

Wargrave Morris Men

From Kennet Morris -A Foolish History

The Wargrave Morris Men – our forefathers

Late in 1933 a land-owner, Major Francis “Fanny” Fryer and “his man” Reginald Annetts, who had become interested in English folk-dancing while living near Newbury, moved to Wargrave Hall. Here they found neither country-dance movement nor Morris Club in existence, but regular (and separate) weekly practices for both kinds of dancing were soon begun by him to the sound of his pipe and tabor – making the pipes himself out of bamboo. Various local men and estate employees took part in the Morris practices, and visitors sometimes put in an appearance. Three local men proved to be stayers - John Gillet, Tom Jones, and Rae Jones, and later Fred Coxhead, who had done a good deal of dancing with Fryer and Reggie Annetts in the Newbury district, joined the Club.



"Fanny" Fryer
Thaxted 1939
(Abingdon Sash)



Wargrave Morris Men from Ray Annett's "rescued" collection

When the Morris Ring was formed in 1934, the Wargrave Morris Men were one of the Inaugural Members, and early in September 1936 the Ring met at Wargrave Hall, the Wargrave Morris Men being responsible for the local arrangements. All 38 attendees camped on the Major's (Major being a term he detested according to Roy Dommett) lawn which backed onto the Thames, Bill Kimber played for the instructional and Jinky Wells fooled on the tour. Henry and Percy Hemmings met them dancing in The Bury at Abingdon. The follow up party visited Tom Hemmings and also the Russells at Eynsham, and these contacts helped to spur their revivals in 1937. Fanny Fryer would continue his support as president of the Abingdon men for the rest of his days, but playing the new fangled melodeon, as he'd had to give up his piping for "lack of blow". (He was asthmatic and, according to his friend Lionel Bacon, may have been gassed in World War 1.)

With the aid of one, or sometimes two, guest dancers, the Club was able to dance in public on various occasions, for example at Brownlow Hill, Warfield, in October 1937, and at [Selborne](#) in July 1938 (as part of a pageant attended by 2000 spectators), and about this time the Club organized an evening's dancing tour of villages in the Lambourn valley. The same year the Wargrave men danced in Maidenhead and were met by a Wheatley Morris man who corrected their dances. Fryer's notes from this were passed to the revival of the Wheatley side. In July 1939, with one guest dancer, they performed the Boosbeck Sword-dance at the summer festival of the EFDS (Berkshire Branch). The music was provided by Fryer playing an accordion similar to that used by George Tremain, the

musician of the traditional Boosbeck team. (*Ray Annetts has Francis's Hagstrom D/G Melodeon – a prized possession, Roy Dommett inherited another*) They attended Morris Ring Meetings at Oxford in 1951 during the week-end 14th-16th September and Salisbury 3rd - 5th September, 1954. They also danced in The Royal Albert Hall, Windsor E.F.D. & S.S. Festival May 26th 1951 and with South Berkshire Morris Men in Reading 26th March 1952. The Club did its best to resume the activities interrupted by the war, often jointly with Abingdon Morris Men and some of the men became members. The side eventually disbanded – the last recorded appearance was at Bradfield in April 1960. The remaining dancers became the nucleus of The Berkshire District Sword and Morris Club which begat Kennet. Francis Fryer died in January 1961 aged 73 after several years of poor health, but was still passionate about morris and Abington. These are the known Wargrave Morris dancers:

First Name	Initials	Surname	Position	Year	Also	Year	Joined
Reg	R F	Annetts	Dancer	1933			Abingdon MM
John	J	Carter	Dancer				
Fred	F T	Coxhead	Dancer	1950			Kennet MM
Bryan	B	Coxhead	Dancer	1954			Kennet MM
John	J	Finch	Dancer	1951			Kennet MM
Michael	M	Finch	Dancer				Kennet MM
Francis	Major F E	Fryer	Musician	1933	Founder		Abingdon MM
John	J	Gillet	Dancer	1949	Bagman	1951	South Berkshire MM
Derek	D	Gowers	Dancer	1951			
Rae	R	Jones	Dancer	193?			
Tom	T	Jones	Dancer	193?			Abingdon MM
Bill	W H	Kent	Dancer	1951	Chauffeur	1951	Abingdon MM
Paddy	P W	O'Neill	Dancer				Kennet MM
Brian	B	West	Dancer	1952			Called Up

Paddy O'Neill set up a school morris club of school boys in Henley, The Ancalites. They were an excellent rapper side but adopted/revived the name Wargrave Morris when dancing Cotswold (encouraged by Ray Annetts). They attended EFDSS tours, and danced with Kennet 7th August 1972.

Research by Peter de Courcy – Ring Web Editor and Kennet Morris Fool

From The Morris Ring Log Books

Ring Meeting at Bedford 1950

The thirty-second meeting of the Morris Ring was held in Bedford on the week-end of the 8th-10th September 1950. The following clubs were represented: Abingdon, Beaux of London City, Bedford, Cambridge, Coventry, East Surrey, Greensleeves, Headington Quarry, Jockey, Letchworth, London Pride, Midland, Morley College, Newcastle, Oxford, Ravensbourne, St. Alban's, **South Berkshire**, Thaxted, **Wargrave** and Whitchurch. The Chipping Camden tradition side were also present (sic). Some 150 men were there.

The Squire then presented staves of affiliation to the Jockey Morris Men of Birmingham and to the **South Berkshire Morris Men**.

[signed]

Frederick Hamer

Squire

2 June 1951

The Wargrave Morris Men

Researched by Peter de Courcy – Morris Ring Web Editor and Kennet Morris Fool

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Meeting at Oxford 1951

The thirty-fourth meeting of the Morris Ring was held in Oxford during the week-end 14th-16th September 1951. The following clubs were represented: Abingdon, Beaux of London City, Bedford, Cambridge, Coventry, East Surrey, Greensleeves, Headington Quarry, Jockey, Letchworth, London Pride, Midland, Morley College, King's College (Newcastle), Oxford, Oxford University, Ravensbourne, Rugby, St.Albans, **South Berks.**, Thaxted, **Wargrave**, Whitchurch & White Horse. Nearly all of these mustered a complete side and four dancers & a musician from Bampton took part on Saturday & attended the Feast. The total number of men taking part rose from about 160 on Friday evening to about 190 at the Feast.

From Abingdon MM Diaries

Tuesday 21st June 1938: There was more dancing on the Tuesday from 8.30, Major Fryer again playing, and the dances were A Nutting we will go, Curly Headed Ploughboy, Princess Royal, Girl I Left Behind Me, and "Three Meet" (the Squire's Dance). 10th Collection was £1/12/3. **Fryer took Reg Annetts and Tom Jones from Wargrave** as Abingdon were short of a full side.

Saturday 10th September 1949: Abingdon attended the St Albans Ring Meeting and the participants were Jim Hemmings (dressed as Mayor), Tom Hemmings (Lead Dancer), Charlie Brett, Ray Hemmings, Reggie Annetts, John Gillet, John Hyde, Major Fryer (Musician), William Hacket (Fool). **Messrs Annetts, Gillet and Hacket were Wargrave men** who helped make up the numbers. They probably also danced with Wargrave on the same day.

MEETING HELD APRIL 20TH 1950 Practice, all our dances had a full side. **4 men turned up from Wargrave including Fred Coxhead.**

[**South Berks** mentioned as new Ring members here was a morris team based in Newbury. Its final performance was in 1966 (actually during the World Cup final ! *14 May 1966*). Alec Tofield was a prominent member and after 1966 would regularly appear at Mayor's Day in his South Berks kit.]

MAY 26TH 1951 WINDSOR E.F.D.&S.S. FESTIVAL Left Abingdon by coach at 1pm with Miss Baxter in charge of the junior team. **South Berks Team** had the use of the shooting brake. Arrived Wargrave 2pm approximately, **picked up Major Fryer and the rest of the Wargrave party**, including Mrs Annetts and family, arrived Windsor 3.30pm, Southern Railway station, as scheduled to meet the British Broadcasting van. Commenced dancing outside the station, where a record was taken and broadcast over the air the following week. The next dancing point was in front of Windsor Castle, where further commentaries were to be made, but owing to the heavy rain, had to be abandoned. Tea was taken at the King Edwards Horse Hall. Displays of Morris was given by the Abingdon Team during the evening

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 15th 1951 RING MEETING OXFORD 11 teas 16/6, 12 feasts, £3, 21 lunches £3.3.0, lodgings (5 for 2 nights) £3.10.0. [There are other expenses listed which are not that clear, but include some payments to **South Berks and Wargrave teams.**] [The Oxford bagman's notebook for the Festival of Britain Autumn Ring Meeting has detailed entries for each team that attended, including in most cases their signatures. **Abingdon's entry has signatures from J.Hyde, Tom Hemmings, J.Hemmings, W.Hackett, R.F.Annetts*, B.C.West, F.T.Coxhead*, J.H.Grimsdale, C.E.Brett, W.H.Kent*, F.E.Fryer* (the * indicates 'Wargrave men' in this notebook).**

South Berks also attended, and John Gillett signed in as their bagman.

MEETING NOVEMBER 7th 1951 at Boxhill, Major Fryer indisposed. **Mr Kent and Mr Annetts from Wargrave.** John Gillett asked to London.

Meeting for 26th March 1952 cancelled – **Wargrave men engaged with the South Berks men at Reading.**

Saturday 9th August 1952: Southall Park. **Picked up R. Annetts and two his children from Wargrave, F.Coxhead from Twyford on the way.**

1954 Summary - As this year's notebook entries in particular have a good list of persons attending each time, here is a list of all those who are recorded as dancing or playing for the Abingdon Morris Dancers in 1954.

- Tom Hemmings (Mayor of Ock Street)
- **Major Fryer** (music)
- **Reg Annetts (Wargrave man)**
- Les Argyle (also member of Oxford Morris Men)
- Len Bardwell (music when needed, otherwise danced. Also prominent member of Oxford Morris Men)
- Charlie Brett
- Ernie Constance
- **Bryan Coxhead (Wargrave man?)**
- **Fred Coxhead (Wargrave man)**
- **John Gillett (South Berks man, formerly Wargrave man)**
- John Grimsdale
- John Hemmings (son of Ray, carried the Horns)
- Ray Hemmings
- Jack Hyde (bagman)
- Frank Jordan
- **Bill Kent (Wargrave man)**
- John Mooring (aka Slim)
- Michael Bell novice
- R.Blencowe novice

The Missing Box

Mention should be made of a large copper collecting box, heart-shaped, held by the Bagman of the Ring. It was given by Ernest Makepeace, of the Clifton M.M.; he had had it made by Miss Winsome Bartlett of Portishead, a skilled worker in metals. The box was used for the first time at the **Wargrave Meeting**, 5th September, 1936 and a week later, at the Grasmere Meeting, when the men danced at Coniston, the First Log Book says:- "The Chief Constable of the County (Lancashire) had refused permission for any collections to be taken, so a subterfuge was adopted. The Squire (Alec Hunter) explained to the audience that we could not collect from them, but showed them the very fine collecting box presented by Ernest Makepeace in which we had intended taking the collection. This he placed ostentatiously on the ground, remarking upon its beauty but its emptiness, whereupon the audience placed 9/- in it in obvious disapproval of Chief Constables." (The Morris Dancer No.4). The box disappeared for some time after the 70's when it was last seen at Thaxted, This apparently was no loss as it was too small and not much use for collecting (per John Jenner)! It has now found its way to the Ring archive in the Essex PRO.

Major Francis E Fryer

From *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* 1961 / 12 Vol. 9; Iss. 2

TOM HEMMING and FRANCIS FRYER Their work for the Abingdon Morris

Both Tom Hemmings, who died on November 30, 1960 (aged 74), and Francis Fryer, who died on January 26, 1961 (aged 73), played important, but very different, roles in the survival of the Abingdon Morris.

Tom had learned the dances as a boy whilst a member of the family team, of which his father, James, was Mayor. (James's father, Thomas, had been Mayor of Ock Street until his death in 1885.) This team continued dancing until 1901 when it ceased to appear in public. Interest aroused by the visit of Mary Neal caused the team to recommence its annual appearances at the 1910 June Horse Fair, and these continued until the 1914/18 war. During the war, four of the Hemmings family were killed, and the Morris was brought to a halt. The dances, however, were not forgotten and James, his sons, and various friends, continued to run through them every so often in the courtyard of James's house in the Ock Street. Harry Thomas (related to the Hemmings by marriage), who had learned the tunes from the old musician, William Hemmings, played on these occasions. About 1930 an attempt was made to arouse local interest in the Morris by James and his wife, Caroline (who had encouraged the previous revival in 1910), but this was not immediately forthcoming. The Ock Street regalia was carried in the Silver Jubilee procession, but no dancing was undertaken. James died in 1935, followed closely by Caroline, but their son, Tom, kept the spirit of the Morris alive.

At this point Francis Fryer comes into the story. 'The Major' (a term he detested!) had retired from the Army in 1930 and had moved to Wargrave Hall in 1933. He had already 'discovered' folk-dance, and soon had classes going in Wargrave, besides taking a generous and practical interest in a multitude of other local activities. At his invitation, the 1936 meeting of the Morris Ring was held at Wargrave Hall. During the week-end tour the Ring teams danced at Abingdon. Bampton's Billy Wells, who was acting as Fool, recognized James's 81-year-old brother, Henry, among the onlookers, and the two of them danced 'Flowers of Edinburgh' as a double jig.

Afterwards, Dr. Schofield and others chatted to Henry and arranged a meeting to learn something further about the Abingdon tradition. As a result, Henry, and his two nephews, Tom and James (jnr.), were met again a few weeks later. Subsequently it was discovered that a team was actually in existence and had danced during the Coronation celebrations. This team was invited to dance at the E.F.D.S.S. Staff Conference at Wargrave Hall in May, 1937.



Morris Men at Wargrave Hall 1937 (Wargrave Local History Society)

On June 18, 1937, the Abingdon men formed themselves into a proper club, old Henry was appointed Mayor, and Fryer was invited to become President. Tom supervised the dancing. Under Fryer's guidance, and with his generous help, the team undertook modest tours and appeared at Ring meetings, including the one at Stow in 1938, to which Mary Neal was invited. The Mayor's Day ceremonial was also revived in full that year.

At the outbreak of the Second War, Fryer again joined-up and lost contact with the team. Unlike most teams, Abingdon thrived during the War and appeared in aid of Savings Weeks and the local hospital. Henry Hemmings died in 1942, and Tom was appointed Mayor until the proper ceremony could be enacted after the War. Harry Thomas, the musician, died in December, 1947, and the Morris stopped. Fryer was demobbed in 1948 and he and Tom were able to rally the men as Fryer had learned the whole repertoire of tunes from Harry Thomas. By mid-1949 the team was back on its feet and was immediately successful. Mayor-making was revived and Tom was elected Mayor, which he remained till his death, when his nephew, Ray Hemmings, was voted by the people of Ock Street to take his place. There have been regular outings and attendances at Ring meetings, and they were hosts for the 1952 and 1956 meetings.

From 1949 the Abingdon Morris became less of a family concern, hinging on Tom rather than on the Hemmings family, although two members of the family still dance in the team, and there are several more who could dance should the occasion demand. Fryer was careful never to interfere with, or influence, the traditional outlook of the team. His quiet, metric playing, though rather lifeless, seemed to reflect the ceremonial feeling the men have for their dances.

Both men are sadly missed, but the tradition continues, in the form they helped to mould, as their memorial.

ROY DOMMETT.

FRANK PURSLOW.

From Abingdon MM's History:

The Morris Ring was founded in 1934 as a confederation of morris teams and held regular meetings. In 1936 a Ring Meeting was held at Wargrave, at the home of Major Francis Fryer, and they visited Abingdon one afternoon, where they met Henry Hemmings and discovered that there were still morris dancers in Abingdon. On 29th May 1937, a complete team of Abingdon morris dancers danced at Wargrave Hall and on 21st June 1937 the Abingdon team danced in Abingdon once again. Major Fryer was invited to be their President and the Abingdon Herald reported that in addition to the team's officers there were 12 dancers. Later in 1937 they were seen dancing in other locations in Berkshire, and on August Bank Holiday took part in a show in the Abbey grounds along with the newly-reformed Eynsham team and a 'scratch' Ring team led by Kenworthy Schofield. They now called themselves the Abingdon Morris Ring Dancers as they had become members of the Ring, and took to wearing white shirts and white trousers. In 1938, they added a sash with a chequered pattern to the uniform. They danced at the 1938 Ring Meeting in Stow-on-the-Wold at which Mary Neal was a dinner guest. In 1938 and 1939 they danced regularly in Abingdon and other Berkshire towns.

During the Second World War, the team danced to raise money for the war effort, and the dog of the bagman, Percy Hemmings, wore a collecting box round its neck. The musician during the war (and the late 1930s) was Harry Thomas, who died in December 1947.

The dancing started again in earnest in 1949, with Major Fryer as the musician, Tom Hemmings as Lead Dancer and Jack Hyde as bagman. The election of the Mayor of Ock Street resumed as an annual event in 1950 and 'away fixtures' included Windsor Festival of Britain celebrations (1951), the Oxford Ring Meeting (1951) and the Royal Albert Hall Folk Dance Festival (1952). In the early 1950s, the team included some dancers from the Wargrave morris men. Abingdon hosted Ring Meetings in 1952 and 1956. In 1956, the team changed their uniform from a sash to the green and yellow crossed baldricks worn today, these being the main colours of the town flag and crest. These were worn on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the granting of Abingdon's town charter and the visit of the Queen, but they had first appeared on Mayor's Day that year. The team continued to thrive, attending Ring Meetings and dancing outside the town as well as in it during the late 1950s. In November 1960 Tom Hemmings died and Major Fryer died in January 1961, and the team lost its two main leaders.

For detail see <http://atmd.org.uk/diary-for-1919-1949/>

Also:

Just when things were gaining momentum war broke out. Major Fryer returned to military service (*it is rumoured as part of Bletchley Park Security*) and many of the dancers were called up. Those men remaining managed a few performances to raise funds for the war effort, but no elections were held. Henry Hemmings died in October 1945 and Harry Thomas, the team's musician, died in 1947. It seemed as if the Abingdon morris tradition was going into decline again and Percy Hemmings was reported to have lost interest in it. In response the team approached Major Fryer in 1948 to see if he could help out again. Fryer was willing and in 1949 team practices were held twice a month at the Happy Dick with music played by Fryer. No election was held but Tom Hemmings took on the role of Mayor of Ock Street. Some of the Wargrave morris men attended practices to help make up the numbers.

<https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/feature-articles/abingdon-morris-tradition-1918-2018>

Russell Wortley Archive

/1264z Members of the Abingdon Traditional Morris Men, parading at a Morris Ring meeting in Abingdon, Oxon. The melodeon player is Francis Fryer. [B&W; stamped 'Copyright Photograph supplied by H.J. Milligan, Abingdon' on reverse] Sept 1952

Len Bardwell recollections of Fryer

When the Ring was formed I became East Surrey's first bagman and it was then that I started my friendship with Francis Fryer who used to come over with some of his Wargrave men to join in East Surrey's morris day held in May each year. I kept going with East Surrey and Greensleeves till the war stopped things in 1939.

I was in touch with Francis Fryer soon after the war. I should have been in Abingdon for the resumption of the mayor-making in 1949 but for the fact that OMM had a fixture on the day. From then onwards I have been at all the mayor-makings except for 1954 when I was on holiday. Although as bagman of the OMM I was chiefly concerned with their affairs, I used to go to a fair proportion of the Abingdon practices. I learnt the tunes from Francis Fryer (who got them from Harry Thomas) but was mainly concerned to do the dances at first. I didn't say anything about membership but round about 1953 I was invited to join.

It was about 1955 that Francis Fryer became decreasingly active because of asthma. When the fortunes of the OMM suffered a temporary decline, I naturally was glad to turn to Abingdon to keep myself going as a morris man. Francis Fryer played a little (seated) up to about 1957 but I stood by to relieve him and from then on functioned as musician to the team.

Post Script: Len died on 18 Feb 1967 after a full life. His love of the morris drove him to be active & his doctor considered this the prime reason for his four score years! His health defeated him at the end of 1965 & he missed his first May Morning in Oxford for very many years in 1966. We all genuinely missed his jig. The most incredible aspect of a life that spanned the key years of the Revival is that he had not danced a step of morris till he was forty. It pleased him to say that that he had been allowed two lives! He is survived by his wife 2, for many years a sufferer from chronic arthritis, and several children. Len owed a great deal to the morris - too few men now can remember what the Morris owes to Len.

Roy Dommett

<https://www.morrisfed.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/MM-34-1.pdf>

From John Finch – More Folk Memories

Fryer was President of the District until his death and was extremely generous; Wargrave Hall was used at on time for EFDSS Staff Conferences and I believe for the Morris Ring. He played the accordion for the Wargrave Folk Dance Group which met in the Hall and was instrumental in reviving the fortunes of his great love - the Traditional Abingdon Morris. He had his eccentricities such as never missing the 'Archers' programme, even if he was being driven in his Bedford van to Abingdon. He was also very impatient about small matters while ignoring major ones. In dancing he seemed to be blind to wrong stepping but would be very irritated if in Picking Up Sticks a man turned his back on a woman in the diagonal movement. I have known him to storm out of the room over such an incident - and he didn't come back.

We oldies also have memories of the Midsummer Country Fairs in Hambleton Village Square (7pm - midnight) at which we put on every form of dancing we could (*see photos*).

Berks EFDSS programme 1961 Saturday June 10th 7:00pm

1960 Friday June 24th 6:00pm – 11:00pm

(From Hambleton History -The right to hold a weekly market on Mondays and a yearly fair on the vigil, day and morrow of St. Bartholomew (23, 24, 25 August) was also granted in 1315. (fn. 95) The fair on St. Bartholomew's Day was being held in 1325, when Hugh le Despenser obtained an extension to the two following days, (fn. 96) but no later reference has been found to either market or fair.)

(John Finch was the EFDSS District Chairman from 1964 - 67 and President from 1968-74 and a founder member of Kennet. He was made a life member in 1975 and died in April 2009 aged 90. He reckoned Wargrave MM only kept going because of Major Fryer's pride!)

Ray Annetts Memories

We were fortunate to have a first-hand source in Ray Annetts, a Kennet founder member and currently a musician both for Kennet & Mr Hemmings team. His father was Reggie Annetts, the Major's "man" who moved with him from Newbury and had a flat at Wargrave Hall – where Ray spent some of his early childhood. One of his lasting memories of the place was the ballroom, where Adingdon's Horns were stored - scary sight when first seen by a young boy.

Fryer never married and, according to Ray, lost any interest in marriage after having his heart broken when jilted by his “true love”. He was renowned for not changing his mind, once it was made up! He was an excellent engineer and had a fully equipped workshop at Wargrave, complete with a lathe.

He certainly recalls Fryer's passion for the Archers as described by Len Bardswell above, and for the Shipping Forecast, when he would recalibrate his barograph, a pen recording aneroid barometer, and no doubt rewind the clockwork mechanism driving the drum of the graph chart.

We would know more if his brother John, who couldn't understand his folk interests, hadn't built a bonfire in Wargrave Halls' garden, following his death. This included his many volumes of morris notes, song collections, researches – and the Wargrave archive. Reggie Annetts and Roy Dommett, who was a regular visitor, witnessed the event and managed to salvage some of the material, but much was lost. Quite a few of the dance and music sources in the Black Book came from Roy's rescue efforts and he credits Fryer for several of the collected versions appearing under “RD” in Lionel's opus.

Fryer's melodeons were recovered, one being given to Roy Dommett, and the other, a rare Swedish made Hagstrom D/G in a Viennese tuning, being gifted to Ray. It remains Ray's pride and joy.

Paddy O'Neill setting up a school morris club of school boys in Henley, The Ancalites. They were an excellent rapper side but adopted/revived the name Wargrave Morris Ray Annett's suggestion. They attended EFDSS tours, including dancing with Kennet 7th August 1972.

Ray also confirms Wargrave's badge was a Stags Head.

From FOLK DANCE AS A TRADITION Morris Dancer Volume 3, No. 6, January 1999

By Dr. Elise van der Ven-ten BenseL Translated and abridged by Antony Heywood.

The way in which the Morris Tradition develops was seen in Abingdon Abbey grounds on August Bank Holiday Monday when teams from Abingdon and Eynsham appeared. When these teams in deep decline, came into contact with the Morris Ring, they began to think: “If there is so much interest in our dances, why don't we reform and do them ourselves”. This occurred in the Autumn of 1936 with some older dancers and some new ones in each case. Abingdon chose Major Fryer as squire but he took a back seat in order not to influence memories and natural developments.

From Kennet Morris 1965 Archive

<u>AUGUST</u>			
7 Mon.	Evening Tour with Wargrave Morris Men	Burchetts Green (The Crown) Littlewick Green (The Cricketers)	7.30 8.30

Reading Standard 29 April 1960 (British Newspaper Archive)

Wargrave's last known performance before Paddy O'Neils' revival side.

Saturday 23 April 1960



An Interesting Discovery

From the Morris Ring Newsletter No 135 Oct 2024 by Nigel Strudwick

When the Bagman and I were inspecting the stock of Morris Ring staffs held by him to find examples for the two sides who were to dance in this year (Flowers of Ilmington at Stratford, Golden Star at Peterborough), we made an interesting discovery. In addition to (fortunately) two blank staffs, we discovered two older ones, the identity of one of which was unclear, but the other was very clearly painted down the length at one end with “Wargrave” and “Morris Ring” in large letters, and around the circumference at the other end in smaller letters “October 1934” and “Francis Fryer – Bagman”.

The name Wargrave rang a distant bell, and a quick call to Matt Simons confirmed they were a side who had been in the Ring from the very early days—they seem to have been a forerunner of the current Kennet Morris, for which see the article on the Ring web site by our esteemed Web Editor, Peter de Courcy (<https://themorrisring.org/article/southberkshire-morris-men-uncovered>). Fryer was very prominent in that area of the country in the prewar period. I first encountered Wargrave when reading the booklet *Fifty Years of Morris Dancing from 1949* (see <https://themorrisring.org/50-years-booklet>). [I should preface any further remarks by saying that I am not a Morris historian and am unfamiliar with lots of sources, so please correct me (as I’m sure you will) on what follows!

The evidence of this staff surely indicates that they were admitted to the Ring at the Inaugural Ring Meeting on 20 October 1934, as they are mentioned as being present at that meeting on p.6 of the printed *The First Log Book* by Walter Abson, a transcription of which was published by the Ring in 1991 (one relevant part of it is at <https://themorrisring.org/about-mr/history>). As far as I can tell, this document does not specifically note their admission to the Ring, but that is presumably in the official minutes. Although clearly distinguishing them from the six Founding Sides, the *Fifty Years* booklet does call them an Inaugural Member, along with several other sides.

Wargrave were among the teams that were formed subsequent to the publication of EFDS News in 1934 announcing the formation of the Ring in Thaxted in June 1934. They hosted the sixth meeting of the MR in 1936. Peter deC’s latest reference to them is in 1952, and it would be good to know when they called it a day. If anyone has information about how and when the Wargrave staff was returned to the Ring it would be gratefully received. There is a piece of paper bearing the word “Wargrave” stuck onto the staff by—I would guess—a Ring Bagman at the time of its return.

I thought it would be of interest for the membership to be aware of the existence of this staff, as it is clearly an important object from the beginning of the Ring and a key document of an Inaugural Member, and should be kept somewhere safe. For the latter reason, I contacted Chris Wildridge (MR Archive Group chair) for advice, being aware that—as I have said at more than one ARM—3D items cannot be added to the Ring Archive at the Essex Record Office (ERO). Following enquiries, Chris got back to me saying that the ERO was prepared to accept “totemic items”, such as a side’s staff, as a deposit, and so it looks like the safety of the Wargrave staff is assured for the future.

