

The Morris Ring *Circular*

Past Squires honoured *Top honours for master taborers*

Bert Cleaver and **Mike Chandler** need little or no introduction to most of us. Past Squires of the Morris Ring and foremost amongst our Pipe and Tabor players, these two masters of the art of taboring have guided our steps, awed



Bert Cleaver

audiences and enthused other players for many decades via their mastery of this most perplexing of instruments.

In recognition of their services to the Morris, and to English taboring in general, The Taborers Society has been pleased to award both worthies with Lifetime Honorary Membership, reports fellow taborer **Clive du'Mont**.

The pipe & tabor – otherwise known as the “whittle & dub” – is renowned for its exceptional capacity to provide the Morris dancers of England in particular with all the signals and clarity of expression needed to lead them to the highest quality of performance. Comprised of a fipple flute that has three tone holes played with one hand and a type of snared drum played with the other, it demands of the player a complex combination of rhythmic co-ordination, fine



Mike Chandler

breath control and tricky fingering to produce music that's not only perfect for its purpose in pointing the dance but is also a captivating instrument to listen to and watch being played.

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Morris off...

Thanks to all who've contributed to this *Morris Ring Circular*, and for everyone's great patience while items accumulated to a sufficient level to render publication viable. This edition, by necessity, looks back at some of the successes and achievements enjoyed last year by Morris Ring sides around the globe, and marks some of their losses, too. A great deal more went on, of course, but unless *you* send in those snaps and scribbles, they won't be featured here - alas!

The contents of issue 76, due out in March 2020, will reflect the exploits of member sides in 2019, so please send in your photos, reports and correspondence. It matters not if they've already appeared on the web or social media, and even the briefest of articles and the solitary photograph is welcome.

The *Morris Ring Circular's* metamorphosis into annual format will be underpinned by posting much of its content on the Morris Ring website prior to release in hardcopy; the greater part of this material will emerge in a good old-fashioned, ink-and-glossy-paper yearbook; whether it will be a bumper edition depends entirely on you... *Get cracking!*

Deadline for MRC 76:

26th January 2020

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Please submit items to Tony Foard at thecircular@themorrisring.org. Letters and articles may be subject to shrinkage. For *each* photo submitted, please include date, location, photographer and identity of subject. Single photos, with or without an accompanying article, are especially welcome, as are most forms of literary endeavour.

NB Photos less than 250dpi at 180mm wide are unlikely to be considered for inclusion. Shame, but there it is.

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THE MORRIS DANCER

The digital journal that expands our understanding of the Morris in all its forms.

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Squire's Ramblings

After the change to the constitution in 2018, to allow woman dancers in the Morris Ring, a question I have frequently been asked is 'Why three organisations doing the same thing?' [See also back page.] To examine this fully would take more room than the editor has allowed me, but despite all having the same

reasons to exist, we all go about things differently and have different strengths.

An example is the Morris Ring Archive. With the best will in the world we had a 40 year head start here and it is something very important to a lot of our members. The Morris Ring archive is housed at the Essex Records Office but, until

recently, just gathered dust. Chris Wildridge, chair of the archive group, has taken on the task of cataloguing and digitising it all. No small feat. At the moment Chris is still working on putting funding in place and is looking at ways to report progress to the membership most effectively. If he asks for your help, and you can, please support him in this. It will make it accessible to us all and may pave a way for clubs to deal with their archives.

There are still challenges on the horizon. One we cannot ignore is the issue of disguise in Morris and mumming. Changing social opinion is forcing us to look at what we consider traditional. Perhaps we should remember the motto of the Round Table: 'Adopt, Adapt, Improve'. More on that to follow, I suspect.

One last thought before I go. Please don't forget you have an area rep; if you don't know who it is, check the web site. They are there to help and, having a local knowledge the officers can never hope to have, they are often a good place to start if you have a query. While you are at it, why not invite them to your day of dance or feast? It's a good way to get to know them.

Hopefully I will see many of you over the coming months. Carry on capering!

Pete Simpson

Squire of the Morris Ring



Simpson solo Chester City Morris Men look on as the Squire of the Morris Ring entertains an audience of Cestrian shoppers with a jig.

St Cross welcomes the Morris

Winchester Morris Men enjoy “perfection” on a sunny day

Nestling in the water meadows alongside the River Itchen and in the shadow of St Catherine’s Hill lies Winchester’s ancient Hospital of St Cross. Last year **Winchester Morris Men** were once again afforded the honour of performing in this idyllic setting to help celebrate the Hospital’s 150th annual fete. And the sun shone!

Renowned for the tranquillity of its setting and the beauty of its medieval architecture, the Hospital is one of the country’s oldest charitable foundations. The principal activity of the Hospital, which has provided food and shelter for hundreds of years, continues to be the



Tom Gregory shows the way

The Chapel of St Cross



provision of apartments for a living community of elderly ‘Brothers’, who wear black or red gowns and a trencher hat for daily church attendance and other formal occasions.

Winchester Morris Men have not been around for all 150 fetes, at least not to my

knowledge, but we are regular attendees, and the immaculate gardens offer a location of absolute perfection for a traditional English event of this nature.

Text and pictures by
Harry Stevenson

Continued from page 1

This happy fusion of pipe & tabor features in mediæval spectacle, courtly dancing and folk dance traditions across Europe and beyond; its history in the written word, architecture and works of art is extensive and fascinating. The Taborers Society helps promote the pipe & tabor amongst Morris sides and provides a forum for taborers of all genres to swap information and meet to share their experience and passion.

In 2016 The Taborers Society initiated a Directory of Morris Taborers, which counts some 58 current players amongst its entrants so far, whilst efforts to establish a reference archive of past players is also underway. A depository of photos, personal histories, tunes etc. is available to entrants, and new contributions for this are always welcome. So, to Mike and Bert, our whittle and dub laureates, we say, “Well done – and thank you!”

The author is a member of Mendip Morris Men and a previous winner of The Taborers Society annual competition for new works for the pipe and tabor.

Learn more about the wonderful world of whittle and dub at www.pipeandtabor.org; you can email the Society via tts.morris@gmail.com.

A Beastly Privilege

Knotty keeps an eye on John Edwards as he goes on safari.

As members of the Illustrious Order of Fools and Beasts, my hobby-horse Knotty and I acknowledge that we may be on the eccentric side of the Morris world and subject to an infinite range of reactions. One has to be prepared for almost anything. In most cases we can raise a smile, answer questions, pose for a photo or happily co-operate in selfies or group pictures.

It is particularly important to know how to deal with children. Some may be more than happy to talk to the horse or rub his nose, while others may be quite fearful. I find that a cuddly puppet can often help defuse the situation, but it is always best to respect the child's viewpoint and just gallop off, even if an adult is offended.

On one occasion a girl of about eighteen, who was obviously wary of Knotty (who is quite a friendly beast), told me that when she was little, a scary Morris beast had frightened her and she had been apprehensive about them ever since. I told her I would deal with him when I next met him, which I think helped!

On another occasion twin seven year old girls spotted Knotty. One rushed up and flung her arms around him while the other screamed and ran off. Most teenagers

respond well to banter, but a group of teenage girls in Denmark were genuinely terrified and made their escape.

The responses of passers-by are legion. Most will respond to a friendly "Good morning!" but a few deliberately ignore the greeting. Others see you coming and pointedly move to the other side of the road. What must they imagine you're going to do to them? Even a member of the clergy, quite happy to have dancing in her church, would not continue with the service if the hobby horse remained in the building.

The big privilege is that in this role you can talk to literally anybody. Perhaps people go through a day without speaking to anyone, so it is quite possible that a friendly comment from a Morris character could have a therapeutic effect. You can talk to a pretty girl, an elderly

person in a wheelchair, a policeman, a delivery driver, or a disabled person, most of whom would be suspicious if you did so in ordinary clothes – certainly in big towns! Being a Morris dancer, and particularly a character, gives you licence to cross many accepted boundaries. We have all heard the numerous remarks that people think are original ("Which one's Morris?"), but occasionally they are new. A small girl once looked at my red jacket and white beard and said, "Excuse me, but don't you usually use reindeer?"

The chance to interact with folk of all ages who have some significant disability is something I value a great deal. Many appreciate the fact that you have chosen to talk to them, not their carers. To the beast everyone is a friend. A blind person may want to feel the horse or your hat; a deaf person may ask to shake your bells, because that may be as near as they get to understanding the Morris. Thousands of photographs have been taken and sent worldwide to show what the lunatic fringe of the English get up to. Most of us dance the Morris just because we enjoy doing it; however, we must always consider what the people watching us get from it. I hope that we make their lives a little happier in the process. Yes, it's fun and a privilege, but it's also a great responsibility.

Knotty (and John) belong to Stafford Morris Men.



Postcards from Brittany

Mersey Morris Men and Kinnerton Morris Men venture abroad



Les Gastadours and guests

Dance being an art form that transcends all barriers, **Mersey Morris Men** crossed to Brittany in the August of 2018 for a dance weekend with Les Gastadours de Lamballe. After a welcome of *crêpes* and *cidre*, our first dance spot at a nearby seaside resort was made more than memorable when a paramedic helicopter landed

(almost) in mid-set. *Quelle sensation!*

Saturday started with *petanque* and a typical Breton five course lunch, wine and more cider. Then at Moncontour, a beautiful fortified small city, we danced in the town square to a mix of curious locals and tourists. Amazingly they stayed to watch all afternoon. The day

ended with *gallettes saucisson* (sausage pancakes) and local wine at an evening festival.

A visit to a local Bread and Threshing Fair at Plougenast on the Sunday brought us more local cuisine to sample before a couple of performance spots, which included of a gaggle of geese being herded through the set by a dog. First aircraft, now the animal kingdom!

On Monday evening, after sight-seeing in the medieval town of Dinan, we enjoyed a *conviviale*, another belly-busting feast of local produce. Informal performances by both sides included Breton social dancing and a massed jig which included Alain, one of our hosts. He has been signed up as an overseas member. Finally we offered an obligatory Scouse song, *Lily the Pink*.

Thus ended our trip, but we look forward to a warm and growing relationship with our Breton counterparts, and to many future meetings on both sides of La Manche.

Steve Adderley

Kinnerton Morris Men have made many friends in Brittany after several tours since 1994. When a very special friend invited us over as part of her 70th birthday celebrations it didn't take us long to make our minds up to go. We set off in September for a five day tour. The minibus of our youth was replaced by the comfort of air travel and hire car appropriate for the more mature young. The attic dormitory hadn't changed! Our welcome everywhere was as warm as ever and our hosts looked after us wonderfully. With their help we obtained permission to dance in Vannes, Isle-aux-Moines and Auray. As a special favour we also did a

performance for France Alzheimer at one of their Memory Cafes in Vannes.

On the last night we moved to St Malo where we were also well received and had an enjoyable evening sampling the food and drink of the city.

From the moment of our first foot up we attracted a lot of

interest. The crowds were always friendly interested and appreciative. A group of first year nurses were particularly eager to be photographed with us on the quayside in Vannes, as part of their team building exercise. Free drinks were dished out on Isle-aux-Moines and while we were relaxing after a



The sun shines on the righteous...

dance in St Malo, passers by constantly stopped to talk, take photographs and try our hats on. Goodwill was everywhere. The night ended with locals in a bar visited, at one time, by passing police officers who, though appreciative of our dancing skills, enlightened us on the local law concerning late night noise. Alternative accommodation was mischievously offered for the night if we didn't stop, but as we had already paid for our hotel in advance we put our instruments



away and stayed to enjoy lively local conviviality. It was late! We must give our musicians, Pete and Lyn, a great big thank you. They overcame a lot of difficulties to be with us on this

trip and we couldn't have done it without them. With their support we had an excellent few days. At one time we thought that it might be our farewell tour of Brittany...but it *was* good! We did enjoy it. Perhaps then it was the first of our farewells! We'll do it "our way".

Terry Peach

Has your side visited foreign climes? Send in your holiday snaps (and maybe a few words) so everyone will know what a staggering time you had...

A scorcher of a seventieth for Whitchurch Morris Men

Seventy years ago my father Charlie Hogston, his brothers John, Owen and Ted, and brothers John and Pete Alderman met for the very first practice of the fledgling Whitchurch Morris Men.



Above Whitchurch Morris Men, 1951

Spool forward to June 2018, when we marked our 70th anniversary with a grand weekend of dance. We met our guests on the Friday at Stoke Mandeville, the birth place of the Paralympics, for some chatting and reminiscing with music and singing thrown in. Next day 163 of us boarded four coaches which were to dispatch us to all corners of the Vale of Aylesbury. The sun shone all day and, despite the heat, all went well.

At the end of the day all four tours came together at Watermead, a beautiful lakeside spot on the outskirts of Aylesbury. Most sides did a

show dance and all joined in several mass dances—a great end to the day.

Then it was back to Stoke Mandeville for a feast, speeches and party pieces.

On Sunday, after the church service, we all danced in Kingsbury Square as part of the "Aylesbury on Sea" event (in a town that couldn't be much further from the ocean!) It was a great weekend, if a tad warm. We would like to thank all who joined us. I think those six young lads who started all this in 1948 would be proud that the side they formed is still flourishing.

Alan Hogston

Below Hosts and guests relax



For one night only?

Roy Fenton catches sight of Wimbledon's rarest Morris side

What would the Morris do without pubs to perform outside and to go inside to quench the inevitable thirst which dancing brings on? So it is good to report that Greensleeves Morris Men have been able to modestly repay the hospitality they enjoy in *The Sultan* in London SW19. GMM's inevitable resort after (and sometimes before) practice, the pub is both a popular local and a place of pilgrimage for CAMRA members as the only London hostelry serving the Hopback beers from Salisbury.

The occasion was to be *The Sultan's* autumn beer festival; the idea was mooted of readying a team of regulars to dance at that event in order to help raise money for the pub's chosen charity. Encouraged by landlady Helen, five good men and true volunteered, and set about obtaining sponsorship. Time was set aside at three of Greensleeves' practice nights to teach them *Vandals of Hammerwich*; Geordie, Jim, Charlie, Dave and Steve duly turned up sharp at eight each night. Although none had much experience of dancing, let alone of the Morris, they coped admirably. By the end of the third practice they were getting through the dance very

well, with three men from Greensleeves' ranks making up the eight.

Come the appointed day, a last minute refresher practice was held in an upstairs room. The lads then made their debut outside *The Sultan*, bedecked in yellow Hopback Brewery

our team entered into the spirit of the event. Their involvement has made a significant contribution to what the Sultan has raised for a very good local cause'.

So will the Sultan Morris Men dance again? They certainly enjoyed the experience, and



The power behind the Sultan's throne: **Greensleeves Morris Men**

shirts, and cheered on by fellow customers. The Sultan Morris Men quite clearly enjoyed impressing the audience with their dancing, and a positive measure of their enthusiasm was the £1,000-plus raised for the local Trinity Hospice.

Landlord Steve was delighted with Greensleeves Morris Men's involvement. 'It's great to have your support in training our regulars to dance, and we were really pleased that

there were whispers in their ears about doing more; perhaps even a mummers' play. Watch this space.

Particular thanks are due to Greensleeves' Foreman Alan Chetwood, who was faced with the daunting task of getting five complete novices performance-ready in just three weeks, and to Bagman David Cooling who liaised with Helen and Steve at the Sultan, and ran the dancing on the big day.

Molly and the Mercians (and border, to boot)

Although primarily a Cotswold side, every now and then **Mersey Morris Men** like to swap baldricks for rag coats and do a bit of Border and Molly dancing, and the city of Chester has become the destination of choice for our now-traditional spring tour. Last year's was even more interesting than usual because it coincided with both the Chinese New Year and the day when the 2nd Bn Mercian Regiment exercised its freedom to march through the city centre with fixed bayonets. Chester is well known for its city walls, which run for nearly two miles around the centre, and its world-famous Rows.

Shoulders back...



For those who have never been to Chester (you should, it's a beautiful historic city), these are four streets that have two-storey shops, dating back to medieval times, with covered galleries that run along the upper row. Because the city centre is pedestrianised, these



... chests out

make perfect viewing spots.

It was a sunny, crisp early spring Saturday and the city was full of shoppers and day trippers. Our total of dances reached thirty in all, in six different spots - by the walls, by the River Dee (another thing Chester is known for) and between the Rows themselves. We have a small repertoire of Border and Molly dances; our



Superior viewing from The Rows

Border dances are in-house productions from the fertile brain of one of our members, and our wily foreman has added to our Molly dances with another self-penned number. We supplement these with the Upton Stick Dance.

So if you're ever near Chester on the third Saturday in February, do come and see us as we continue our new tradition. We can't promise fixed bayonets, but if you can tear yourself away from the dancing, you'll find sightseeing riches in abundance.

Matthew King

Photos **Matthew Stapledon**

Southport Swords at fifty

A cut above!

Geoff Charlton reminisces

It all started in 1968 when John Smith and Pete Mackie, both members of Southport's famous Bothy Folk Club, had their quiet pint at Hexham Folk festival interrupted by a rapper sword dance. Thus inspired, they signed up for a Flamborough Longsword workshop to learn the basics, then recruited other club members for a debut performance in the back garden of the Blundell Arms. The audience comprised fellow folk club regulars, with music provided by Dave Boardman and Stan Ambrose on guitar and whistle. As it wasn't always easy to gather eight dancers

together, the team soon moved on to the North Skelton dance, and John persuaded a skilled friend to make the first set of swords - the handles were made from coffin wood!

Ray Cope from Jockey Morris Men moved into the area and joined the team the following year. He taught the side some Cotswold standards to offer a varied entertainment when dancing out; in 1974 rapper was introduced to add the perfect high-impact spectacle for rainy days in the pub.

In 1975 the Everyman Theatre in Liverpool was scheduled to close for refurbishment. One of the last productions was a



Lockmania in 1986

festival of the sea organised by Stan Ambrose, by now a presenter with Radio Merseyside. He invited Southport Swords to perform the Papa Stour Sword Dance, to fit in with the overall theme, but a dearth of men led to a collaboration with Mersey Morris Men, and the combined group learnt, and executed, the dance at the festival. Papa Stour is now a firm component of the side's repertoire.

Over the years the side increased its numbers and would often field two sets when dancing out, notably at the Forest of Dean Morris Men's annual family festival in the early 80s. Numbers have dropped somewhat since those days, but in the past fifty years over one hundred men have enjoyed membership of Southport Swords.

The International Sword dance Festival at Scarborough introduced the side to several overseas sword teams. Witnessing the athleticism of

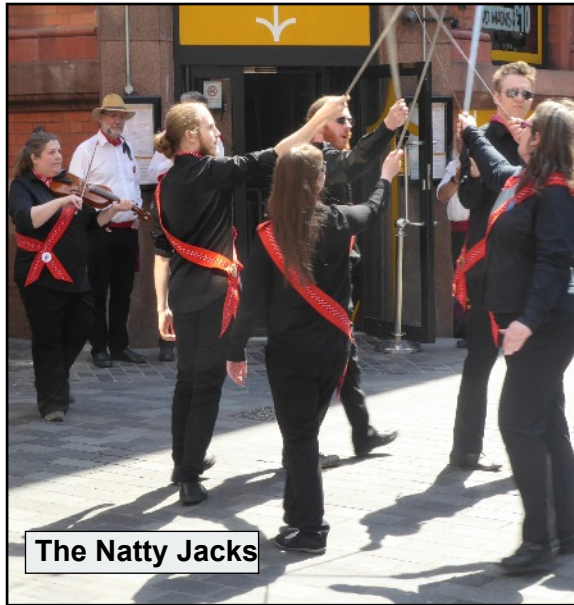


Fishing for compliments at the Blundell Arms

a man being hoisted aloft on locked swords, Southport Swords decided to develop their own take on this feat, which continues today in their programme as a great crowd-pleaser.

Home-crafted sword dances also began to appear: Southport, Little Crosby, Churchtown and Birkdale have been added to the repertory mix, with Jeff Lawson bringing the Elgin Sword Dance and the Bampton Weavers Dance when he joined the team.

In 1995 Southport's Scarisbrick Hotel established a beer festival timed to start at 6am on May Day morning, possibly inspired by Southport Swords decision two years previously to dance at dawn in the town



centre. The beer festival may have long gone, but the dancing continues, with the addition of a temporary Maypole set up outside the Atkinson Arts Centre. To balance the seasons, the Swords also dance in and around town on St George's Day and Boxing Day.

The culmination of Southport Swords' celebratory season was a grand day of dance just down the road in the centre of Liverpool, where friends old and new joined the side to mark fifty years of fine swordsmanship. Among the many dance sides in action were Southport Swords' very own youth team. The Natty Jacks are named after the rare natterjack toad which has found a refuge amid the

dunes which characterise the local coastline; these two-legged variants include several offspring of the side's current and past members.

So, just like the area's glorious sandy beaches, the future for Southport Swords looks golden indeed!



Geoff centre and colleagues at their golden jubilee day of dance in Liverpool, 2018

A flowering of Morris sides

THE MORRIS RING AT WORK



Earlsdon Morris Men

Warwick Folk Festival

Photo Phil Lyon

Saddleworth Morris Men

The 44th Annual Rush Cart

Photo John Foster



Shakespeare Morris Men

St George's Day at
The Boar's Head, Hampton Lucy

Photo Joe Oldaker

Long Man Morris Men

Hop Hoodening at
Canterbury Cathedral

Photo Steven Archer



Yateley Morris Men

The Helmond Meeting

Photo Steven Archer

Obituaries

Colin Spencer

Green Man Morris & Sword Club



Colin Spencer, *alias* Chippy Spencer, *alias* Geordie Spencer, joined Green Man Morris and Sword Club in 1958 after training at Loughborough College. He moved to Birmingham to take up his only permanent job as a woodwork teacher at King Edward VI Five Ways Grammar School and soon afterwards joined Green Man with the intention of learning rapper dancing.

Initially he could not get a place in the rapper team, so he became Tommy and soon began his devastation of the incredulous

Midlands population with his calling-on song delivered with such a rich Geordie accent: "Gud people give eear te me stooory.....". Actually he had a great tendency frequently to launch into *Blaydon Races*, *Cushie Butterfield*, *Keep Your Feet still*, *Geordie Hinny* or more before realising that he rarely knew the words and inevitably had to stop!

He was on much safer ground with monologues. Who can forget the "*Charge of the Tight Brigade*" delivered impeccably at such breakneck speed.

Colin relished his background and was proud to be a Geordie, exiled to the Midlands. Apart from his accent which stayed so richly with him, he had the genuine brazen sense of humour and love of his origins and always the twinkle of mischief in his eye. He was born in Heaton, north of the Tyne but his father was a relief pharmacist for Boots Chemist and he spent his early life in Sunderland, Seaham and other places in County Durham. He had an enduring interest in football and was always keen to bemoan the fortunes or misfortunes of Newcastle United and Sunderland - even right up to three days before his death.

Colin knew everybody. He could remember all of his college friends. He knew almost all Morris Men, but he never hung back if he found one whom he did not know. He just launched himself forward.

As a form master he could remember all of his pupils and the year in which they came to

him, by name and even by face forty or fifty years afterwards. On one occasion he went into a pub on Harborne High Street where there was a huge, rough-looking man standing at the bar. Colin approached him saying he had once taught him. The man looked at Colin, snarled and spat out "I hated you...and my mother hated you as well!" Colin left immediately.

Whilst a woodwork teacher he was allotted 40p per year per student for purchase of timber! As a result he had to beg, borrow or otherwise obtain his own sources of timber. He regularly used to drive around Birmingham looking in skips for offcuts and scrap timber. Actually this was a good system, because he got a lot of exotic timbers, which would ordinarily have been unobtainable.

It was wrong to describe Colin as just a woodwork teacher; he was actually a brilliant carpenter and a very good designer. He made his own furniture and continually designed a range of domestic pieces, taking advantage of his scraps of recovered timber. He developed a technique of using many pieces of endgrained timber to produce chess boards, chopping boards, box tops and coffee tables with highly decorated finish. He also made thousands of puzzle construction pieces, most of which he gave away.

At school, the first task given to young pupils was the production of a cribbage board. On completion, Colin would get out the pack of cards, light a fag and

teach the students the finer points of crib, just to make sure the board worked properly. For this, he would probably have been thrown out of school by Ofsted today.

In Colin's mid-fifties, education changed to the extent that he had to take on "Craft Design Technology", which meant the almost abandonment of woodwork as such and the addition to the curriculum of the use of plastics and other new materials and approaches. This was too much for a real craftsman and he took early retirement.

After his retirement Colin proceeded to take between one and two thousand Old Boys under his wing. He almost single-handedly produced the Old Boys' Magazine. He wrote all of the articles and contents himself and edited it, about thirty pages long. He travelled around his Old Boy contacts in Birmingham, so that he could appeal to them to give him reams and reams of paper which were taken to Five Ways School for photocopying. The printed sheets were then transported to his house so that he could collate the pages and staple together the magazines, finally stuffing them into envelopes and then posting them. This whole exercise was a regular mammoth undertaking. He also organised a monthly lunch for the Old Boys.

He was throughout a mainstay of Green Man. From 1958 until about two years ago he danced every Tuesday and at almost every team event – hundreds of occasions. This included sixty years of dancing in the Bower Procession at Lichfield, although he probably missed the odd one or two. He was a great dancer and offered much wise counsel to less experienced dancers. He

was Squire and, to his great delight, became Club President. Colin was Scrap-book Keeper for Green Man for about forty years. Each year he produced a great scrapbook, usually A2 size, hard backed and with covers decorated with offcuts of the wallpaper which had he had used in his house that particular year. They were beautiful.

Colin had many contacts in Wales because the school had an old farm cottage west of Oswestry and he was instrumental in doing maintenance and alteration to make it habitable for the boys.

He organised annual trips to the area for the sole purpose of cutting Morris Sticks. It was usual to cut about one or two hundred morris sticks per year and then Colin would spend many days, waist deep in bark and shavings, reducing the sticks to the right diameter prior to storing them for at least a year. This meant that for years Green Man had the BEST sticks in the Ring and Colin became a benefactor of many sets of sticks to other sides which were on his LIKE list!

Colin bore several years of ill health with great courage; he is sadly missed. His cremation at Selly Oak was attended by over 400 of his friends and relatives. There were a good number of Morris representatives present, including fifteen ex-members of the now disbanded Green Man side who formed a guard of honour for the coffin and danced at the wake.

Colin was very much a family man and leaves Alison, his wife, and children and grandchildren, and an internationally scattered extended family.

Bob Bailes

Denis Smith

Westminster Morris Men



Denis Smith, with his Scandalli accordion and its familiar 'dustbin lids', was well known and much respected in the Morris world playing for the Westminster Morris Men for over 50 years. His music career started in the early Fifties playing piano for ballroom dancing in the Charlton Sextet. Then they wanted to add the tango to the repertoire, so he bought an accordion!

In 1954 he was approached by Colin Fleming and asked if he played for Morris. "Who's Morris?" came the innocent enquiry. But it did not take long for Denis to learn the Westminster repertoire – often being 'corrected' by 'Ginger' Saunders in after-breakfast sessions during Westminster's first Cotswold tour in 1955. The men would then set off in/on a variety of transport, Denis on a

BSA Bantam, his accordion strapped to his back, around the Cotswold sites that were, for almost 60 years, a constant feature of the annual Westminster pilgrimage. He played for the side at Sidmouth and Stratford festivals, at the EFDSS Royal Albert Hall shows and featured with the side in the film *The Great St Trinian's Train Robbery* released in 1966.

Born in Forest Gate in East London, his schooling was interrupted by the War and evacuation, first to Ipswich and then to South Wales. An acute attack of nephritis, which hospitalised him for months, prevented him from returning to school. Then began a long process of study at home and in evening classes and he qualified as a Mechanical Engineer in 1955. He became a lecturer at West Ham College of Technology (now part of the University of East London) and went on to complete a PhD in Engineering History at Imperial College. Early retirement gave him the opportunity to pursue his twin interests in folk music and industrial archaeology.

He founded the Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society (GLIAS) in 1968 and was chairman from 1972 to 2012; he published many papers and book chapters on engineering history and in the late 1990s was made President of the Newcomen Society for the study of the history of engineering and technology.

Denis's reputation for accompanying the Morris grew rapidly. Douglas Kennedy remarked to him at the 1956

Stratford festival, "It's nice to hear the Morris played as music!" He played mostly by ear, but always with great musicality and a sophisticated and absolutely distinctive harmonic sense, as he sought to find just the right chords for the accompaniment. People often remarked "listen to his left hand!" There is a common perception that you need to be a dancer to be a good folk musician but that was not true of Denis. He always watched the dancers carefully and followed every nuance of the movements to provide the right 'lift' and balance. Because of the way he always turned to look at the dancers Westminster often referred to him as 'Sideways Smith'. Westminster owe so much of their reputation to four people: Colin Fleming for his inspirational leadership, Bill Atkin, who 'found the Unicorn in Epping Forest'; 'Ginger' Saunders who created dances in the Longborough style, and Denis for his musical interpretation of these and other dances in the repertoire. His playing of *Staines Morris* without any bass chords, including Ginger's own variant of the tune, was quite magical. Denis was a strong supporter of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. He served as District Chair in Essex and subsequently as Chair of the Eastern Area. He was also a member of the Editorial Board of the Folk Music Journal from 1970 to 1982.

Apart from the time he devoted to the Morris he also played extensively for country dancing, for numerous clubs

travelling abroad, for musicians' workshops, festivals and weekend courses. He was often partnered by violinist Jim Coleman. Their early recordings of Morris jigs in the fifties are still available in the VWML sound archives, and they made concert appearances around the country. Denis was also a member of the Countryside Players, with Nan Fleming-Williams and Pat Shaw, producing a delightful mixture of folk music on the concert platform. He was presented with the EFDSS Gold Badge in 2001.

Denis often provided musical entertainment after a Morris feast; his *'Three Cuckoos in One Nest'* was his own arrangement of three variants of the traditional tune. And I personally have very fond memories of his sensitive accompaniment of my singing *Claudy Banks* and, particularly, the Symondsbury Mummers' Tune, *The Singing of the Travels*, on such occasions. This latter tune had become a traditional part of the annual carol concert at Cecil Sharp House, played by Nan and Denis, and a recording of this tune by Denis and his daughter Jenny made in 1998 was played at his funeral.

A memorial event for Denis at Thaxted last summer was attended by over 150 people. The many spoken and musical tributes reflected his wide interests, including industrial archaeology, engineering, folk music and, of course, the Morris.

Mike Wilson-Jones

Keith Tassart

John O'Gaunt Morris of Lancaster



It is particularly sad to report the death of Keith Tassart, who was the longest serving active member of the side, having been a member for over fifty years. He had served in various capacities during this period of time including that of Bagman.

Latterly he looked after the side archive, and as Ragman made it his mission to ensure that the side was well turned out.

He was always a very active person being very much a countryman, preferring to work out of doors. For a while, Keith worked as a rat catcher and, being a little bit crafty by nature (on his own admission) often left some behind so that he would need to be called back again. He had also worked as a forester and as a game keeper.

For many years Keith worked as a lengthsman for what used to be British Waterways Board. In that role he looked after a stretch of the Lancaster Canal; what he did not know about canal maintenance and operation was not worth thinking about. Canals had always been one of Keith's other passions as an alternative to the Morris, and in recent years he acted as the volunteer co-ordinator for the Lancaster Canal Trust. He was an excellent motivator and frequently managed to persuade people to do things for little or no cost; thus considerable progress was made towards what is hoped will eventually become the full restoration of the abandoned northern reaches of the canal from Preston to Kendal.

During the latter years of his life he worked as Maintenance and Conservation Manager for a holiday parks chain in the Lake District. In spite of his advanced years he refused to retire until his health made it impossible to continue.

A further interest of Keith's was his work with young people. He was at one time active with the Boy Scout movement, serving leader of the 1st Halton Scouts, where he liked to pass on his knowledge of country matters and crafts also including local folk activities. He was also invited to give talks to local school pupils about these subjects.

Keith made his last appearance with John O'Gaunt Morris on

Good Friday 2018 for the annual tour of South Lakeland. This was also a celebration of our Silver Anniversary which we shared with Southport Swords who had similarly attained their half century. Keith was invited to blow out the candles on the two cakes on behalf of both teams, an honour with which he was greatly pleased.

He was diagnosed with a brain tumour and admitted to hospital several times for an operation to remove it and for chemotherapy. Sadly this did not work; the cancer returned and he died in June last year. Keith leaves his wife Jean, son David, daughter Vicky and a granddaughter. He is sadly missed by them as well as all members past and present of John O'Gaunt Morris, the Lancaster Canal Trust and many other friends and acquaintances.

The funeral took place at the Lancaster and Morecambe Crematorium; the guard of honour was provided by members of the side and Keith went to his rest accompanied by his favourite song, *The Manchester Rambler*, performed by one of our members.

We will all miss his cheeky smile and his, at times, devilish sense of humour.

Rest in peace Keith. We will long remember you.

Derek H Humphreys

Kerry Manning

Victory Morris Men



Victory Morris are very sad to announce the sudden death of Kerry Manning at the age of 67. Kerry joined Victory Morris in 1997 and was Squire of the side from 2003 to 2007. He became Foreman in 2012 and was still active at the time of his untimely death.

Kerry was a stylish dancer and put much effort and dedication into his role as Foreman. Teaching is often a thankless task, but Kerry's encouraging watchcry of "your other left foot, gentlemen, please" will no longer be heard. As Squire and Foreman he always made a point of thanking the musicians. Kerry also helped devise the original dance *Weary Winter* performed in Lichfield style to the tune by John Conolly with the first verse and chorus sung by the side as an introduction. This was performed at Saddleworth Ring Meeting in August 2018 to great acclaim by all, and was an event greatly enjoyed by Kerry and the whole side.

Kerry was always at his happiest with Victory Morris when they were at events where they could put on a good dancing show and also have a good pub sing after. Events such as the Belles and Broomsticks Morris weekend in Guernsey 2016, Thaxted Ring Meetings, Victory and Sompting Morris Days of Dance and of course Saddleworth Rushcart were some of his favourite events. Kerry was a good photographer; he captured on film many of the sides involved and the memorable moments from these events and produced booklets featuring all the participating sides.

Kerry was also an accomplished musician and singer, and a leading light of Chichester Folk Song Club. He was an excellent guitarist and also played concertina, melodeon and bodhran. He performed solo, and also with his partner, Marilyn Campbell, as the folk duo Marker. It was a club joke that he didn't like yodelling or banjos!

Kerry's funeral was attended by over 200 people, many of whom could not get into the room as it was so crowded. Many tributes were paid to Kerry as a true gentleman, a wonderful musician, a fine dancer, a trusted colleague and a devoted, loving family man. At his wake everyone remembered the good times spent in his company and gave him, as he would have said himself, "a grand send-off". We will all be poorer for his loss but enriched by having known him.

Patrick Hogston

Mike Oxenham

Mayflower Morris Men

Mike Oxenham joined Mayflower Morris Men in 1976 as a pipe and taborer, and became the side's musical mainstay. A graduate of the University of Nottingham, by profession he was a French teacher but was musically very gifted, both in playing and in music theory.

His passion was mediaeval and early modern music and he was at the forefront of the early music revival and instrumental (he would have appreciated the pun) in its success. He played first with Musica Reservata from 1967 then with St. George's Canzona from its foundation in 1970 to its demise in the mid 80s. He made numerous early music recordings known by their frequentative titles *A Tapestry of Music for...Robin Hood and his Merry Men, the Black Prince and his Knights, Cromwell and his Roundheads*, etc., and he is credited as the player of schawms, crumhorns, curtals, rauschpfeifes, recorders and rackets, to name but a few. He performed professionally on many occasions including one episode of Dr. Who (it had cybermen and is viewable on-line).

He had nothing in his large collection of original and replica mediaeval instruments that he couldn't play himself. His studies as a music theorist led him to believe that that modern Morris music was played much too slowly, too

quietly, and with the wrong sort of pipe. Consequently he played at a hell of a lick and the dancers were obliged to keep pace while at the same time losing none of the grace, intricacy, and precision of the movements. This was challenging for other sides who danced alongside us and, as we aged, it became challenging for us! His strong, steady drumbeat was excellent for



keeping us in step and you could rely on hearing it even at the very back of a procession. He was a purist;

seeking a sound as close to the original as possible, he commissioned hand-made replicas of Thomas Snye's pipe and tabor (from the *Nine Daies Wonder* woodcut) which became his instruments of choice.

His musicianship was superb. He could correct errors in The Black Book and recognise when music had been recorded for violin or anglo-concertina. He would then transcribe it for the traditional pipe and tabor. We still have his original hand-written sheet music for Morris tunes. He was inventive and creative - he helped produce the accompanying music for our mummers' play. I have heard other Morris musicians, even his rivals, call him (out of earshot) one of the finest pipe and taborers in the country - a real compliment and no idle

boast. We were lucky to have him.

In the 40-plus years he played for us he never played a wrong note or missed one, except once at a fête in 1982 when Old Jack's false teeth went flying in the first half of a half gip and ended up in the middle of the set. It wasn't the falling out that made Mike chuckle, it was Jack's scooping them up in the second half and putting them straight back in his mouth!

He was our Squire 1988-92, Bagman 1978-88, attended 30+ Ring Meetings, and for 22 years played drums in our ceilidh band. He was a stalwart of the side, the Ring, and Morris in general.

Mike had a proper 'Morris' funeral - bells, hats, colour (including Mayflower's trademark black and white chequerboard), noise, banter, energy, exuberance, good cheer, vitality, dancing, and of course music - and that's how we, with friends from other sides, said our farewells. We shall miss him sorely and remember him with admiration, as will all who heard him play. His wife Margaret passed away four years ago but he leaves a son Chris, daughter Kathy and two grandchildren.

Time for Bonny Green, Mike!

Julian Whybra

John Drake

*Hartley Morris Men,
Wadard Morris Men &
Woodchurch Morris Men*



John Drake joined Wadard Morris (as it then was) in 1983. He quickly established himself in the side and put his metalwork skills to use by making the squire's baldric badges and a cake-bearer's sword. When he and his wife, Brenda, were looking to relocate, he moved nearer to the side's base and became established in that community. John was confident as a dancer and would not hesitate to interrupt practice to give his view on how a particular figure should be executed. As well as this, he had a keen sense of humour and hardly a practice would pass without John telling a joke. His humour also had a practical edge and men quickly learned to ensure that their shoe laces were tightly fastened before practice began.

Not long after John joined Wadard we were introduced to a Belgian folk dance group and with another to which we were later introduced, we exchanged several visits. We would hire a minibus to reach the channel ports and, as we crossed the Medway, would prepare ourselves to be told, yet again, that the AA were 'murderous bastards' because his grandfather had been involved in a fatal collision with a patrol vehicle. He revelled in the reaction to the story more than in its telling.

Unsurprisingly, John took it upon himself to become the side's fool, and in this role he was in his element. His costume was a suit made from cloth woven on a loom in Saddleworth by his childhood friend and neighbour, John Kelly, a master tailor and another much-missed late member of Wadard Morris Men. It comprised a suit, with breeches instead of trousers and had the side's emblem worked into the back of the waistcoat.

There was good reason for the use of Saddleworth cloth in the making of his fool's suit. John came to love the Saddleworth Rushcart and attended more than twenty times. He was given the distinction of being made an honorary member of the Saddleworth Morris Men. The death of his old friend, John Kelly, touched him deeply and in his grief he considered burning his fool's suit. He was

instead persuaded to donate it to the Saddleworth Museum in Uppermill, where it remains as a tribute to both men as well as providing a connection with that village's industrial past. John's affection for the area extended to becoming a regular attender at the Whit Friday band contests.

John was the side's self-appointed cultural attaché. He became the custodian of the side's snuff box which essentially went wherever the side went. As it was in reality a repurposed needlework box (not something easily disguised), it often became a talking point and would tempt the curious. However, it contained more than boxes of snuff; suffice to say there were some items that John had doubtless put there to watch people's reactions. Whatever their immediate reaction, John's presence and character would invariably draw smiles. John took the opportunity given to him by redundancy to set up his own business. Its name was a play on the name of a popular television series whilst its logo exploited his seafaring Tudor namesake. *Drake's Seven Household Services* did well enough, but the name became less appropriate when John, who was not against a challenge, took on an eighth trade. Nevertheless, I count myself amongst those who became grateful for his skill and industry over the years, and

both within and around my house I have much to remind myself of him. I can recall several times returning suited and booted from work, standing in the midst of dust and general chaos whilst John explained the issues that he had to overcome that day before going into a detailed explanation as to how a particular figure should be danced. I don't believe that he ever refused the offer of work from friends, on occasions travelling to Ireland to complete projects.

He was unafraid of defending what he believed to be right and successfully contested a planning application for a development that would have encroached upon his land. He was motivated to serve as a member of his local parish council and spoke proudly of the support successfully given to one of his constituents in a case against the local district council.

John will also be deeply missed by the other sides that he joined, namely Hartley Morris Men and Woodchurch Morris Men (for whom he was foreman), as well as throughout the Morris community. The thoughts of all us, I am sure, go to his wife, Brenda, and his family.

Steve Goldsmith

Twopenny Post

MISSIVES, MEMOS
& MESSAGES

CALL FOR NEW DANCES

Colin Andrews, of Exeter Morris Men, has taken up duties as the Morris Ring's New Dance Coordinator and welcomes details of any original dances devised by members. Such dances may be in the style of existing traditions or in completely new traditions; information in the following format will enable Colin to synchronise new submissions with those previously recorded by Michael Wilkinson of Dolphin Morris Men:

- *Dance Title*
- *Tradition*
- *Tune* (if available)
- *Genre/style* (Cotswold, North West etc)
- *Hands* (hanky, stick)
- *Number in set*
- *Source* (side/person)
- *Other notes*

Notation will not be made available to other parties without the express permission of the composer(s). Colin is also developing an international database of morris dances at www.morrisdancedatabase.org.uk, a searchable database of sides performing in the traditional idiom and their dances. Notation is not documented, as some sides have their own unique dances which they may prefer not to publish, but links can be made to team web sites if they choose to give access to that information.

Sides can also access to the database to post details of their repertoire, including newly minted dances. It is hoped that these initiatives will encourage sides to expand their artistic range and share endeavours. Further details are available from Colin: bonnygreencolin@gmail.com (01363 877216).

THE PLYMOUTH MORRIS TRADITION

John Summerscales announces a new book from Plymouth Morris featuring a short history of early morris dancing (including Tudor records for Plymouth), and the music and dance notation for a set of mostly four man dances first performed by the side in public during 1989. *The Plymouth Morris Tradition* may be downloaded free of charge from <http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/13279> or is available in paperback for £4 inc. p&p (cheques: Plymouth Morris) from Plymouth Morris, 92 Ponsonby Road, Plymouth PL3 4HW. Proceeds will fund the renewal of the Plymouth Morris costume in preparation for the Mayflower 400 celebrations in September 2020.

MUMMERS DIGITAL UPDATE

The Traditional Drama Research Group, dedicated to exploring the history and scholarship of folk plays, has refreshed and updated its website, reports Duncan Broomhead. The new-look www.folkplay.info includes an authoritative essay on the mummers' play, resources to help researchers, play texts, details of the major collections, all back copies of the *Roomer* newsletter, a bibliography, conference papers and a must-see gallery of images, including the widest selection of photographs of Hampshire Mummers ever gathered together.

One organisation for all Morris dancers?

Dear Editor,

Further to Adam Garland's letter in issue 73 of *The Morris Ring Circular*, I believe that what is surely needed is the dissolution of the Ring – and of the Federation and the Open Morris – and in their place the establishment of a single umbrella organisation for Morris dancing.

I'm sure that nobody outside the very small world we inhabit understands why on earth we need three national organisations. A single united organisation would be far stronger when lobbying government or handling the media. Nobody would be able to play one organisation off against another, or play the sexist card, which is the lazy and therefore often-taken option in the national press.

Clubs or groups of clubs would organise gatherings on their own terms, inviting whoever they wished – and maybe be able to apply to the national organisation for a start-up loan to facilitate such gatherings. The Ring Meeting model is far from being the only one.

The big problem, of course, is how to reconcile three organisations with very different constitutions and very different ideas about membership, representation and voting rights. Nobody wants to be mired in Article 50-style negotiations.

We need some visionaries from each of the three organisations who can get together, wipe the slate clean and begin to put together a 21st-century national morris movement from scratch.

David Wintle
Anker Morris Men etc.

Please help spread the word by sharing these items, some of which have appeared previously elsewhere.