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In this edition we celebrate the last 75 years with a retrospective on the founding of the Morris Ring from John Jenner of Cambridge Morris Men. There is also a selection of photos from the Morris Ring Photographic Archive.

Duncan Broomhead produced a CD of many photographs from which the selected photos have been chosen. It is much appreciated of the time and effort that John and Duncan have put in.

Whilst 75 years is a significant milestone to reflect on, it is also something to celebrate and what better way than through the dance.

There are five Morris Ring Meetings in 2009, hosted by Bathampton (4th-6th September), Exeter (24th-26th July), Men of Wight (21st-23rd August), Hartley (12th-14th June) and Thaxted Morris Men. Indeed, Thaxted Morris Men celebrated their own 75th anniversary last year.

The response from members of the Morris Ring has been



Alec Hunter, first Squire of the Morris Ring 1934-36

Morris Ring Archive (MRA)

tumultuous-over three hundred dancers and musicians are anticipated for the annual Thaxted-hosted Morris Ring Meeting, over the weekend 29th-31st May 2009.

Amongst the great northern sides taking part will be the unique. Britannia Coconut Dancers from Bacup, rarely if ever seen this far south and Saddleworth from Uppermill near Oldham representing the

North West traditions, Monkseaton rapper sword dancers from near Whitley Bay, North Tyneside representing the North East, Leicester Morris Men, Dolphin from Nottingham, Moulton from Northamptonshire and Winster Morris Men from Derbyshire representing the East Midlands, and representing Yorkshire the newly formed Great Yorkshire Morris.

The year has arguably started well with much publicity. This writer may not have seen all the TV, Radio, newspaper articles and letters, but the public response to me

has been nothing but supportive. We should all build on this positive aspect, engage with our public and perhaps we may all have that extra enthusiasm and spring in our steps as we leap into this celebratory 75th anniversary year. For further details of the 2009 Morris Ring Meetings see: <https://themorrisring.org/about-mr/history/previous-meetings>

The Incoming Squire's Report

..... in with the new

The clouds parted over Totnes and the Sunday of the Dartington Morris Ring Meeting turned out to be a lovely warm early autumn day. Ideal for Paul Reece to dance out as Squire of the Morris Ring and for me to dance in. It was a wonderful occasion and one which I shall always remember with much pleasure.

As Squire Elect I spent a lot of time with Paul over the summer of 2008 and learned a lot from him about the business of being Squire of the Morris Ring. Thank you Paul for all your help and I know you will give me the benefit of your advice when I need it during my term of office.

The time since September has been fairly quiet. I went to Bromyard Folk Festival with the Sallyport Sword Dancers and enjoyed tramping through the mud after the Friday night downpour. At the beginning of October I attended the Morris Federation AGM at Skipton and had a master class in how to run an AGM efficiently (and quickly) from their President, Trefor Owen. On the way home I spent an enjoyable Sunday lunchtime with the Rutland Morris Men and their guests who were concluding their weekend of dance. Later in October I was invited to join the Fools and Beasts at their



Dancing with Castleford Longsword at the Sword Spectacular in York on 24 May 2008

Photo: Rosemary Simcox

Unconvention at Colton in Staffordshire. The hosts were the Stafford Morris Men who arranged tours around some of the local towns and villages. I was honoured to be made a member of the order, despite being neither a fool nor beast, on the rather tenuous grounds that I had made the Hartley Morris Men's first hooden horse.

In November I attended a meeting of the Archive Group which is now being chaired by Dick Shilton of Chalice Morris Men. We had a very constructive meeting which concentrated on the progress being made on digitising the archive so that it can be viewed on line and on finding a permanent home for all of our original documents, photos, films and assorted other items. I am pleased to be able to report that progress is being made on both these issues and that

2009 should see some major developments.

In December I attended the Mendip Morris Men's Christmas Ale, in Somerset. I spent Boxing Day, nearer to home in Sussex with the Ashdown Forest Morris Men.

At the beginning of January, the White Star Sword Dancers held their annual outing around west Kent. We always invite a variety of guests so that we can show our audiences the full range of our dancing traditions. This year we had: rapper sword, longsword, Cotswold Morris, clog dancing, mummers, handbell ringing and a performance by a hooden horse. Later in January I was invited to the Goathland Plough Stots plough tour and annual dinner. They dance around the village visiting many houses on their route before

concluding their tour at the wonderful Birch Hall Inn at Beck Hole.

A concern I have about the Morris Ring is that our shows tend to be dominated by Cotswold Morris and the other traditions are sometimes not represented at all. I have, and will continue to encourage our sword, north west, border and mumming sides to play a greater role within the Morris Ring, including attending Morris Ring meetings. It was great to see some North West sides (including the wonderful Bacup Britannia Coconut Dancers) and sword sides apply for a Morris Ring meeting this year. However, they all applied for Thaxted, and all the other meetings will be 100% Cotswold Morris. Much as I love dancing Cotswold, I would like to see a bit of variety and this is still possible if those sides who dance a second tradition make a commitment to perform it. King John's danced north west at Dartington and very good they were too. Chanctonbury Ring dance north west, St Albans, Martlets, Winchester, Plymouth, Broadwood, Greensleeves and Green Man all dance longsword, Moulton, Stafford, Mersey, East Suffolk and Bristol dance rapper and Leicester dance border. I am sure that this is not a complete list. If

those sides who dance a second tradition showed it more often it would add considerable variety to our displays.

I would like to make another point about Morris Ring meetings. They are our flagship events and I would like to see even more sides taking part. This year sixty three sides made successful applications for Morris Ring meetings or are hosts, which is more than last year, but represents only about 42% of our member sides. I have not included associates in this calculation because for various reasons they very rarely come to Morris Ring meetings. Every year we are pleased to see a few sides apply who have not attended for some years, but generally it is the same clubs who come year after year. Clearly the sides that come enjoy

it and must consider it worth the money. In 2009 the cheapest meeting is Hartley at £50 and the most expensive is Thaxted at £75. I often hear people say that Morris Ring meetings are too expensive. They cost what they do because of what is offered, which is a complete package for the weekend including all meals. One way round the cost problem is to offer a flexible package where people can choose the parts they want. We were able to keep the cost down for the Hartley Morris Ring Meeting because we used a village hall rather than a school. This meant that we had to keep the numbers attending fairly low and the facilities at the hall are not as good as at a school. Nevertheless, we received the number of applications we needed to

make the meeting viable. I wonder if this is the way to go in future: more but smaller meetings? This might also have the advantage of spreading the meetings around the country a bit more. It would be good to see more meetings in the north of England. If your side could host a meeting please speak to one of Morris Ring officers. We could include another in 2010 and there is lots of room after that. If you haven't been to a meeting for some time, please consider coming. If you have reasons for not coming please let us know what those reasons are. If you have a suggestion for the type of meeting you would like to see, again, please discuss it with us. On 28 March, the Morris Ring, the Morris Federation and the Open Morris will be getting

together in Nottingham for a day of revels. The three organisations work together very closely for the benefit of the Morris in general. Not only do the officers of the organisations have an excellent working relationship but at club level we are working together as well. The Dolphin Morris Men, for instance, are helping the Lady Bay Revellers with the Nottingham Revels. There are also many instances of clubs from the three organisations getting together for days of dance.

Elsewhere in this issue there are articles about our 75th anniversary. Go out and enjoy it and make it a year to remember!

Brian Tasker
Squire of the Morris Ring



Handsworth Sword Dancers

Handsworth Sword Dancers believe the photograph was taken in 1920 at York. They also believe Cecil Sharp was there. It has been suggested that one of the two men standing in the background is Sharp!

**I am grateful for
Boz Davison and the
Handsworth Men**

**The photograph is owned
by EFDSS**

The Morris Ring

A look back over our 75 year history

by John Jenner

In order to appreciate the formation of the Morris Ring and its influence over the last 75 years one must appreciate that the (revival) "morris" situation was very different from the present. Most clubs or sides were not essentially separate clubs although some had recently been formed but were in essence groups of male dancers organised under the auspices of the local branch of the English Folk Dance Society. They very rarely danced in the streets or other public places, still mainly meeting for practice and to give "private" shows. Oxford May Morning and Thaxted Morris weekends being exceptions. The first street show in Cambridge was not until well after the Second World War, although they had danced in the villages.

However, led by Rolf Gardiner, some Cambridge men had danced in public in 1924 in the Cotswolds and in the following year in the Forest of Dean. Alec Hunter from Letchworth, but also instructing at Thaxted, joined that tour and with Father Jack Putterill may have encouraged the start of the Thaxted bank holiday dancing in the Bull Ring on the following Easter

Monday.

After the first Travelling Morrice tour it was decided by the morris men still in Cambridge to hold a reunion dinner and to form a club "so that those dancing in Cambridge could keep in contact with those who had now left and to invite a guest each year who would then become an honorary member of the Club". Alec Hunter and Douglas Kennedy were invited as guests to the first Feast in 1925.

In 1925 there was a suggestion for a joint club meeting on Royston Heath but this could not be arranged. However in 1926 there was a gathering of the morris clubs, from Cambridge, Letchworth, Thaxted and Ashwell and some individual dancers at Ardeley in Hertfordshire but due to the difficulty of dancing on a Sunday the following year the weekend was transferred to Thaxted, where a Morris gathering has been held each year ever since. After this start other similar weekends were arranged but all were officially under the auspices of the English Folk Dance Society which combined with the Folk Song Society in 1932 to form the English Folk Dance and Song Society. By 1933 the Cambridge men had

met many other dancers on Travelling Morrice or country dance tours, or at the weekends. At the suggestion of Joseph Needham, (Squire) and Arthur Peck (Bagman), a meeting of the Cambridge Morris Men (CMM) was held on 3rd November 1933 to discuss how these men might become associated with the CMM as it seemed impractical to invite them all to a formal Feast in a Cambridge college. It was decided that they should not all be invited to become extraordinary honorary members of the CMM, i.e. by not all being invited as guests, but that their clubs be invited to join a new organisation to be called THE MORRIS RING. The clubs would remain separate organisations but their members could join together occasionally for weekends of dancing.

Joseph agreed to write to five other clubs to gauge the support, but in fact the letter to Greensleeves was not sent, however the support from Letchworth, Oxford, Thaxted and East Surrey was sufficient to go ahead. During a week of dancing practice for members of the CMM in April 1934 a constitution was worked out. The objects much as in the present constitution and the organisation to remain very simple with just two

elected officers as in the CMM and the names of Alec Hunter (Letchworth and Thaxted) as Squire and Walter Abson (Cambridge) as Bagman were proposed.

It was therefore at the 10th Feast held on April 14th 1934 that the Morris Ring was instituted, and it was suggested that the Morris Ring should be constituted at the Thaxted weekend as something already in being. On the Monday Joseph wrote to William Ganiford of Greensleeves apologising for the oversight and giving a copy of his original letter, and a full letter of 14 points setting out the reasons for founding the Morris Ring and the plans to carry this through.

One of the main concerns was the relationship with the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) and quoting from the letter "none of those concerned envisage that the Morris Ring will trespass on any of the obvious functions of the EFDSS such as that of being a learned society, or repository of information relating to folk-dancing or that of being a central arbiter of technique or of conducting technical or pedagogical examinations. As regards teaching, however, the experience of Thaxted

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probably shows that the Morris Ring would hardly be able to bind itself to absolutely no teaching since teaching includes after all, team practice indefinitely after the principles of the dance are learnt. The position arises owing to a certain failure of the EFDSS to understand the optimum conditions for the flourishing of the Morris. These conditions are the close association together of men, and men only, in a club, with activities which include spontaneously organised meetings and tours".

The Morris Ring having been instituted in Cambridge, the Constitutional Meeting was held at Thaxted on June 2nd and this was followed by the formal inaugural meeting at Cecil Sharp House on October 20th at which Alec and Walter officially took office. Although the whole idea was Joseph Needham's he was too much involved in his academic work to have much further influence. However, Arthur Peck was appointed Recorder, a position he held until he died in 1974.

Alec Hunter was an active figurehead and his fine presence and dancing set the way for Squires to follow at Morris Ring Meetings. However it was Walter Abson who, as Bagman, got the Morris Ring going and apart from writing letters to other clubs was the main

organiser of meetings of the Morris Ring, many of which were held at Cecil Sharp House and were what we would now think of as one day instructionals. Thaxted followed the pattern of their previous weekends and these were the model for most subsequent meetings. Obviously the club helped with the local arrangements, but even here it was Walter who acted as Bagman for the event. It should be said that the main emphasis was on instruction and dancing together with men, not full sides, from elsewhere and that any public dancing was subsidiary to the weekend, although over the years especially after the war the emphasis changed towards public shows.

In May 1936 the Morris Ring officers and others arranged a visit to Bampton in order to "learn how the present side dance". They were very warmly welcomed by William Wells and a full side to demonstrate. It was Arthur Peck's idea to publish a new morris book with a new and different notation from the Sharp books. However, the draft for Bampton and Headington was not very well received and the whole idea lapsed at the outbreak of the war. No weekend meetings were held for seven years and Douglas Kennedy acted as Squire throughout this period.

Arthur Peck was elected Squire in 1947, staying for three years as Richard Callender died before taking office, and did a great work aided by Bob Ross as Bagman to get the Morris Ring into full swing after the War. Gradually the organisation of meetings, other than those at the House, was taken over by clubs and this was extended by Russell Wortley, who took over from Bob in 1950. Russell brought to the post his deep academic interest in the history of the morris and of the various traditions, particularly Bucknell.

After the war Morris Ring meeting weekends concentrated on activities for full club sides and for dancing out, however instructional days for individual dancers in various traditions continued to be held, often at Cecil Sharp House, and in more recent times there have been very successful jig and musician weekends, notably those held at Chipperfield, Sarat, Sutton Bonington and Wilstone.

By 1959 it was thought by various members of the CMM, that due to the large number of clubs represented at the Annual Reps Meeting it had become a speech making event and no constructive directions made and the small business meetings at Morris Ring meetings served little purpose.

However, the officers needed some sort of support, not only in planning the future way forward, but deciding what should happen in an emergency, for example, if one of them should die or be unable to continue in office. At the annual meeting of the CMM held on 24th October 1959 it was proposed that some form of Council of past Squires and Bagmen should be formed primarily to consider the way the Morris Ring had grown to that date and its future. At 1.00 am Kenworthy proposed that the matter should be left to the local men to draw up the details, following submissions by men who could not be present.

A very long meeting was held on the following Thursday and subsequently the CMM proposed at the January Annual Reps meeting that a Council of all past and present officers be formed and that the Morris Ring Constitution be amended to take this into effect. In 1974 the Constitution was again changed and four elected members from the clubs were added to the Advisory Council and after a special meeting in Birmingham in October 1976 and the following two annual meetings, at which full democratisation of the Morris Ring through a fully elected Council was considered, it was agreed in February 1978 that the

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Advisory Council should in addition to all past and present officers have nine elected members who would be elected by clubs within the various areas. It should be noted that the sole executive powers of the current officers remain and that the council is there to guide and help in the development of the Morris Ring and its general interests.

In 1959 Ewart Russell took over as Bagman and his influence and guiding hand led the Morris Ring for the next twelve years. He started the Morris Dancer as a Journal for "learned" articles as opposed to general matters which were in the circulars. The only previous outlet for such articles had been the EFDSS Journal and some of the more learned articles still appear there. During the sixties and seventies there was a great expansion of the Morris and numerous new clubs were formed and some of the Morris Ring meetings were very large. In 1971 nearly 350 men attended the feast in Trinity

College Cambridge. The work of the Bagman also increased so in 1977 it was decided to split the Bagman's job and Barry Care was elected as the first Treasurer.

The Advisory Council had been aware for some years that there was a need for some sort of handbook to replace the Cecil Sharp books, which were then out of print, and in any case were "dated" and did not have any of the recent dances or variations. So in 1974 Lionel Bacon was persuaded to "polish up" his personal aide-memoir and it was published in loose leaf form by the Letchworth Morris Men on behalf of the Morris Ring. Lionel Bacon's influence with the book cannot be passed over, but it should be always remembered that he was very concerned that the Black Book was becoming "the Bible" of the Morris and was very firmly of the opinion that it was an only an aide-memoir and that the Morris should continue to be taught by personal

instruction.

On 12th May 1984 nearly a thousand morris men gathered at The Metropole Hotel in Birmingham to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Morris Ring. Joseph Needham, by now a very well known figure in the academic world, was the main guest and he told us why and how he and Arthur Peck and other Cambridge men had been the main instigators behind the founding of the Morris Ring.

As mentioned above there was concern in 1934 about the relationship with the EFDSS. However, the Morris Ring is grateful to the Society who gave the Squire's badge in 1955 to mark the Morris Ring's twenty-first anniversary. Over the 75 years the two bodies have moved on as parallel organisations. The Morris Ring as an umbrella organisation for separate independent clubs, but the Society still a national body for individual members with branches and the excellent Vaughan William's Library. Both EFDSS

Directors Douglas Kennedy and Nibs Matthews were Squires of the Morris Ring. The Morris Ring has worked together with the Society on various matters and has taken over much of their historical function in publishing articles etc., and in the immense work of our various archivists and individual collectors and as the main instructor of men's Morris.

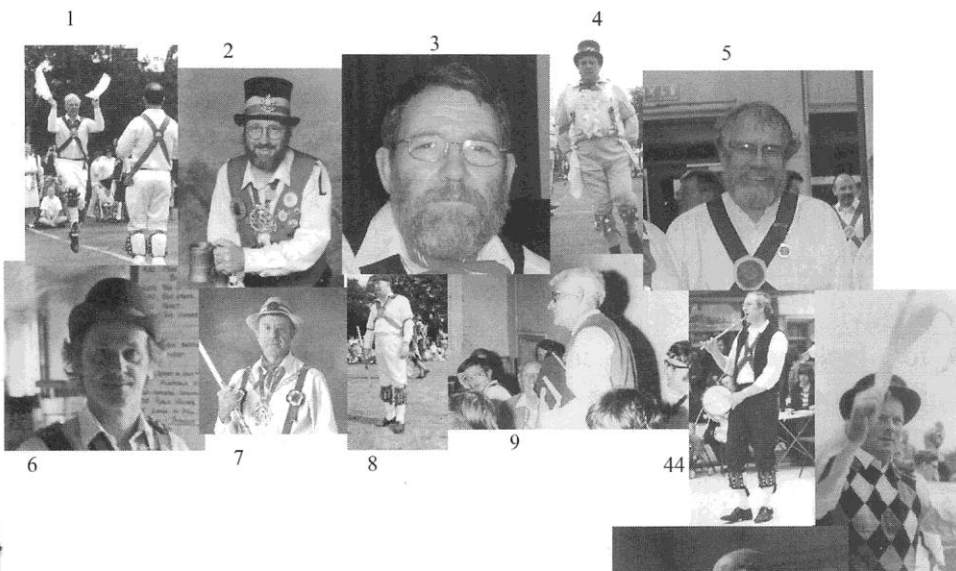
To summarise, whilst it was the initial inspiration of Joseph Needham and other Cambridge Men who started the Morris Ring, surely the biggest influence over the past 75 years must be Thaxted, who before the Morris Ring was instituted had set the pattern for all future meetings. We must acknowledge not only the club's succession of morris men, but also its citizens and the vicars at the church who have given so much support over the years.

John Jenner is a member of Cambridge Morris Men (NB The English Folk Dance Society merged with The Folk Song Society in 1932 to form The English Folk Dance and Song Society-ed.)

The Morris Ring Photographic Archive

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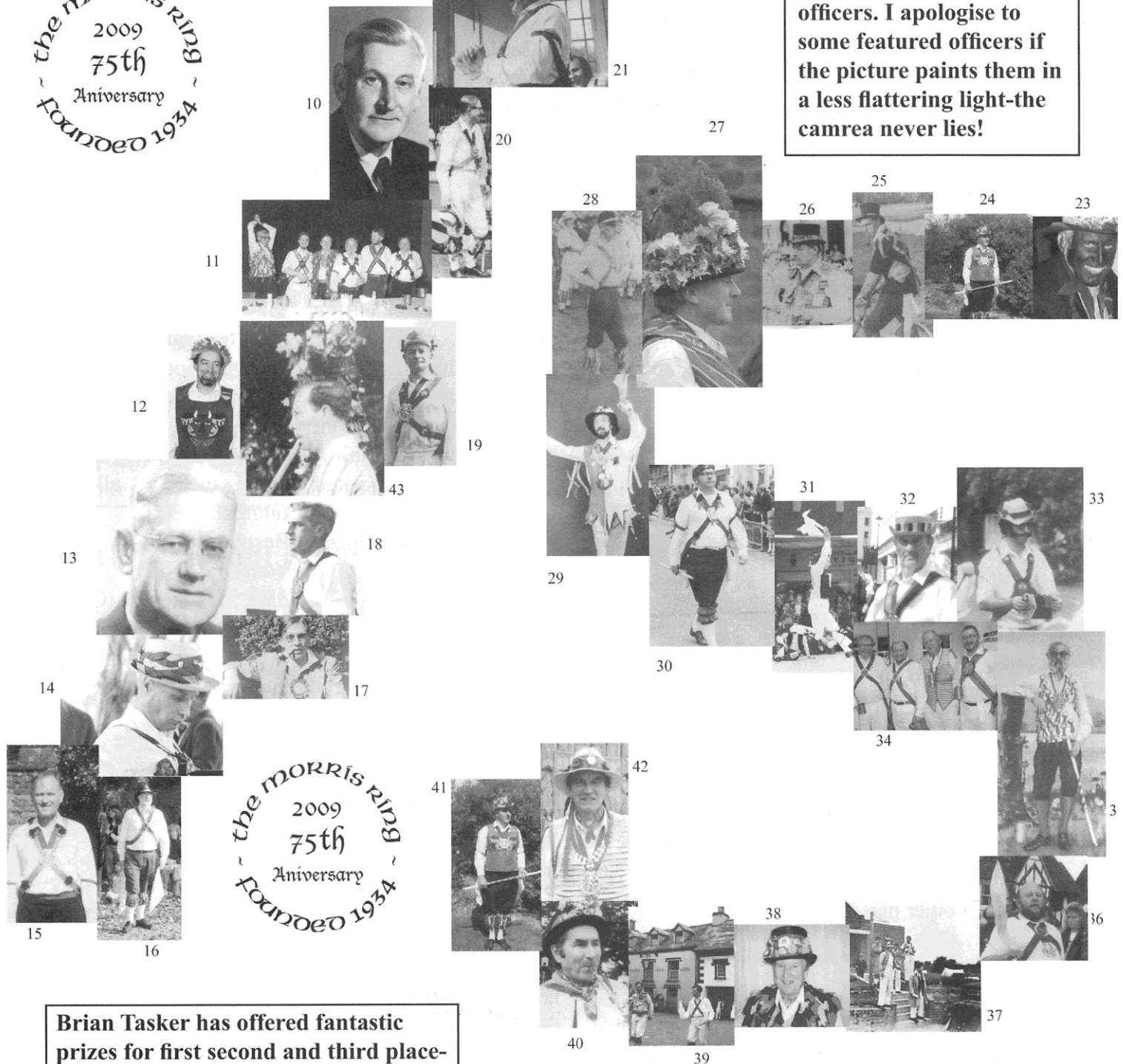
a = possibly Alec Hunter; b= Adlington Morris Men Archive; c = Bedford Morris Men; c = Bristol Morris Men; d = Photographs © Brenda Venebles; e= Photographs © Circle Photography, 15 The Nook, Anstey, Leicestershire; f = Photographs © David Campbell, 6a Church Street, Saffron Walden, Essex, The David Campbell collection is now held by Saffron Walden Town Library Society, The Secretary, 2 King Street, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB10 1ES; g = Photographs © Dave Fisher; h = Photographs © Don Reid, The Barons, Bishop Stortford, Herts, CM23 4HR j = Photographs © E.C.Cawte; K = East Surrey Morris Men; m = Greensleeves Morris Men; n = Harthill Morris Men; o = Photographs © Helen Manning, p = Photographs © Ian & Gabrielle Anderson; q = Photographs © Jenny Care; r = Jockey Morris Men; s = Leyland Morris Men; t = Shakespeare Morris Men; u = Walter Abson; v = W.G.Manning Collection; w = White Hart Morris Men;x=Hartley MM; y=Paul Reece;z=Pru Boswell;JF=John Frearson; GR=Gordon Ridgewell; HS=Harry Stevenson; RH=Richard Hankinson. The codes refer to photos on pages 7, 16, 17 and 20 and follow the number or description. {page 7 copyright: 1,3,4,5,23=HS; 6,31,34, 44=p; 9,14,21,30=f; 7=x; 15=m16-JF; 27=q;32=t;35=z; 37=a; 39=u; Page 16:4,5f;Page 17:Page 20: 1,11u; 4j; 5,6,7,8,9,12f; 10,13o}



Competition

Name the Officers

In celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Morris Ring, the Morris Ring Circular invites readers to put a name to a face. Some men are featured more than once and some officers are missing. Extra points can be gained if you can name the missing officers. I apologise to some featured officers if the picture paints them in a less flattering light-the camrea never lies!



Brian Tasker has offered fantastic prizes for first second and third place-it's just that he doesn't know about it yet! Enter now.



The Morris Ring Circular

January
Issue No 58

Letters To The Editor



Dear Harry,

A lot has been said, broadcast, televised and written this week (i.e. w/c 5 Jan 09) regarding the future of Morris dancing beyond twenty-years time, which prompted this letter.

Grimsby Morris Men like others suffer from membership numbers (108 members over 40 years 1967 - 2007 and starting 2009 with 19).

During 2003/4 member Liam Robinson set up a Mini-Morris company, which successfully visited local schools etc teaching 8-14 year olds the life of folk dancing inc. Morris; the styles and history. These visits have proved the most popular and have set a 'seed' for the future generations.

The Grimsby Morris archives since the formation and the re birth of 1967 have been a treasure chest of photo's and information. A couple of years ago,

as the present archivist, I undertook to look through and enlarge the photo's from snap size to A4, and during 2009 they are being displayed in local libraries etc, one per month complete with membership forms and 'post box'.

Since October 2005 for dance-outs we have always taken a Visitors Book used as a comments book for onlookers to write their thoughts and to be involved not only in memory by sight but a conscious expression in words. We are now onto our third volume with over 2000 contributions. The books not only act as a diary, they are a historical record for the future.

No end of times folk says "I saw you last year, can I put another comment in the book". You see it builds up a following too.

On 28 December 1749 the then Grimsby Morris

men disappeared after an earthquake interrupted their dancing and my quest is to find their names, but that seems a wild goose chase!*

This mustn't happen to the present side, so I have filed photographs of each. I also found the local and county archives have no details of Morris men or dancing in the area so booklets have been produced and deposited with them.

The booklets are roughly 54 pages thick, there are three volumes condensing 40 years plus earlier histories into hand-held documents that can be easily read and a constant source of information.

They have been deposited with:

North East Lincolnshire Archives, Grimsby;
Lincolnshire Archives, Lincoln;
Central Library, Grimsby; English Folk Dance & Song Society, Cecil Sharp

House, London.

Not only are we trying to recruit new members, we are involving onlookers and giving a history a source of inspiration for years to come.

In the meantime we are building on our annual events so that the public associate the time of the year with what we are doing; examples being the 41st Boxing Day tour, 27th Annual Waes-hal, 30 years of Plough Plays, umpteen St. George's Day events, May Day of course and local festivals.

It is a long slog, very enjoyable and I hope I have given some ideas to other sides.

Good luck to all our futures!

Best wishes,

Yours very truly,

Ian Horsley (GMM Archivist)

(Pictures of Grimsby on facing page)

*Lincoln, Rutland & Stamford Mercury

Dated: 6th January 1750

At Laceby in Lincolnshire and in several other parts of the county as well as of the counties of York and Nottingham the Earthquake was felt very sensibly. And at Laceby aforesaid there happen'd this remarkable story:

On Innocents Day in the afternoon, several Morris Dancers *came thither from Grimsby*; and after they had danced and' played their Tricks, they went towards Alesby, a little town not far off; but, as they were going

about five o'clock they felt two such terrible shocks of the Earth, that they had much ado to hold their feet, and they thought the ground was ready to swallow them up whereupon thinking that God was angry with them

for playing the fool, they returned immediately to Laceby in a great fright, and the next day home not daring to pursue their intended Circuit and Dancing.



The Morris Ring Circular Editorial



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The first Morris Ring Circular of 2009 celebrates The Morris Ring's 75th Anniversary. The next two issues will continue with photographs from the Morris Ring Archive, under the custodianship of Duncan Broomhead. From that Archive, Duncan has selected a broad sample depicting the various sides, from various eras from the diverse families within the broad definition of 'Morris' in our 75 years, and in indeed in some cases beyond. Space and the need for variation prevent all member sides being depicted, but watch out in future issues.

Articles and photo's planned for the next issue include the Mersey Morris Men's Morris Ring Meeting report, a selection of photo's from Horwich Prize Medal Men's Morris, and other amazing and authoritative alliterative accounts. Phew!

An idea A special edition of this organ containing a single photograph of every member-club dancing in 2009. Likely to be published in 2010, it does put a small onus on clubs to send-post or email-a photograph of your club to The Morris Ring Circular. Simple. Of course, you can send more than one -

others will reproduce better than some. But, please remember to include date, place, event, photographer's name (and copyright, if different).

The Treasurer, Steve Adamson has decided to call it a day. Steve has been the elected treasurer of the Morris Ring since 1994: at that time the Morris Shop was in existence and he has continued to combine the two roles ever since. During his term of office not only has the shop grown from strength to strength, but its financial contribution to the Morris Rings's financial well-being cannot be

underestimated. Indeed, his professionalism with the organisation of the Morris Ring accounts is also acknowledged.

These achievements are worthy of more than one individual, yet set against some personal circumstances which he, outwardly at least, has borne with a stoicism and goodly humour.

The Morris Ring is indebted to Steve and he receives all our appreciation and thanks. The editor will continue to utilise his counsel and proof reading ability. Cheers matey!

18th January 2009 Waes-hals

Grimsby Morris Men dancing at Skidbrooke Cyder Orchard

Photo's: Trevor Jones



Ian Dunmur

Clog dancer, musician and a founder member of Kennet MM

by John Walford

Ian Dunmur had a major operation in the summer of 2008 and made a quick recovery. Shortly before he was expected to return home from

convalescence, when he was organising a programme of meetings for two societies using his mobile phone, he caught a fatal viral infection. He was cremated in Carlisle on the first of September. Ian was active in his University Folk Dance Club and when the existing 'experts' moved on, he took over. With the aim of teaching Morris Dancing he attended practice sessions of the local teams to learn the art, and he subsequently taught it at the University Folk Dance Club. Ian took up employment in Berkshire in 1957 and went to a Morris evening class in Reading run by Daphne Green, the local EFDSS representative. This was the origin of the Kennet Morris Men, although it was another two years before they became independent of the evening class, decided on their name and started giving displays. When the founding Squire and main musician left the KMM about 9 years later, Ian was the obvious choice to take over both roles, but after 2 years he instigated the annual election of Squires.



Ian could play a number of musical instruments, including a concertina and a home-made pipe and tabor for the Morris. He seemed to have the ability to instantly play any Cotswold Morris dance at the right tempo, even when called on without previous warning. Ian remained the principal musician of the KMM until retiring with his wife Ailsa to the Lake District in the 90s. Ian founded the Barn Owls band for folk dances, and when they became independent of him he created the

Berkshire Tragedy band. He organised a number of workshops for folk dance musicians. In the first half of the 60s Ian was a co-founder of a dance group that specialised in Traditional dances, particularly clog dancing and those that involved stepping that had virtually dropped out of the folk dance repertoire. The group, after much debating, decided on the name of the Reading Traditional & Step Dance Group, but were generally known as the Reading Cloggies. Members of the group researched and collected stepping from various parts of the Country. Ian, along with his wife, specialised in the clog dances of the Lake District, following on from the work of the late Tom Flett, and became possibly the most knowledgeable person on Lakeland clogging. The group made a significant contribution to the revival of clog dancing in this country by teaching at workshops; their own annual day of workshops attracted people from all over the country and a few from abroad. Ian also had the skills of a showman. A notable occasion was at a display of clog dancing at the Sidmouth Folk Festival. Ian was looking up and smiling at the audience apparently unaware of

a cable lying across the stage connected to a microphone to pick up the sound of his clogging. His dancing crisscrossed the cable and microphone, and not only riveted the attention of the audience, but also the rest of the display team.

In the Lake District he formed the Reunion Band with two past members of the Berkshire Tragedy now living in the area. He continued teaching clog steps and was active in the local community. He was a member of an Industrial Archaeology society and owned a large collection of hand tools that took up a significant part of a barn. He displayed selected items at local exhibitions. Ian returned to Reading in 1997 for the KMM's celebration of 40 years: a walking tour around the town dancing at 40 pubs. He often met up with the KMM during their annual visits to Saddleworth, and he attended their 50th year celebrations in September 2007 where he performed his 17-step Lakeland routine - still very agile in his mid 70s.

Photo-Ian playing his pipe and tabor for a Morris display in Henley-on-Thames during our 50th Anniversary Weekend of Dance in 2007.

John Walford is a member of Kennet Morris Men

Thomas Albert Townsend "Son" 24th May 1914 - 24th December 2008

On Christmas Eve an era in the history of the Traditional Bampton Morris dancers came to an end with the death of Sonny Townsend, a man whose family connections with the tradition went back over two hundred years.

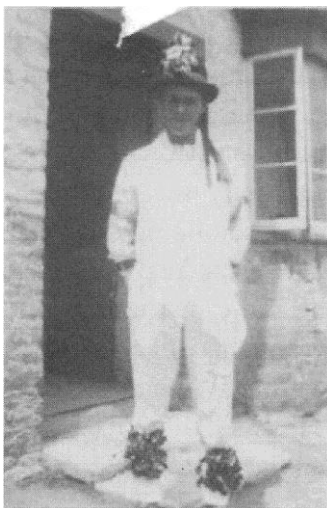
Although he was known all his life as 'Son', 'Sonny', or Sonner and he never answered to his proper name, he was christened Thomas Albert Townsend: born on 24th May 1914 to the landlord and landlady of The Elephant & Castle pub in Bampton in the Bush, Oxfordshire. At that time the public house was the headquarters of the Bampton Morris Dancers, and as a boy Sonny would watch at their practices and occasionally he was allowed to dance in. A few days after his eleventh birthday at Whitsun 1925 he was told he was needed to dance out with the team as one of the Tanner brothers was unwell.

Young Sonny wasn't keen to get all dressed up in his white clothes, bells and beribboned bowler hat and join the Morris dancers in their traditional Whitsun festivities dancing round Bampton all day. But as they were one short, needed him, and it is a tradition that's been going for hundreds of years, he received a traditional persuasion - a



Arnold Woodley and Sonny Townsend, late 1980's, Arnold Woodley's papers

clip across the ear from his grandfather. Mindful that his Grandfather had once danced with the team, young Sonny forgot his shyness and joined in



Sonny Townsend, 1932. (Photo' given to Barry Care by Sonny)

the Whitsun dancing.

When once questioned about it Sonny explained it: "One of the dancers dropped out at the last minute and I was told to take his place. I didn't want to do it, but Grandfather soon settled that and in those days you did as you were told." He admitted how much he had enjoyed that day, starting off the dancing at 8am, but the fun had started before that. He would relate about how everyone had come into his Dad's pub and enjoyed a drink or two before setting off. Beer was 2d and 4d a pint, and

whisky 6d a shot. They danced all round the village until mid morning when they returned to the Elephant and Castle for bread, cheese, pickles and more beer; then carried on dancing.

In the afternoon they went round all the big houses, dancing on the lawns and were treated to more refreshments. In the evening there was more dancing round each of the pubs until about 8pm, and then it was back to the Elephant & Castle for a barn dance in the yard joined by all the wives, girlfriends and other villagers. The pattern he described at that time can still be seen in Bampton these days, and Sonny kept up his association with the Morris in Bampton for some eighty years.

Sonny was certainly a link with the past history of Bampton Morris and had a fascinating pedigree. His grandfather already mentioned was Thomas Porlock, one of three brothers who danced in the last half of the 19th Century. Thomas Porlock was married to Elizabeth, sister of Harry Radband, one time leader of the team, and she was Aunt to William "Jinky" Wells. Son's mother, Elizabeth was granddaughter of Thomas "Jingle" Radband, born in 1776 and went on to lead the

Son Townsend continued...



Bampton Morris for fifty years and was also their musician.

Sonny's father, Albert, was not a dancer. As well as keeping the pub he had a fruit and vegetable business and Sonny could remember boyhood trips to Ilmington in Warwickshire (another Morris village) where he met up with the traditional fiddler Sam Bennett. He went there to help his father pick plums in Sam's orchard. It was Sam Bennett who took over the musician's role at Bampton when Jinky Wells left the team.

The members of the old original team Sonny had joined had argued with their musician, William "Jinky" Wells, best known as the provider of the dance information to the folk dance and song collector Cecil Sharp. The following year Jinky

broke away from the team, teaching a new side of boys in the village later to be led by Francis Shergold whose obituary recently appeared (The Guardian 13/1/09). In order to carry on, the old side recruited Sam Bennett for Whitsun 1926, and up to 1940 there were two teams in the village, but the difficulties of the wartime period saw them come together for several years. Then in the 1950's the two sides separated again and the old side was reformed under the leadership of Arnold Woodley and Son Townsend became their Clown and instructor of the dances.

In his working life Sonny served in the Fire Service for many years, and later worked at the famous Early's Blanket Works in Witney. In his retirement he served on

the committee of the Windrush Club also in Witney, and was involved in the various charity fund raising efforts. Sonny kept up his interest and support of Bampton Morris and he continued to administer the smacks with his bladder to keep the dancers on their toes until he was well into his eighties. In 2005 Sonny was presented with an engraved tankard by Bob Cross, Squire of The Morris Ring to mark his eighty years of association with Bampton Morris. At that ceremony the old fiddle once belonging to Jinky Wells was played, being the same instrument that Sonny had danced to at his first Whitsun in 1925. He was quite overcome on that occasion. For the last few years he spent his time in a retirement home in Bampton, but

always pleased to see old friends. The Traditional Bampton Morris Dancers called in to see him during the Spring Bank Holiday Monday dancing in May 2008 and danced several jigs for him. He died peacefully on Christmas Eve 2008 and his funeral was at Bampton Parish Church on Monday 5th January 2009. Bampton Morris musicians played his favourite tune "Old Tom of Oxford" at his graveside, something he had requested. He lies among so many other past dancers in the peaceful village cemetery.

Barry Care M.B.E.
Clown
Traditional Bampton
Morris Dancers

Photo: Mollie Care, Whitsun
2008

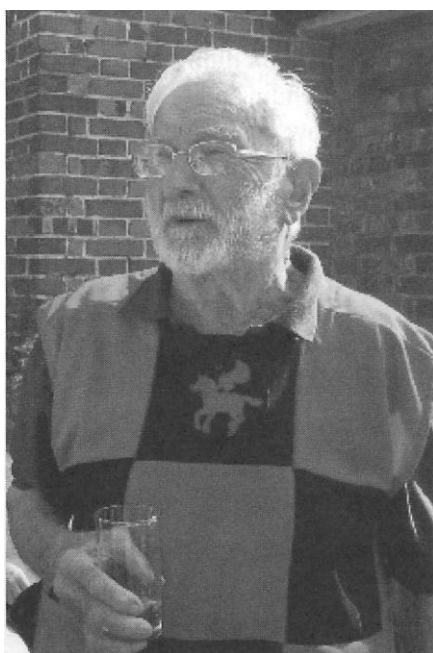
Denis Manners, 1920 - 2009

Founder, Towersey Morris

On 2nd January, 2009 Towersey Morris lost its dear old founder, Denis Manners. He was 88, still loving life and humanity, though missing his wife, Sheila, who had died the previous summer. She had first become his girlfriend in 1946, sixty-two years earlier.

Denis's involvement with the Morris started when he lived in Kidlington, Oxfordshire, in the 1950's. He soon joined Oxford City Morris, which was becoming revitalised after some years when its only activity had been its Squire dancing a jig on Magdalen Bridge on May Day each year, just to keep the side in existence. Soon after, Denis himself was Squire, a post he held for seven years.

Denis, Sheila and their children moved to Towersey, where Denis built his home, "Long Odds" right next to The Three Horseshoes and brought Oxford City there to dance. "The local yobbos", as Denis always called them, laughed at the dancing and Denis told them they'd have the right to laugh if they could do better. Quite incredibly, Denis's charisma, personal magnetism and goodwill caused these young lads, not to sneer some expletive laden rejoinder, but to become the founder members of Towersey Morris Men, and Denis to become



virtually a second father to them all.

It may be that Denis was such a great Morris man at least partly because he was so much more than a Morris man. Not only did he have his lifelong interests in socialism and the peace movement, (a belief he only suspended to take up arms against Nazi Germany), but he had thrown himself wholeheartedly into Towersey village, with its ruinous, toilet-less village hall. After one of the legendary "Long Odds" weekend breakfasts, where guests were quite likely to outnumber the family, Denis, Louis Rusby and Roy Bailey (yes, that's why almost every Towersey Festival has him headlining a concert or two) slipped through the gate that Denis had installed between his garden and The Three Horseshoes

and sat down to consider the problem. "We should hold a festival to raise funds," said Denis, and so they did. Didn't they just. Denis ran it for the first twelve years, by the end of which time it was a national institution, and of course it's going from strength to strength to this day.

As age made convenience more important to them, Denis and Sheila moved into Thame, where they were living in 1998, when Denis was awarded the MBE for his services to Morris dancing. Though not a great believer in the honours list, he felt it was partly recognition of the Morris's place in English tradition, and also that it would be churlish to turn it down. Buckingham Palace though, was not a place he intended to grace with his presence and he opted to be invested by the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire at Thame Town Hall. With Towersey leading, all the Morris sides Denis had been involved with danced, followed by his limousine (chauffeured by Nigel Cox, current Bagman of Whitchurch) down the High Street. Dancing before, dancing

after, the wonderful Morris tunes, it was a huge celebration of what Denis meant to us all. The Lord Lieutenant loved every minute and talks about it to this day.

In 2006, Denis, Sheila and Jenny, their daughter, moved to Nottingham to be close to the main body of the family, though he visited Towersey several times a year, including the 5.30 a.m. dancing the Sun up on May Morning. Of course, August Bank Holiday weekend was *always* spent at Towersey Festival, where Towersey, the first Morris side he founded, (he also founded Crendon Morris Men) danced every year, and although the last of his yobbos had ceased to be active in the Side, he never missed the chance to catch up with us.

Roy Bailey, Denis's great friend, and the patron of Towersey Festival, sings a song with the lines,

"And the only measure of your time on this Earth,
Is the love you leave behind you when you're gone."

If that be true, Denis William Manners was without doubt a great man indeed.

Andy Hardy
Towersey Morris *Photo,*
Towersey Morris

The Jigs Instructional — A Virgin's View

Sutton Bonington, 2009

by Steve Holder

I've been dancing quite a while now and never really got around to learning a decent jig. There's a couple I've had a go at, but they've never seemed to strike just that right chord with me. For the last couple of years I've been thinking that perhaps the place to remedy this would be the Morris Ring's Jigs Instructional, this year I finally took the plunge. Friday 16th January, 2009 saw me picking our foreman up and heading towards Sutton Bonington for a weekend of learning jigs. This was it, I was going to find that solo dance that suited me and master it with a couple of days intensive tuition.

Well, I was right, in parts... I didn't actually get to learn a jig to a degree I'd be confident dancing it out, but I did get to try out loads — and there were one or two there I would like to think about taking further.

We arrived at the Village Hall at around 6:30, to find that most people had already arrived and set up camp, the most popular place seeming to be the library. After a quick cuppa we laid out our bedding in the corner of the hall and headed off towards the local pub for a couple of quick pints before supper. After supper, served in the main hall, we were given an introduction to the weekend by Geoff Jerram. As Geoff welcomed us it became apparent why so many men had actually been there so early, many of them were repeat visitors, and had

been for a number of years, hence all the prime spaces being bagged early!

Introductions over, at 9pm we were into the first session — an hour of Headington jigs. This was where I began to realise that my perception and assumption of what the weekend was about didn't match the reality. Rather than being taught individual jigs in detail the session covered a number of jigs from the tradition with 10 to 15 minutes spent on each, the dances being demonstrated and then everyone having a go.

After the first session it was back to the pub for more beer, songs and tunes, I have to confess I was an early leaver. The gaiety (apparently) continued for a good couple of hours after I'd gone to sleep thank heaven for industrial strength ear-plugs!

What a civilised awakening, our hosts bringing cups of tea to us in our pits! A much appreciated gesture. Just time to get breakfast out of the way and then on with the day.

Saturday was broken into four traditions — Fieldtown, Bledington, Bampton and Sherborne. Around 75 minutes was allocated to each session and there was a 'Basic' and 'Advanced' class for each. The formula followed pretty much the same pattern as the previous evening; demo, all have a go and then onto the next dance.

As the day wore on I noticed more differences between the old-hands and the virgins. Some of the

regulars didn't appear to be attending all of the sessions. Now, the tight part of me found this a very difficult concept to handle — I like to get my full moneys worth! Deliberately bunking off would be anathema; but as the day wore on I could see the value of the 'less is more' approach. By the time you're approaching your fifteenth jig of the day it can all start to get a bit muddled. Choosing what you want to concentrate on does help you focus,

Saturday night's feast was superb, I'm useless at learning names quickly but I seem to recall that the main architects of our gastric delight were Albert and Ian — excellent work, gents. Just to make the evening a little more special we were joined by Bert Cleaver for, as I understand it, the first time since he handed the weekend over to others.

Feast over, the tables were quickly cleared away and it was back down to the pub for ale, songs and tunes.

Again we were stirred with warm cups of tea & could really get used to that — Morris Ring Meetings, please note J). After breakfast there followed a single session on jigs from Oddington and Ascot, with a reprise of what had been covered on Friday and Saturday. After lunch and clearing up it was back home and time to reflect on the weekend.

Now, and this is purely a personal opinion, I think the weekend's title is a bit of a misnomer. In my view 'Jigs Taster' would be

more apt and better reflect the programme. Speaking to Geoff and a couple of the other instructors (my apologies, chaps — as I said above, I'm not too quick on getting names) I could see some of the reasons why things are as they are. It does show anyone attending a broad spectrum of jigs across a good range of traditions. Find one you like and you can work on it; everyone I spoke to seemed willing to come along to a practice to do a bit of a specific teaching.

My personal preference would perhaps be more of a halfway approach, reduce the number of main traditions by half, teach a couple of them in the morning and then follow up in the afternoon with consolidation sessions on what had been taught in the morning.

At the end of the day success has to be measured by whether I gained anything from the weekend and the answer has to be 'Yes'. I picked up some useful tips to apply to my dancing in general, I've identified some jigs I'd like to look at in more detail and I spent the weekend in the company of a great bunch of blokes.

I suppose the acid test is 'Would I go again?' and the answer would have to be, again 'Yes', although my general approach might be a little different. Would I recommend it to anyone else? Again, the answer would be 'Yes'.

I have to conclude by thanking everyone involved

continued on page 15

in the weekend for their terrific commitment, organisation and effort, you did yourselves proud. The instruction was good and the food was excellent.

I couldn't end, though, without a special word of praise for Dolphin, who for a number of years have

organised this event but have now passed the baton on. On Friday night Geoff had said that in previous years men from Dolphin had served food to the tables at the feast but this year, as they were no longer involved he would be asking a table to take on the

waiting role for each course. As the feast rolled on and courses came and went I couldn't see this happening. It seems that Dolphin were unable to easily give up their occasional careers as waiters and turned up to deliver out food. That's what I call dedication.

Thanks boys!

Steve Holder is member of Jockey Men's Morris Club (*The gastric experts were indeed Albert (Wilkins) and Ian (Small) of Winchester Morris Men, trading as Hampshire Basin-ed*)

Is the morris in danger of dying out in 20 years' time? I doubt it!....



....so writes Hilary Blanford.

Top two photographs: Young talent at Pin Mill, Suffolk on Boxing Day 2008, East Suffolk Morris Men

Above, left & right: Cambridge Morris Men dancing outside King's College on Plough Monday 2009

Left: Young people watching the Cambridge Morris Men who were performing East Anglian Molly dances in Cambridge on Plough Monday 2009





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1 Five Fools, Bedford RM 1950;
2 Barnsley Longsword, Thaxted RM 1972; 3 Beaux of London City, Thaxted RM 1952; 4. Colchester, Thaxted RM, 1967 (f) 5 Bedford, Thaxted RM, 1969; 6 Country Dancing, Thaxted RM, 1936; page 17: 7 Saddleworth, 1977(RH); 8 Manley, Boar's Head RM 1992 (Hs); 9 Monkseaton, Thaxted RM, 2008 (GR); 10 Thaxted, 1970 (0; 11 Britannia Coconut Dancers, Saddleworth, 2008 (b);

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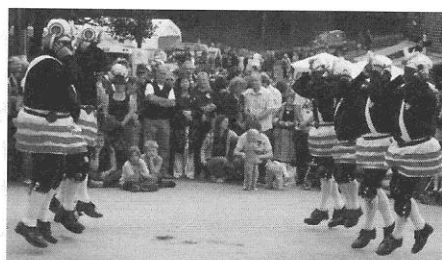
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16



12 Claro Sword, Boar's Head RM, 1992, (HS); 13 Greensleeves, Greensleeves RM, 2006 (HS); 14 Cambridge, Thaxted RM, 1970 (f); 15 East Surrey, Thaxted RM 1969 (f); 16 Silurian, recently, queuing

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12





East Suffolk Morris Men

Golden Jubilee 2008



by Adam Garland

So that's it then, another dancing season over, and as all sides do at this time of year, a time to reflect on the venues and dancing we have seen over the summer.

This year, however, we have something a little more to reflect on, a little more to be proud of, for this year was our fiftieth anniversary.

We decided a long time ago that we were going to make this year something special, different events were given to different groups of members to arrange and we decided to put a little bit of extra effort into the programme thereby making our 'birthday' special not only for East Suffolk Morris Men but also for the people of Suffolk, especially the younger generations.

Our Dancing year traditionally starts on May 1st where we can be seen on Felixstowe sea front celebrating Beltane, dancing in the summer and welcoming the sun which this year put on a ESMM on May Day



SMM with members of Zonne, Southwold

superb show for us. It also coincided this year with the celebration of our founding member's eightieth birthday, Desmond Herring.

Desmond and his Hobby Horse, Constant Billy, still appear with us and as a mark of respect ESMM went with him to Nordlinger in Germany as a birthday trip.

The spring Bank Holiday arrived in a slightly soggy fashion. This did not, however, dampen the spirits for our annual tour to the Suffolk Wool Towns-Sudbury, Long Melford, Lavenham and Kersey. We marked this year by inviting a few local sides to send representatives or full sides to join us. In the end we did very little dancing due to the rain and when we got to the Bull at Long Melford they were in the

middle of a power cut, yet somehow with a bit of dancing, music and song we got over this and Blackmore and Haganeth MM left asking could we do it again next

year.

In early June a weekend was arranged specifically for friends and family of ESMM; a completely introspective event letting us celebrate with those people who have supported us and assisted us, danced or played for us over the years. An evening of dance, music and song with a barbecue buffet and a bar was held on a gentle evening in David's barn. On the Sunday morning East Suffolk were present for morning service in Stonham Aspel church, and we were very pleased to have Daniel Fox, Past Squire of the Ring, to speak for us during the service.

Over the years ESMM have been lucky enough to be invited overseas to spend time enjoying the company and traditions of different European Folk Dance groups. At the end of June ESMM placed an exhibition of who and what we are in the Tourist Information Centre in the middle of Ipswich. Manned by members of the side in kit it led up to

Folkdance Group Zonne from Belgium, and Kursiu Ainiai from Lithuania, joining us for nearly a week taking in some of Suffolk's towns and attractions: Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds, Lavenham, and Southwold.

Over the weekend of 28th and 29th June we relaxed with private ceilidhs and garden parties but finished with a public concert in Framlingham Church for the town's residents, an event where ESMM took a back seat and were more than happy to do so. The final evening Monday 30th June, sadly after Zonne had taken the road home, ESMM and Kursiu Ainiai took over the Greyhound Pub in Pettistree dancing and singing long into the evening, a night of friendship and camaraderie that shall remain in the memory for many years.

During the planning stage we decided that an important part of our celebration must be to take the message to tomorrow's generation. In early July we held



Paul and Founder of ESMM, Des



three days of dance that we termed the Children's Festival, Nearly eight Education Authority and sent out to numerous schools in the County



hundred children were accommodated over the festival and were given an introduction to ESMM and our dance, but were also introduced to English Country Dance, and East Anglian song. A CD of the music was made available to Suffolk County Council - the message must be spread, the tradition kept alive. This festival culminated in a joint production between us, Peppery Productions, and Ip-Art where we hosted the Demon Barber's Road Show — a high-octane production of music,

song, clog, Morris and Sword dance. Damien Barber and his team were guests with ESMM over night and joined

Light Railway and The Victoria Brewery, Earl Soham. The evening saw us relaxing at the Ten Bells in Stonham Aspal



ESMM, May Morning, Ipswich

us for a lunchtime drink at the May Bush in Waldringfield on the Sunday, a very relaxing do in the sun by the river. Finally September 13th and 14th saw the last of our celebratory events. I had always envisaged this as a relaxing weekend where we played host to just a couple of Morris sides for a little dancing, a little music, a little song, and a little beer. We were joined on the Friday night by Utrecht Morris Men and on Saturday we were joined by Thaxted MM for a gentle tour taking in venues including Ipswich, The Mid Suffolk

where the Landlady excelled with food, beer, and ambience. On Sunday we first went to Constable Country and danced in the sun by the river at Flatford Mill and then on to the Hare and Hounds at East Bergholt for a final dance and drink before our guests departed for home. We were very pleased that Past Squires Paul Reece and Cliff Marchant could join us for the event.

So many of ESMM have done so much this year in the way of arranging events, running events, hosting things, putting up guests, providing food, providing beer, or just being there for the dance. Did we meet our objectives? Well, we had a great time singing & dancing. We had significant impact on the community, and yes, we have several prospective new members.



Photo's:
Top left, Cliff Marchant at the September Utrecht visit ;

Middle left, ESMM, Christmas 2008

Left, ESMM At Westminster 10th May, 2008

The Morris Ring Photographic Archive 1934-2009



Photo's: 1 Instruction in Godley Hill, Tideswell 1937; 2 Headington quarry, 1950; 3 William Kimber centre, 1934; 4 High Spen 'Blue Diamonds,' 1955; 5 Newcastle, Thaxted Zing, 1971; 6 'Juvenile' side, Thaxted, 1957; 7 Westminster Unicorn & Thaxted, 1956



8 Manchester, 1956;
9 Handsworth at Thaxted, 1967;



10 Men of Mercia, practicing Lichfield, 1954; 11 Cambridge MM, Grasmere 1936; 12 Lutterworth Boys, Thaxted 1964; 13 Stow on the Wold Ring Meeting, 1935-at Bourton on the Water