the decision to go beyond doubt. There was a great deal of organising necessary on our Club's part. In this context I use the word "our" very loosely in that all I had to do was countersign a few Club cheques and for my Wife and I to appear at Bristol Airport at the appointed time clutching my bells and baldrick plus a few other items. Malcolm Appleton organized the flights, John Ley liaised with the Sedgemoor District Council and Joe Raucki (Boss Man) generally speaking kept the Morris Men plus sundry wives in order for the duration of the visitation.

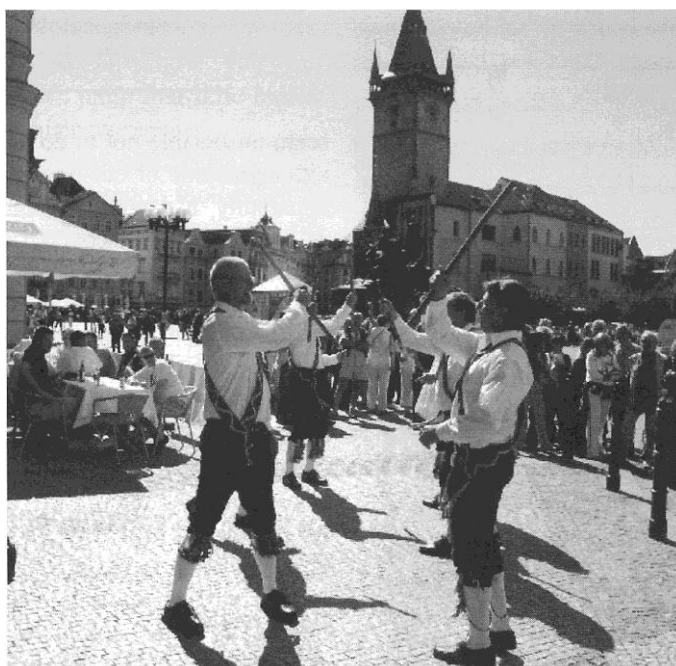
My allocated task was to write this report and to endeavour to make the report mildly interesting to any potential reader on the basis that reports never actually live up to actually participating. It is a bit like the difference between participating in sex and writing about it.

The final group consisted of sixteen dancers/musicians, one retired founder member of the club and his wife plus assorted wives. (The wife of the founder member was the lady responsible for introducing Bob Cross to morris dancing). At the last minute Andy Wilson was prevented from travelling after losing a

fight with a bag of compost reserved for another visit! but there lies another story.

Flying from Bristol Airport (with the aid of a plane, otherwise your arms get tired)

Back to the Hostel to prepare ourselves for our first dancing session of the visit. We travelled to Prague's Barancnicka



*Old Town Square, Prague*

Photo Malcolm Appleton

it took less than two hours airtime to reach Prague where we were to spend two nights in a Hostel before travelling on to Bridgwater's Twin Town: Uherske Hradiste - and when you next see me, please do not ask me to pronounce "Uherske Hradiste" as I already have enough trouble with my teeth, and the "growl" in the back of the throat which is apparently necessary to pronounce the town's name correctly will give any decent whisky drinker a sore throat. Three mini-buses duly transported us from Prague Airport to U.Melounu Hostel - at rather breakneck speed I thought. After settling in at the Hostel (a bed each and one to spare) we set off on foot for a guided tour of the City of Prague. What a magnificent City. Please note that the Guided tour took us close to, but not actually to the red light district - this attraction is

was tremendous as was the beer. The Czech Band were treated almost as Gods, and the atmosphere generated could only be described as "electric", as was the Czech Band's amplification, and my only reservation was concerning their amplification, which was to my delicate ears a little on the loud side.

The next day was a full day in Prague, where we had further opportunities to explore this very beautiful city and to ride on the trams. (We do not seem to have many trams in Watchet!). Lunchtime, we assembled outside (and some of us, inside) Caffrey's Irish Bar situated in Prague's Old Town Square. Two dancing sessions followed with a suitable "tea" break in between. Again the crowds were enthusiastic, including the Stag Party which was anxious to join in. The weather continued to be excellent - a modest 26c. Free time to explore then back to the Hostel, before climbing on to Tram 22 which took us to Sumucka Vinarna (a wine bar) where we ate, danced and sang, alternating performances with a group of Gypsy musicians (although they did not appear to have any clothes pegs or lucky heather to sell). I have

Rychta (a sort of Pub Club). A joint performance with the Czech Folk Rock Band: Neocekauany Dychanek. Reg from our Club advises me that this Band is really famous in that part of the world and their music can be heard via the Internet, but presumably not via "[binding@tvtbox.net](mailto:binding@tvtbox.net)"! The reception we received



*Squire, Joe Raucki, presenting gifts to Mayor  
of Modra*

Photo Malcolm Appleton



to report that some alcohol was consumed. The Wine Bar was notable for the two most miserable waiters I believe that I have ever encountered. On the return journey to the Hostel we succeeded in alighting from Tram 22 at the wrong Tram stop, which left 16 morris men and musicians in full gear plus wives etc., at midnight attracting quite a few curious glances. A police car drove by us very very slowly, but thought it better not to get involved. Eventually we found ourselves back at the Hostel, but by this time, the neighbouring bar around

lasted all afternoon and early evening visiting numerous wine producers where each producer was presented with a Certificate of Excellence by the Mayor, and then the wine was sampled. Dancing and singing followed each presentation involving local folk group, local band, ourselves and half the village, and as the walking tour visited over ten wine producers (I lost count as to how many) a jolly time was had by all. Eventually we ended up in the village park/play area for the evening dance (in the open) where food was served



*In Uherske Hradiste*

Photo Malcolm Appleton

the corner from the Hostel had closed for the night.

The next morning, all on the coach for the journey to Uherske Hradiste and our three night stay at the Hotel Morava where we were joined by our Guide for the rest of our visit. Very little time to settle in, before it was all back on the Coach to travel to the nearby village of Modra for the village wine festival, which to me was the highlight of the visit and nothing to do with the fact a few of us have been known to consume a little wine from time to time. At Modra, the weather continued to be wonderful, the villagers very welcoming and, yes there was unlimited supplies of wine. On arrival we took wine with the Mayor and the local Priest in the Church before setting off on a walking tour around the Village. This

to us, as were further "liquid" refreshments. More singing and dancing. Gifts were exchanged with the Mayor. I ended up dancing with the Mayor's young wife. A good choice it seemed compared with Robin, whose partner from the village proved to be a well "oiled" strong buxom wench who caused Robin all sorts of problems with regard to steering her in the right direction whilst dancing the Cumberland Square Eight. Sadly all good evenings must come to an end and it was back on the Coach to return to the Hotel, where exhaustion set in, evidenced by one morris man sat sleeping on the toilet for two hours!

Sunday morning and we danced at (guess what) a wine Festival for champion wines of the Region, being held in Uherske Hradiste and with some 300 vintages to sample, it did



*Arts Centre in Uherske Hradiste*

Photo Malcolm Appleton

seem unsociable not to do so, although some of our number apparently needed a change of beverage and discovered a bar selling beer in the cellar of the complex where the event was being held. After leaving the Wine Festival, a quick change and we were off in the coach for more sightseeing (Castle Buchlov - I think), followed by our evening meal where we organized our own mini folk concert. I have a vague recollection of moving on to the local Brandy at some time in the evening.

found shelter from the midday sun in a kerb side bar.

Then it was again on the coach for more sightseeing, this time to neighbouring Velehrad mainly to visit its famous Basilica, although of course you cannot visit a village without meeting the locals, and the best place to meet the locals is of course the Bar round the corner from the Church. Back to Bridgwater's Twin Town and for a farewell Dinner with singing inside the Restaurant and dancing outside joined by a couple of local musicians, and I have a picture of a viola (requested by Brian Heaton) to prove it.

Next day the homeward journey, coach to Prague Airport and aeroplane back to Bristol Airport. We had all enjoyed the visit and plan to return to the Czech Republic again at some time in the future.



*In Uherske Hradiste*

Photo Malcolm Appleton

# Sonny Townsend: 80 Years of Dancing with Bampton

The Traditional Bampton Morris Dancers held an evening of celebration on Saturday 19th February for



**Sonny Townsend with his new Tankard** Photo Hany Stevenson

Sonny Townsend to honour his outstanding contribution to Morris Dancing with this being his 80th year in the team.

In 1925 aged 11 Sonny first danced out at Whitsun and has been with the team ever since. Though the past years may



**Barry Care MBE, giving a short history of Bampton & Sonny**

Photo Harry Stevenson

have been turbulent Sonny has been a loyal figure of inspiration to many. Although his dancing days are now over Sonny still attends Bampton every year at Whitsun and has never forgotten his dancing days as the Clown. At Whitsun, he can often be heard shouting "Higher" when the team are dancing capers. As we all know you can always jump that little higher when encouraged.

The celebration took place in Bampton village hall and was attended by a full Bampton side along with some very special guests including our own Ring Squire Bob Cross.

The evening kicked off with a couple of six handers from Bampton starting with The Quaker followed by Constant Billy.

Then a few words from Barry Care who gave an excellent biography of Sonny with some moving reminders of the past characters that have been a part of Bampton Morris.

Bob Cross then presented a personally inscribed tankard to Sonny with a few kind words. Then there was a poignant moment when the Bampton Bagman, Nick Locke, played "Old Tom of Oxford", Sonny's favourite tune. What made it particularly moving was that it was played on a recently restored fiddle, which originally belonged to Jinkey Wells. The Fiddle was broken after an argument back in 1925. \*

Sonny is the last and only living person to have danced to the fiddle being played by its original owner.

"Old Tom" was then danced by Brian O'Rourke and Luke Fowler, who gave an excellent performance. It was then time



**Nick Locke playing 'Old Tom' on Jinky Wells' fiddle**

Photo Harry Stevenson

for the Bampton "Scratch Band" to strike up a tune for a few well loved country-dances.

As the evening came to an end Bampton Morris said their farewell to Sonny and all in the traditional manner

every one that worked very hard to make the evening such a success, and to say a final reminder of the many changes that have taken place in just one lifetime and yet the preservation of the tradition is still as important to us as ever before.



**Bampton dancing The Quaker**

Photo Harry Stevenson

by dancing "Bonnie Green Garters" leading the way out. It was a huge success and enjoyed by everyone. We had a local press photographer and a positive article in the Oxford Mail. We would like to thank

(I was delighted and privileged to be invited to this evening and thank Bampton and Barry for their hospitality and an unforgettable night. \*See final page for details about the broken fiddle. Ed.)



*Bampton: A 'Newly discovered Dance?': Watch this space*

Photo Harry Stevenson

## Thaxted 'Oldies'

*By Dave Brewster*

**In 2004 two** members of Thaxted Morris Men, John Bull and Colin Townsend celebrated 60 years of Club



*John Bull & Cohn Townsend*

Photo Dave Brewster

membership. Both joined when Fr. Jack Putterill was the Parish Priest and Alec Hunter was Squire of the Club.

Fr. Jack encouraged many

young men and boys from the Church to attend practices which were held in the Vicarage Barn on Sunday afternoons. The Club at this time had a very strong young membership, however many left school and took employment away from Thaxted eventually leaving, in the late 1940's, John and Cohn as the two youngest members.

Both were made life members after 50 years of dancing with the club.

Sadly, John's health has prevented him from dancing for several years, but he is still able to attend Morris functions including Morris Ales.

As the longest serving Squire of the club he is able to offer his advice on many aspects of dancing gained over the years.

Colin is still an active dancer and served as Squire for two years from 1998-2000.

Both men received Staffs of Office from the Club inscribed with their names and dates of service 1944-2004.

## Shakespeare Morris Men NewYear's Day 2005



*Shakespeare dancing at The Blue Boar, Temple Grafton* Photos SMM





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# Live Audience of 45,000

By John Harriyott

A 55-minute procession through the streets of Lewes to a lively enthusiastic audience. Yes, it is our annual treat for November 5th where we join in the Grand Procession of Lewes's famous Guy Fawkes bonfire societies celebrations.

Amid all the splendour of bonfire society costumes the Northwest Clog team of Chanctonbury Ring Morris men process through the streets to massive audiences dancing Milnrow. The procession is vast, taking 45 minutes to



*Led by Cliff Marchant*

Photo CRMM



*In to Line*

Photo CRMM

pass any spot and lasting for almost an hour. Whilst all the bands and bonfire societies walk, we dance. This brings roars of approval and tumultuous applause from the audience lining the streets. Three-to-twenty deep sardines have it easy compared to the crowds watching this fabulous display. The crowd is so uplifting and the high it creates gives us the energy to dance non-stop both down and up the steep hills of Lewes and at the end we still feel fit

enough to do it all over again

This year we had 14 dancers and a dozen musicians but even with so many musicians all we could hear as we processed was the steady beat of the big bass drum. Yes the spirit of Morris is alive and kicking here in Sussex.

If you are a Cloggie or a musician and would like to experience this for yourself, please contact us in plenty of time so that for our 30th anniversary you too can join in and feel the full magic of dancing to massive crowds. Contact [bagman@crmm.org.uk](mailto:bagman@crmm.org.uk)



*The Parade*

Photo CRMM

## New Editor of The Morris Dancer



*Sean Goddard*

I have been appointed the new editor of The Morris Dancer - the Morris Ring's yearly publication devoted to historical and similar research.

I dance with Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men (Sussex), and my father was a member back in the 1950's. I have been their Squire, and am currently the Captain of the Cotswold Side.

I have a great respect for Morris Dancing, and am very interested in its historical development and associated traditions. I have written short articles for English Dance and Song, Society of Folk Dance Historians, and The Morris Dancer and Circular.

I would like to encourage any reader to submit an article, comment, suggestion, obituary [lets hope not!], review to me for inclusion. Items should be sent to me at the address below.

Sean Goddard

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# The Morris Ring Circular

March 2005

Issue No 49

## Letters To The Editor



### Amis on Bardwell

From Matthew Wright

January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2005

Dear Harry,

An earlier correspondent to the Circular mentioned that the character of Professor Welch in Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* was based on his then father-in-law Leonard Bardwell of East Surrey MM. While that book makes clear Amis's antipathy to Bardwell's interest in folklore it contains no specific reference to the morris. However, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1949, while staying with the Bardwells in Eynsham, Amis wrote to his friend Philip Larkin a letter that included this passage:

*"The best news from here for a long time is that old Bardwell was taking part in some lunatic folk-fandango in which the men swung a lot of staves about and ducked and jumped over them (SILLY OLD DIPPY OLD SOPPY OLD DAPPY OLD POTTY OLD FOOLS) — you know the kind of thing. Well, old B's opposite number swung his stick at the wrong time, or old B mistimed it or something: anyways, the upshot is that old B takes one hell of a crack on the brain-box, and is laid out for some time, and suffers a lot of pain and has to be treated for shock."*

### NOW THAT'S F?????G GOOD EH?"

*The letters of Kingsley Amis, ed. Z. Leader, Harper Collins, 2000*

My guess is that the dance in question was Lads a Bunchum, Adderbury (elsewhere he mentions suffering Bardwell's telling him about an octogenarian fiddler from there), perhaps the East Surrey archives could shed more light?

Matthew Wright  
Winchester MM

Courage  
Winchester Road  
Waltham Chase  
Southampton  
SO32 2NA

(The earlier correspondent referred to in Matthew's letter was Bob Hobley in Morris Circular No 41- ed.)

### Matthew Wright at Winchester's 52nd Feast, 2005

Photo Richard Hambridge



### Thaxted & The Morris Ring

From Daniel Fox

March 2005

Dear Harry

In Circular 48, Gordon Ridgewell wrote that the programme for the 2004 Thaxted Ring Meeting contained a reference to the formation of the Morris Ring "as a direct result of a meeting held in Thaxted". He asked for evidence of this meeting and if there is none for the programme for 2005 to delete any reference to this meeting. Like most aspects of the Thaxted Ring Meeting, little has changed over the years and the wording on the programme has been unchanged for over twenty years.

As always, Gordon has touched upon a nice point. There had certainly been a "meeting" of Morris sides in Thaxted in June 1933, as there had been since 1927. I am not aware of any written record of a discussion at Thaxted in 1933 about the formation of what became the Morris Ring. But that is not to say that no such discussion took place.

The meeting in 1934 in Thaxted at which the Morris Ring was constituted, following discussions in Cambridge in 1933, is well documented in the archives of Cambridge Morris Men and Thaxted Morris Men as well as the Morris Ring.

Perhaps the current Squire of Thaxted Morris Men will review the wording in the

light of Gordon's comments. Continue to flourish

Daniel Fox

Thaxted Morris Men (Squire 1984 to 1998)

PS Thaxted Ring Meeting 2005 is on June 3-5, the 72<sup>nd</sup> time Thaxted has hosted a meeting of Morris sides.

45 Mill End  
Thaxted, Great  
Dunmow Essex  
CM6 2LT

01371 830046 / 07817136229  
lanie10,[danielfox.charityclays.co.uk](mailto:danielfox.charityclays.co.uk)

*Daniel Fox at Winchester's 48th Feast, 2001*

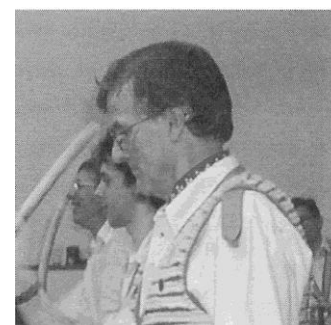


Photo Harry Stevenson

My thanks to all the writers and email correspondents who genuinely (mostly) and otherwise wished me well in editing this circular. H.



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01962 855911 harry wmm@trunkles.freemove.co.uk

## Looking Back

**I suppose it is** no coincidence that in Eddie's first Circular there was an article by John Jenner and a photo of Dudley Binding. I am happy to print articles by the same in this my first as Editor.

Eddie has been Editor of this Circular and The Morris Dancer since 1985. It is a tribute to Eddie, and a demonstration of the work he has put in as Editor that the current Squire has seen fit to split his job in two. So we now have Sean Goddard of Chanctonbury as The Editor of the Morris Dancer (see page 7) and myself as Editor of the Circular.

My interest in Morris has been within me since school days in the sixties (yes, I'm afraid I am not the right side of 50) but I only started dancing in 1975 when my work took me to Plymouth. In 1979 I moved to Hampshire and joined Winchester.

I am grateful to Eddie for the helping with the printing for the time being.



*Gordon Ridgewell*

Photo Derek Wisbey, Standon Morris

## Looking Forward

**I have a number** of burgeoning ideas for the Circular, the first of which is included in this edition: an article from Appointed Officers describing what it is they do. If you are an Appointed Officer please get writing!

Another idea has emerged from your responses about dancing on Boxing Day. A number of you dance on 'short days', including Boxing Day and raise considerable amounts of money for Charity. I would like to highlight this more prominently but I can only do so if you tell me. You

can see Ben Dauncey's Marathon challenge in Easter 2006, on page 20, where his target is to raise £100,000. Fantastic!

A number of clubs are celebrating birthdays: I will write about some of the events I attend but it is up to you to write about your own events. I do have my own 'roving reporters', but consider appointing your own reporter for specific events and send it to me. I particularly enjoy hyperbole and perhaps a little exaggeration.

Which reminds me, Gordon Ridgewell is a real person and proof is on this page, not in the form of a letter but dancing! Thanks Derek.

I did receive a letter from Gordon, and he referred to an article in The Times T2 about Straw Bears. I think you can access the article through The Times web pages.

When you send in photos I will always acknowledge the photographer when told.

Happy Dancing in 2005.  
Cheers,

Harry  
ps now, where is that new ring & circular logo?

## Wanted !

Fancy yourself as a budding reporter? Think you can write? Prepared to exaggerate occasionally? Prone to embellishment? Well, some of the time these attributes (surely not) maybe appropriate but what is important is a preparedness to

be a diarist. When going to a Ring Meeting, Day of Dance, Folk Festival, or a 'normal evening out with your club take a note pad, collect programmes, feast and menu cards (they help you to remember where you have been)

and practice writing, especially towards the end of an evening. I have no preference how you write it but email, or any word type document is preferable. Hand written or typed articles will be considered but I am a slow typist. Especially looking

for younger writers to provide a balanced Circular reflecting all opinions, and new contributors always welcome. I look forward to your musings.

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## William (Walter) Walker Abson

### 1911- 2005 : Bagman of the Ring 1934-1946

---

William Abson was born on 12 February 1911 in Horbury, Yorkshire and after attending Ossett Grammar School went up to Fitzwilliam House, Cambridge University in 1929. At college he became friendly with William Palmer (photographer of the well known Little Downham Molly photos) who invited him and Lionel Bacon (see The Morris Dancer Volume 3 No.7) to a party held to recruit new members to the local branch of the EFDS. William Palmer had previously danced the morris in Letchworth and attended practices of the Cambridge Morris Men (CMM) in 1929, and he persuaded both of the other two to start morris in the autumn of 1930 and as the club had an established man by the name of William, he became Walter and the name stuck throughout the rest of his life. At that time Arthur Heffer was the main instructor and in his second term as Squire, on his sudden and tragic death on in November 1931 Conway Waddington took over both roles.

Walter became active in the local branch of the EFDS and among other occasions was a member of the Cambridge team at the Oxford Folk Dance Festival at Blenheim Palace on 6th June 1931. He often told the story of this rather sickening typical damp and cold day that he drove back to Cambridge with two of the seven Hopkinson sisters in the back seat of his car who argued the whole way home. (They were daughters of the awesome Mrs Hopkinson who wanted to get them all married to morris men, Daniel Fox's mother and two others were successful, however Arthur Peck never plucked up the courage to ask and when approached by the good lady



*Walter with the Cake & Sword*

Photo Peter Copley\*

said he wasn't sure and Walter was put off by this occasion) Just after sinking into bed that night at 1.30 a.m., there was a sizeable earthquake. The wall of Jesus College, Cambridge was partly shaken to the ground and at Madame Tussaud's in London the head of Crippen the murderer was split in two.

He attended his first Travelling Morrice (TM) tour in June 1931, but was only allowed to take part in a limited number of dances. His shadow is behind William on the left hand side of the photo of the processional at Burford taken that year, which was in the previous Ring brochure. He

was admitted to membership of the CMM in April 1932 together with six other men, including Lionel Bacon and Russell Wortley. This was the largest number admitted in one year until equalled in 1952. Joseph Needham and William Palmer had been admitted in the previous year.

In 1934 Joseph Needham, Squire and Arthur Peck, Bagman, arranged a week of morris instruction for members of the Club at Ringstead Mill in Norfolk and although the idea of the Ring had been agreed in the previous November, the draft constitution, the details and the clubs to be invited were discussed at length in

the evenings after supper. It was at one of the informal gatherings that the names for the two officers were put forward. While Walter was asleep his name was suggested as "Secretary" and he awoke to find that all men had agreed to his name being put forward, together with Alec Hunter as Squire. The provisional first officers were formally agreed when the Ring was instituted at the CMM AGM on the Saturday April 14th, and of course confirmed by the other clubs at Thaxted in June. During the summer Walter did a great deal of work in getting the agreement of at least five of the other founder clubs, culminating in arranging the meeting on October 10<sup>th</sup> 1934 at Cecil Sharp House where with Douglas Kennedy presiding, the Morris Ring was finally inaugurated and the first Squire and Bagman finally elected.

In the period up to 1940, when Ring meetings stopped due to the War, Walter was instrumental in welding together the disparate groups and clubs into a national institution. Membership was rising to about 35 clubs by that time. Eighteen meetings were held, mostly with periods of instruction as well as public shows, and in those days the Bagman made all the arrangements for the meetings. Even at Thaxted it was Walter who ordered the beer and in 1937 he ordered sufficient half pint bottles to satisfy the men for the weekend only to find that he was supplied with the same number of quart bottles. However he always added that the men happily consumed the lot. The log of these meetings has been published by the Ring with a forward by Walter. He retired as Bagman in 1946 to be followed by other

Cambridge Men, Bob Ross in 1946 and Russell Wortley in 1950.

After going down from Cambridge in 1932 with a scientific degree, Walter moved to London and took a teachers training course at an establishment run by a Mr Fox (Alistair Cooke was also a "Fox's Martyr") and then taught Mathematics and Physics at Marylebone Grammar School. He joined London Pride, which still has separate country dance and morris sections, and remained an active member of both sections for the next seventy years.

During the War he served in the RAF as part of the telecommunications research establishment involved in testing air to air radar. When hostilities ceased he travelled around Europe securing enemy scientific military equipment that had been seized; (a strictly unofficial benefit of this being the re-equipment of Brussels University's physics laboratory.) And at this time those who were to run a new laboratory in England had learned for the first time that it was to be an Agency of the Ministry of Supply controlled like those that had applied to shadow factories during the second world war. An immediate consequence was a requirement for a "brochure" setting out everything that would be required from buildings, laboratory equipment and machine tools to knives, forks and spoons for the canteen. Each item had to be approved before it could be purchased and the Ministry insisted on supplying some items, such as cars, from Government stocks. Fortunately the civil servant principally concerned, Walter was extremely intelligent and understanding and the preparation and gradual approval of the brochure, though laborious, went smoothly except for that part

which dealt with buildings, which was controlled by the Architects Branch of the Ministry.

After the war he first went to work at the Atomic Energy Establishment at Harwell, then joined the Civil Service in various departments utilizing his scientific training and knowledge. During the early 1950's Walter was elected to the Royal Institution's Visitor's Committee, on which he served as Chairman in 1955-6. It appears from the minutes that during his time he showed as much tenacity and tact in trying to improve that Institution as he did in the Morris. There were a number of well-known scientific names on the committee but he clearly had no problem in leading things there. In 1965 he was escorting a group of Russians to Farnborough where they were to be shown around by Roy Dommett, who explained that he wished to dance at 5.00 pm with the TM at Chiddingfold in Sussex. Such is the friendship of the morris that the visit was shorter than it might otherwise have been. In retirement Walter took up painting in a serious way, going on courses and often visiting France painting or sketching the mountains and hills which he loved. He was secretary and in other ways fully involved in the life of his local Church in West Wickham, where we were able to give him a morris farewell. *(see page 13 for a report of this. Ed)*

At London Pride he soon became the main instructor and was appointed Squire in 1950. During his year he suggested a change in the headgear to bowler hats, then worn daily by several members who worked in the City and West End, so when they arrived for a show all they had to do was to attach the feather and ribbons. Well into his last decade Walter continued to attend weekly

practices, teaching new members, not only the steps and figures but also its magic, the infectious combination of rhythmic movement, teamwork, tradition as well as the less tangible spiritual aspect. He was in the LP side which danced in Thaxted Church in 1959 as part of the Offertory at Mass, and even at the service, all present were sworn to great secrecy lest the press should hear of it. This was the first such activity by a visiting side.

Walter throughout all his morris life regularly attended Travelling Morrice tours and a quote from the log of Tuesday June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1931 his first dancing day set the way for the next seventy years. "At Lechlade Walter distinguished himself (as elsewhere also) by his mastery of the pecuniam tin. Inmates of passing cars also contributed a certain amount". (For the record, 8/11d was collected). In later years Walter was always happy to take round the cake sword and tin, and not only to talk with the audience of all ages and types but to instil in them part of the mystery and spirit of the morris. In camp Walter was often employed cooking breakfast and helping wherever needed and was always ready to advise new or younger men on the finer points of the dancing, whether during practice sessions or more often quietly to individual men.

Walter married Vivien on 5th February, 1955 and they had a son and daughter, who do not follow their parent's active love of dancing, although Stephanie has played her fiddle (or maybe violin is more correct) for at least one TM show. When Walter died he was not our oldest member of the CMM; that position goes to his Best Man Robert Saunders, who became a member of the CMM in 1930 and who tells me that had Walter been awake, or objected, he was next in line for the job

of Secretary elect. It was following Robert's suggestion in 1959 with the support of Arthur Peck, Walter, Bob Ross and others that the CMM held a lengthy meeting (five hours) in William Palmer's house to instigate the formation of the Ring Advisory Council.

Walter continued to attend Ring Meetings and even in his 92 year attended the Ring ARM and the Advisory Council. He did not say a great deal, but when he spoke all men listened to his well thought out points of view which were always only relative to matters in hand; on many occasions decisions and agreements that seemed a long way off were quickly brought to a finish after he had spoken. The same was also true at the Annual Meeting in Cambridge which he missed in 2004 after almost continuous attendance since 1932. As Bagman I shall miss the frequent telephone conversations to gain his advice on some matter.

Walter had a great knack of talking to and helping everyone not only morris men, and he soon won the respect of all that met him even if only once at some rainy and cold Ring Meeting.

He died on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2005 and will be missed by all that knew or met him.

### John Jenner 2005

\*Photo taken during the Travelling Morrice tour in Cumbria in 1980 at Dacre and Walter is carrying the cake sword and tin which was purchased by the Cambridge Morris Men in 1974 in memory of Arthur Peck, an original member, past Squire and Bagman of the CMM also past Squire of the Ring. The sword was bought direct from Wilkinson's and the copper tin made by Henry Hart of Chipping Campden.



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# Roy Yarnell

**6th October 1944 - 17th March 2005**

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*by Stephen Lowe  
Squire, Jockey Morris Men*

Roy was a patient and loving person who gave his time generously to those many people who had the pleasure to have spent time with him. He was a Birmingham born man who began his life at Dudley Road Hospital. He lived with his parents in Great Barr on the North side of the City and his early education after starting nursery at the age of 2 continued at Beeches Road Junior School before progressing on to Great Barr Comprehensive.

Roy was an accomplished musician in the Morris and Folk circles in which he moved and he was encouraged to engage in musical activities as a child having had piano tuition between the ages of eight and twelve. He was also co-opted in to the school band playing the violin although this was meant as a punishment for various misdemeanours that



**Roy at Jockey Morris Men's Feast, 2004**

Photo Dr... Iain Salisbury



**Roy dancing out as Squire of the Ring in 1994 in Ledbury at the Silurian Ring Meeting.** Photo Dr.. Iain Salisbury

he found himself engaged in as a school boy. Little was he to know that his early musical endeavours would stand him in such good stead later on in life.

On leaving school he had aspirations to be a draftsman and his first employment took him to the patent office where he worked for one year before moving on to employment on the railways aged 16.

His first position with British Railways was at Aston Goods Station and it marked the start of a long career working with the transportation of goods on the national rail network. He had responsibility for many safety aspects in his job and contributed much to this during his working life. He had already retired from one job with Railfreight and was currently engaged in his last professional position managing a work force numbering approximately fifty employees for Freightliner based in Birmingham. He was due to fully retire later this year.

In his youth he excelled in the swimming pool competing for his school, the City of Birmingham and for the

County of Warwickshire.

At the age of 18 in 1962 Roy was to meet his future wife Janet at the ice rink in Birmingham. They were married in 1966 and moved to a house in Raeburn Road in Great Barr. Later that year they celebrated the birth of their first child Laurence followed one year later by the birth of their daughter Louisa.

There were many activities that Roy was involved in. As a younger man he devoted much time to various youth groups and was involved in the scouting organisation for many years. He also had an interest in bell ringing which he did at St. John's Church in Great Barr.

Anyone who has visited the Yarnells' homes could not fail to notice that he was also a keen gardener. He was also a practical man who was not daunted by DIY work and when they moved to Lichfield in 1998 it was not long before significant changes were made to improve the house and to create an impressive garden where they would entertain many a welcome friend and visitor.

Roy's interest in Morris Dancing began in the seventies. Along with a few folk club friends they initially tried some dances in an upstairs room in the Prince of Wales pub behind which is now the ICC in central Birmingham. Pat, the landlord at the time, complained about the noise emanating from upstairs so the sessions were soon to cease.

It was very soon after that incident when he saw an advert in the paper for a Sunday afternoon introduction to Morris Dancing class that Moose Cope, one of Jockey's founder members, was running at the Newtown Community Centre. This was his first introduction to the Jockey Morris Men.

He joined the club in 1975. His organisational qualities were soon to be recognised and it was not too long before he was to be nominated as Deputy Squire. He was elected as Squire of the club on three occasions the first time being in the latter part of the nineteen seventies.

At first he was not playing as a musician with the club but his energies were put in to dancing. It was some years later that he started to play his accordion for Jockey due to a lack of musicians at the time.

Roy was instrumental in the introduction of the Plough to Jockey's Winter Tour of Birmingham in 1980. Having asked about a plough in an antique shop the proprietor mentioned that there was one in a farmer's field not too far away. On investigating this lead the farmer told Roy that the plough was in a bad state of repair but if he went to the agricultural college down the road he may be able to borrow

theirs. After locating the college he negotiated the use of their plough but they then ascertained that Roy's need was greater than theirs so the said article was presented to him for its use in conjunction with the Morris.

Roy was elected Squire of the Morris Ring 1992 — 1994. He supported many other clubs close to Birmingham namely Shakespeare Morris Men, Green Man Morris & Sword, Stafford Morris Men, Lichfield Morris Men and Uttoxeter. He was a member of the Original Welsh Border Morris Men and was Squire of this team from 1999 until 2001. He had connections with teams the length and breadth of the country. Many sides enjoyed the richness of his company either as a dancer, musician



**Roy at Jockey Morris Men's Feast, 2004**

Photo Dr. Iain Salisbury

or wise counsellor. He will be sadly missed by many.

Roy is survived by his wife Janet, son Laurence, daughter Louisa and Grandson Jack. Our thoughts are very much with them at this difficult time.

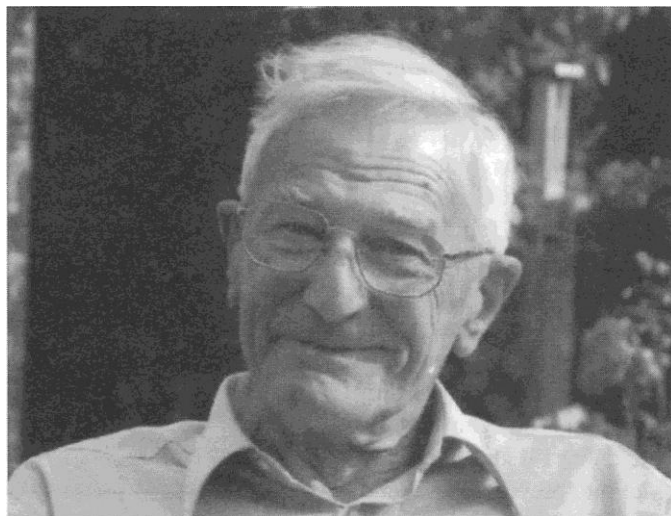
## Gerald Carey

*By Adrian Wedgewood*

I'm saddened to report the death on 19th October 2004 at Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham of Gerald Carey aged 78.

Gerald was a founder member & one-time Squire of White Rose MM and for many years lived in Barton under Needwood (Staffs) where, before his retirement, he taught at the John Taylor School. He recalled to me, accompanying on his melodeon a team of Leeds men led by Norman Peacock, who had rediscovered the Greatham Sword Dance on Teesmouth, when they were invited to perform at Cecil Sharp House.

Gerald was a gentleman and noted local historian, publishing books on the Birmingham & Derby Junction Railway and the history of Thomas Russell and Barton's schools.



**Gerald Carey, a Founder Member of White Rose Morris Men**

Photo do A. Wedgewood

Whilst here he danced with the Burton upon Trent MM and for a while with Uttoxeter Heart of Oak MM. Most recently he was delighted to read in the Circular of White Rose's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations and to see at first hand the success of Celebrating Uttoxeter 2004 at which he enjoyed one of the tours visits to Barton.

He is survived by his wife Audrey, four sons and grandchildren. Audrey & he were very keen country dancers, representing West Yorkshire in the EFDSS Festivals at the Royal Albert Hall in the 1950's where he proudly recalled being asked by Douglas Kennedy to lead all the dancers into the arena for the start of the first dance.

## Walter's Funeral

*By Gordon Ridgewell*

The funeral took place at the Church of St.. Mary of Nazareth, West Wickham, Kent on 9th, March 2005. The service was attended by over 30 men in morris kit including Bob Cross, Squire of the Morris Ring; John Frearson, Bagman of the Morris Ring; Past Squires: Geoff Jerram, Tim Sercombe and Daniel Fox. Cambridge Morris Men and London Pride Morris Men had full sides present whilst the following clubs were represented: Thaxted, East Surrey, Winchester, Bedford, Chalice, Dartington, Martlet and Wadard. Also present were Barbara Sunderland



**Bonny Green at the Church Hall**

Photo Gordon Ridgewell

(widow of Past Squire, Morris Sunderland); Malcolm Taylor (librarian, Vaughan Williams Memorial Library); Hilary Blandford (member, National Council, EFDSS); and Gordon Ridgewell (Past Squire, Standon Morris Men).

During the service Stephanie played on the violin and John Hawkins of London Pride Morris Men delivered the eulogy.

*(I have a copy of John Hawkins' eulogy, but to avoid much duplication with JJ's Obituary have excluded this. Apologies. Ed.)*

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## Bert Cleaver's 25th & Final Jigs Instructional 14-17 January 2005

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*Pete Johnson  
Leicester Morris Men*

I'd hardly walked inside the Village Hall at Sutton Bonington (I don't think I'd even found the beer) before Bert Cleaver was standing on my foot, hinting heavily at permanent damage to my person if I didn't volunteer to write a report of the Jigs Weekend. And this was because I'd failed to turn up last year — no sympathy for the fact that I'd knackered my ankle the previous weekend at the Straw Bear Festival!

I agreed — there seemed no choice — found the beer, set up the camp bed, and got stuck into the weekend. This being a serious event, food came first: meat and macaroni pie with salad, and fruit salad and cream. However the time came for the first workshop and we focused on Fieldtown. Bert laid great emphasis on the hanky style ("Keep the hankies late!") and took us through the technicalities of all the jigs in the tradition, including Princess Royal, which he described as the best jig in the Morris. No-one argued — especially as Bert had uttered his mantra for the weekend: "my way full marks, anybody else's way no marks!"

Eventually we were released and wandered off to the King's Head where excellent beer was available with a warm welcome. Plenty of chatting and catching up, some music, some songs including "Delilah" from the musicians' corner, and the hours passed quickly. Back then to the hall, where more pasta was available, plus pork scratching, bread pudding and Glen Moray in the crowded kitchen.

And so to bed.



**Bob Cross presenting Bert Cleaver with his gift**

Photo Andy Padmore

But not for long — at 7.30 Bert serenaded us with "Hail smiling morn" and the Dolphin lads brought us cups of tea or coffee. Breakfast was kedgereee, to the surprise of regular attendees who know this as a Sunday tradition — apparently the sausages and black pudding had been lost!

Saturday morning was busy: three different traditions to tax us. Geoff Jerram took us through Bledington; Tony Ashley opened the mysteries of Oddington, then back to Bert for the Bucknell. The mixture of concentration and hangovers was palpable through the hall, as was the sense of relief when class was dismissed and we strolled up to the pub for a swift livener. All too soon we were summoned back for lunch — vegetable soup followed by jacket spuds with cold meat, cheese, etc.. Then the tables were cleared and down to business once more. Geoff prefaced the active session on Bampton with a disquisition on the various village sides and the changes in style over time but then it was down to the impossibly difficult "manhole-cover capers" and the left foot lead (which troubled those of us who habitually dance a right foot start back home!). The fifth and last tradition

of the day was described by Bert as "The masochists' session" culminating in My Lord of Sherborne's Jig complete with "indescribable capers".

We were sent out of the way whilst the feast was set up and returned to find our starter of white bean pâté arranged in our places. This was followed by mouton rouge, caramel oranges and an excellent cheeseboard. Beer was provided officially and port seemed to be in plentiful private supply, so there was good cheer. The loyal toast was proposed by Martin of Dolphin, the Immortal Memory by Clayton of Bathampton. Charlie from Leicester proposed the health of the Morris Ring and the Squire of the Ring that of the host side, Dolphin. Bob also punctuated the feast with speechettes on various matters.. Cliff Marchant, unable to be present, sent malt for Dolphin's enjoyment. The major presentations of the evening were of course for Bert Cleaver, whose last Jigs Instructional this was: these were from Dolphin, from the Ring, and from regular attendees of the weekend — for once Bert was lost for words. The Feast was blessed with many fine songs and

recitations, from traditional drinking choruses to a hilarious ditty combining computer failure and electrifying sex! Special mention goes to Tony Foard's version of an old favourite praising one "Abdul Abulbert Cleavere". Replete and in good spirits, the company eventually made its way back to the King's Head for another fine session of songs and companionship. Clearly government proposals for flexible licensing hours are already being piloted in this part of the world, so an early night was not had by anyone.

Sunday brought a lie-in until 8 o'clock, followed by a traditional breakfast complete with the black pudding and sausages which presumably had been tracked down over the last 24 hours. The final workshop covered three more traditions: Tony Ashley led us in Ascot-under-Wychwood; Bert took us through Longborough; Geoff Jerram did the honours with Headington — which, like Bampton, "evolves as I speak"! A break for coffee felt all too short before we had the Reprise: dancing one of the jigs from all nine traditions visited during the weekend. The knees were creaking, the brain was struggling, but we got there!

A short discussion followed, in the hope that points raised will inform future instructionals. Bert may no longer be leading them, but they will continue and Geoff will be the organiser next year. Let us hope he will be assisted by teachers and demonstrators as good as those who have supported Bert.

Lunch rounded off the weekend: bacon hotpot, fresh fruit and the remains of the cheese. Reflecting on the event it felt like hard work,



but with a purpose. It provided an opportunity to revisit the basics of the traditions, as well as attempt some of the more showy dances. We may take away a determination to perform a jig or two in our summer shows, or we may simply go away and think about how we dance a particular tradition, whether our side's way is different from the instructors' for a reason



*Discussion after the weekend*

Photo Andy Padmore

or has it just slipped a bit. In Leicester's case it proved useful on the first practice night after the weekend, when

Charlie and Ian and I felt confident to push the lads into tidying up their Fieldtown with almost instant improvement!

Many, many thanks to Bert for all the instruction and inspiration over the years. May your shadow never lengthen!

## **Appointed Officer: RON SHUTTLEWORTH**

### **The Morris Ring Folkplay Archive -The Ron Shuttleworth Collection**

## **HOWTHE COLLECTION STARTED**

*By Ron Shuttleworth*

It has been suggested to me that others might find interest in the account of how I came to start my collection and to choose its parameters.

I did not set out to do this - it crept up on me. I have been a practising Mummers for some thirty-nine years and was always interested in the hows and whys. I therefore acquired anything that came my way.

Many years ago I had difficulty in locating a reference which I knew that I had somewhere, and whilst searching for it came across items which I had forgotten all about. At the time I had unrestricted access to a good photocopier and decided to locate and copy all the material in my possession. This I sorted into rough categories. From there it was only a short step to copying items which I came across in libraries, notably that at Cecil Sharp House, and I soon found myself actively looking for new material. I then got hooked by the 'thrill of the chase' and collecting became an end in itself.

Initially I tended to play it down and treat it in rather an offhand way but eventually came to realise that I might be building something of lasting usefulness, and should behave more seriously and make safe provision



*Ron Shuttleworth*

Photo Harry Stevenson

~~for its future. I felt that~~ the Folklore Society's collections were less than secure, and at this time the futures of both the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library and the Centre for Cultural Tradition & Language at Sheffield University looked uncertain.

The Morris Ring had recently started to expand and improve its Archive so I offered my collection to them. It makes little difference to me in practical terms as I still retain and work on the material, but it gives me a useful official standing and hopefully ensures that the collection will survive.

The choice of parameters is quite arbitrary and governed by practical considerations including the essential of what will maintain my interest. To attempt to collect all texts and references to teams would be a horrendous task

and was, so I understood, already being undertaken by the Traditional Drama Research Group and others.

I suppose that most of the 'important' material could be acquired quite quickly by someone working full-time with unlimited academic resources, but it would not be half so much fun! There is a fringe of items which should perhaps be reclassified as 'trivia' but at this bottom level the decision to include or not is obviously very subjective. To my parameters of "everything good, bad or utter rubbish" I add occasional items which just catch my fancy - did you know for instance that the King of Egypt is alive and well and raising goats near Stroud?

As a collector, I started just at the right time. Travel was relatively cheap and photocopiers had just become common, although restrictions on their use at some libraries were very frustrating. Younger people today would be surprised by some of the cruder machines which copied onto sensitised paper from a stack of which the stench of ammonia could knock you back. Since the demise of the Net Book Agreement engineered by the large booksellers, I think it would now be impractical for anyone without backing from a university, to do what I was able to achieve. Administered

by the Publishers' Association, it gave libraries a blanket discount on all sales. A well-kept secret was that this was conditional on them granting unrestricted public access to their book stock. Now it is harder, and often expensive to spend significant time in university libraries, etc.. The Inter-libraries Loan Scheme is fine in theory but often slow and patchy in practice.

An obvious problem is finding out about the existence of material. 'Browsing' in likely areas of libraries is one way, and I also carefully troll through recently acquired items for new references, although not all of these will prove to be right for inclusion.

If anyone out there can help or supply material, welcome and thanks. Anything relevant, whether it be from the Mickle-Swiving Parish Notes or your own monumental work which deserves to be more widely known, will be accepted with gratitude and payment if required.

'Wants' lists available on request.

Ron Shuttleworth,  
41, Morningside, Coventry.  
CV5 6PD. (024) 7667 6721.

# Boxing Day 2004

## Is it? or Isn't it? Confusion, confusion, confusion!

By Ivor Alsop

**This year** the Christmas period has been something of an enigma. Since 1900 there have been fifteen occasions when these same phenomena have happened. What is this strange phenomenon?

It's when Christmas Day falls on a Saturday.

The following day is always St. Stephen's Day but is it necessarily Boxing Day? According to the Radio Times, newspapers, the media and some Morris/Sword teams the day in 2004 following Christmas Day was Boxing Day. But is this the case? It set me looking in the dictionaries, perpetual almanacs, calendars and books on English customs for an answer or a solution to this problem.

As always my first port of call was *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 1985 Revised Edition which gives the definition

*Boxing-day. 1849. The first weekday after Christmas-day, observed as a holiday, on which Christmas-boxes are given.*

This is unequivocal. It is the first weekday after Christmas-day. I then went to *Chamber's Dictionary* Revised and Reprinted 1993 and this defines Boxing Day as

*Boxing Day the day after Christmas, when boxes or presents were traditionally given to employees, etc...; the first weekday after Christmas, observed as a public holiday.*

This time - not so unequivocal. Doubts appear to be entering the thought chain. Boxing Day is the day after Christmas or the first weekday after Christmas when it is observed



**Whitchurch Morris Men dancing on Boxing Day 26th!**

Photo James Morello

as a public holiday. You pay your money and take your pick or do you? *The Book of Days*. Chambers n.d. (put pre 1900) doesn't help very much. There are fifteen columns all given over to December 26 but there is no definition of Boxing Day. There are columns on St. Stephen's Day

*In London and other places, St. Stephen's Day, or the 26<sup>th</sup> of December is familiarly known as Boxing-day, from its being the occasion on which those annual guerdons known as Christmas-boxes are solicited and collected. For a notice of them, the reader is referred to the ensuing article. [Vol. II p.764]*

The ensuing article under the heading 'CHRISTMAS-BOXES' goes to great lengths to explain that the church purloined this custom from the pre-Christian era.

*The institution of Christmas-boxes is evidently akin to that of New year's gifts, and, like it, has descended to us from the times of the ancient Romans, who, at the season of the Saturnalia, practised universally the custom of giving presents. The fathers of*

*the church denounced, on the grounds of its pagan origin, the observance of such usage by the Christians; but their anathemas had little practical effect, and in the process of time, the custom of Christmas-boxes and New-year's gifts, like others adopted from the heathen, attained the position of a universally recognised institution. [ibid. Vol. II p.764]*

The article goes on to illustrate that gifts were expected by the tradesmen

*...This custom of Christmas-boxes, or the bestowing of certain expected gratuities at the Christmas season, was formerly, and even yet to a certain extent continues to be, a great nuisance. The journeymen and apprentices of trades-people were wont to levy regular contributions from their masters' customers, who, in addition, were mulcted by the trades-people in the form of augmented charges in the bills, to recompense the latter for gratuities expected from them by the customers' servants. ... Christmas-boxes are still regularly expected by the postman, the lamplighter, the dustman, and generally by all those functionaries who*

*render services to the public at large, without receiving payment therefore from any particular individual. [ibid. Vol. II p.764-51]*

The above quotation shows that the journeymen and apprentices were canny individuals as they were also getting Christmas-boxes from their masters and from their masters' customers but would they have gone to their masters' customers on the Sunday after Christmas-day? I think not. They would have been at their own homes enjoying Christmas with their families.

Why Christmas-boxes? This would appear to be from the boxes which the journeymen and apprentices used to solicit their money. In *Old English Customs*, P.H.Ditchfield. Pub: Methuen & Co. London. 1901 has

*The day after Christmas is still known as "Boxing Day," and is so called from the "Christmas Boxes" which used to be in circulation at the time. In the British Museum are specimens of "thrift-boxes" — small and wide bottles with imitation stoppers, from three to four inches in height, of thin clay, the upper part covered with a green glaze. On one side is a slit for the introduction of money, and as the small presents were collected at the Christmas in these money-pots, they were called Christmas boxes. [p.35]*

Christina Hole in *English Traditional Customs*, Pub: Batsford, London. 1975 has another explanation as well as that shown above

*St. Stephen's Day is 26 December, the feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. But in England this anniversary is far better known*



**Wath dancing on Boxing Day, 26th. Note the dancer on the right with his 'Kammaris' shopping bag. Sophisticated or what! (Sorry, Wath!)**

Photo Eric Presley

*as Boxing Day, a name derived either from the alms boxes in churches, which were opened, and their contents distributed to the poor on that day; or from the earthenware boxes that apprentices used to carry round with them when they were collecting money gifts from their master's customers. Until very recently it was usual for the postman, the dustman and a few other servants of the public to call at all the houses they served during the year, and to receive small gifts from the householders on Boxing Day. [.35]*

These examples of the day after Christmas-day being Boxing-day and others all presuppose that the apprentices, journeymen, postmen and dustmen are all going to be working on the Sunday. This is hardly likely to be the case. Many years ago, when I was a student, I did the usual stint on the Christmas post, working for the three weeks before Christmas and that meant working on the Sunday before Christmas Day but no-one worked on the Sunday after Christmas-day. From my reading of history the servants, maids, kitchen personnel at the big houses were expected to work on the Sunday, preparing and serving meals to the household. They would not have had time to go home to their loved ones

with Christmas-boxes until the following day. In other words they went home on Monday, Boxing-day!

Where does this leave us? I think that the media got it wrong.

I think that Morris/Sword teams who danced on the Sunday got it wrong.

Boxing-day is not synonymous with St. Stephen's Day despite what the books say.

## **Boxing Day is the first weekday after Christmas Day.**

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### **Russell Wortley & Plough Monday**

*By John Jenner*

On Plough Monday 2005 the Cambridge Morris Men carried on the tradition so much encouraged by Russell Wortley. We remembered that it was twenty-five years ago that Russell had collapsed while dancing as the "Lady" in Comberton, and who died on the way to hospital despite

the very quick attention on site of the village doctor. He had revived the Cambridgeshire Molly Dances with the help of Cyril Papworth in the autumn of 1976 so that we could again dance the dances on Plough Monday, in the evening supporting the village team of Plough Boys in their perambulations with an old wooden plough around Balsham. After two years the village folk asked us to dance the morris again, as it was more interesting and noisy and "you enjoyed dancing it more". An interesting reflection but clearly some of the mystery of the morris had rubbed off.

So from 1979 we have danced the Molly during the day in Cambridge and the surrounding villages and since 1981 it has been the tradition that our first show, regardless of the increasing amount of traffic, is at the crossroads in Comberton where we get a small adult audience but a large number of pre-school children and their carers, whose school playground was built over the ancient grass maze in the 20's or 30's. Tradition is soon established and we have had four landlords, including a change of pub, willingly open their pub at about 10.15 so that we get beribboned and refreshed before the show at 11.00 am. We have found that primary schools provide the best two or three shows during the rest of the day. Teachers may be interested that our show one year coincided with a visit from Ofsted with no ill effects.

After a welcome tea break we now join the Plough Boys soon after 5.30pm and for the next five and a half hours or more we walk about the village going from party to party, some in the road or in garages and some in private houses, including once in three years or so in a crystal chandelier lit ballroom (short sticks only). The food and

hospitably is substantial but even the large amounts of hot sausages, chicken legs and curry sandwiches cannot keep the alcohol intake down for drivers. In addition money is raised for a local charity or activity, very nearly £2,000 this year.

Russell had been instrumental in encouraging this activity on its revival in both the 50's and 60's. However it was Jim Daniels within the village that started the current revival in 1973. We heard of this while dancing in the village that summer and Russell suggested that we should again support them. The Plough Boys were very much in favour and so we have been every year since, except following his sudden sad death in 1980. After Jim's death in 1999 the village erected a memorial of a plough (alas a metal one) in the forecourt of the Bull and each year the celebrations cease by this plough for a minute's silence before going into the pub. In this, his twenty-fifth year, Russell was also remembered.

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Note: -

Russell Wortley was Bagman of The Ring 1950 — 1959, Editor of the EFDSS Journal from 1961-1971 and held the office of Squire and Bagman of the CMM at various times. His published articles and papers were collected together into a Memorial Booklet in 1980. Following his death his very extensive collection on most matters of interest on Morris and Folk were given to CECTAL, Sheffield University.

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# Bathampton Morris Men

## Celebrate 70 years

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By Adrian Wedgewood

Were she alive today Mrs Charlotte Oakey, headmistress of Bathampton School, would probably have been amazed to see her team of boys that she started in 1934 have grown into a Morris club that opened their 70th anniversary celebrations with a 'Wheatley On' in Corsham of four sides in Bathampton kit accompanied by a veritable orchestra of talented musicians.

Organised with consummate skill by bagman Idris Roker, the 70th Anniversary celebrations on 2<sup>nd</sup> — 4<sup>th</sup> July 2004 drew together nearly forty Bathampton men and their partners for a coach tour to Saturday dancing spots in Corsham, Lacock, Bradford on Avon and Bath Abbey together a poignant appearance at Bathampton School Fete.

The weekend began in true Bathampton style the previous evening at Bath's 'Park Tavern' when what was planned as a quiet meeting of old friends escalated into a full-blow dancing session forcing the landlord to move us into a bigger room and close his doors at 9 p.m. to prevent overcrowding by tourists clamouring to be in on the action. Very early



**Bathampton Morris Men**

Photo [bathampton-morris-men.org.uk/](http://bathampton-morris-men.org.uk/)

the following day, rapidly shedding the after effects of the previous evening, John Salmon and Dave Lee were interviewed live on BBC Radio Bristol.

Saturday evening saw fifty-five sitting down to a celebration dinner in the lofty platform halls of the former Green Park Station in Bath. John Sturgess, a Bathampton Man since 1974, read greetings and other messages from men who were unable to attend. Bill Holt, who joined the club in 1968 and at aged 83 danced at every spot on the celebration tour, making him 'probably the oldest Morris dancer in the World', provided the Grace before an excellent meal.

The Toasts provided an opportunity for representing both ends of the Clubs membership spectrum. Roy Phillips, who joined in 1955, proposed the toast to Mrs Oakey; Fred Goater a 1940's recruit, reminded us of 'absent friends' and Alan Greer of 1997 vintage proposed the traditional toast to the Immortal Memory of Cecil Sharp.

Scenes from the past were highlighted by Peter Cooper (joined 1964), John Helsdon (53 years service and still dancing) regaled us with modern-day memories and present-Squire John Laver (1994) gave a glimpse into a bright and confident future. Other highlights of the evening

included 'putting up' the bride from an adjacent hen party of Marilyn Monroe look-a likes, the induction of two new members; Gavin Bayfield and Richard Eamer and a noisy rendition (with skull-splitting actions) of McNamara's band lead by John Sturgess. All men present received a 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary commemorative enamel badge that'll be worn on the baldrick.

Sunday morning saw us repenting our sins at a celebratory service in Bathampton Parish Church where we danced afterwards to entertain the congregation and canal-side visitors before repairing to lunch at Bathampton Mill. Here the Management surprised us with a 'birthday' cake and the full 'party' package including balloons and party poppers. Afterwards we surprised ourselves and bemused Sunday lunchers by mustering enough energy for a final dance display.

As a now 'distant' member it was a privilege and great delight to be a guest at a magnificent celebration of seventy years of achievements epitomised by the skilful dancing, superb hospitality and friendship of all those men who dance 'The Bathampton Way'.



**John Burgess dancing  
*None So Pretty***

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### Mendip's John Burgess at 80

by Roger Waddington

John Burgess celebrated his 80th birthday with the Mendip Morris Men at The Black Horse in Clapton-in-Gordano in August last year. John is the senior Mendip musician.

John was presented with a cake by loyal sup

porter Katie Heathman, a framed collage of photos of John dancing covering over 50 years, as well as the usual balloons and badges.

Before buying the assembled a drink, John danced a fieldtown Jig, 'None So Pretty'. (Photos by Roger Waddington)



**John Burgess with gift**

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# Dartington Junior Morris Men

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By Ken Hudson

**The Dartington Morris Men's** winter Practice venue

Four of the current team members, Nathaniel & Matthew Green from Dartington, and



*Ken Giving Last Minute Instructions*

Photo Pat Reid



*A neat set for Constant Billy*

Photo Pat Reid

on Saturday 18th December, the team gave their first display, where they performed 'The Rose Tree', Bampton, Constant Billy' & 'Bean Setting' from Headington Quarry, and 'Jockey to the Fair', Brackley, to a very appreciative audience, which in-

cluded the Dartington Morris Men and Ladies from Green Willow Clog in Totnes, New members to both the Men's Side and the Junior Team will always receive a warm welcome at the Dartington Primary School till April, 8.15pm for Juniors, seniors till 10.00pm

of the Primary School in the Village has proved to be an excellent recruitment centre for the development of an interest in the Ritual Dance, and the building of a Junior Team over the last 12 months was completed in October 2004.

Jack & Jule Skinner from Habertonford, who danced out regularly during the summer, have been joined by Robert Strachan from Chudleigh Knighton and Felix Limberg from Totnes to complete the set. At the Cider Press Centre



*More of The Rose Tree*

Photo Pat Reid



*Excelling in The Rose Tree*

Photo Pat Reid

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# The Next Foot Up The Tradition Marathon

## 8th - 14th April 2006

by Ben Dauncey

In 1599 a man called William Kemp a member of

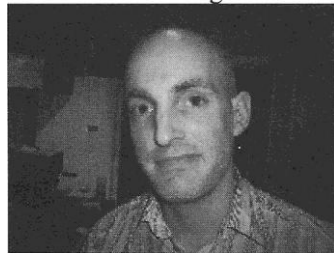


*Woodcut of Will Kemp*

the Shakespeare company danced 150 miles from London to Norwich in 9 days. This mad idea came around because he needed to raise money in order to pay off some rather large gambling debts that he had accumulated whilst playing cards. Well that's the story I heard; he might have just been having a mid life crises and needed to prove he was still a virile young man.

Jump forward about 380 years and Jim Bartlett, from Ravensbourne Morris Men danced a total of 202.5 miles all the way from Orpington in Kent to Worcester. An amazing feat and whereas Kemp did

this dance over nine, non-consecutive days, Jim Bartlett danced his total distance in seven consecutive days. This is the roughly comparable to running a marathon every day. An incredible achievement. I know, I was there. I was only ten years old and my dad, Roger Dauncey, was cook for the event. I can remember spending a day with the team as they wove their way through the English countryside. I danced seven miles with Jim that day. I remember he didn't say much but it must have had an affect on me because in the Easter week of 2006 I will be making my own trip through the old hills of En land from



*Ben Dauncey* Photo Simon Fisher

Tunbridge Wells to Worcester. Some have said I am mad but I prefer to look at it this way. When I saw what Jim was doing I just knew at some point in my life that I would



be making the same journey. It wasn't a maybe. As a child I had made the decision that, as an adult, I will have to live up to. As did Jim before me I will be raising money for the MS society and The Make a Wish Foundation. At the moment I am looking for a physiotherapist to come along for the whole event so if you would like to take part in a little bit of history and help raise some money for some very worthy charities please contact me through the editor.

We are also looking for sponsorship in the form of vehicles and footwear so if you can help at all we would be most grateful. Any media coverage of the event will help us to raise the £100,000 we are aiming for; of course we would love to beat that figure.

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[b.dauncey@ntlworld.com](mailto:b.dauncey@ntlworld.com)

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### *And this is it and that's about it!*

Well, it's good to see Dartington encouraging the youngsters, and I hear through the grapevine the Junior numbers have grown to eight!

The reps voted through some dosh to EFDSS and I am sure we all understood what cause it was going to.

Harthill, take a BOW; a fantastic ARM and superb hosts.

Happy Birthday to Peterborough (25), King John's (30), West Somerset (40), St. Albans (75!), and others who

I don't know about. Someone asked why St. Albans weren't one of the original six that formed the Ring? Well, that would have made it seven!

Barry Care MBE writes about Bampton and the broken fiddle: 'The musician for 1925 was Jinkey Wells, but it was the last time he played for that group. They were all in their cups on arrival back at The Elephant and had an argument over money and accusations were made about Jinkey, this resulted in Nipper Dixey

breaking Jinkey's fiddle!' Which other Past Squire of the Ring has MBE as last 3 letters in his name? Peterborough Morris thanked the Federation for the knitting pattern for the stuffed miniature morris men.

Dudley mentions in his article that reports never live up to the real thing, I beg to differ. He mentions sex, the red light district (for a future visit) and Uherske Hradiste! To which I will draw a distinct veil.

At the ARM I promised Robert I would mention his Fools and Animals Unconvention, Cromford, Matlock, 1-3 July 05. Robert Chisman, is the United Fools Convenor from whom further details can be obtained. Tel 01503 272250;

[triggertrout1@aol.com](mailto:triggertrout1@aol.com)  
Copy dates for next issues 31/07/05; 30/10/05.

Apologies for lateness of this issue, but it was important to include Walter's and Roy's obituaries.