Workshop Notes

The Illustrious Order of Fools and Beasts

Notes from Fools and Beasts workshops held in the late 1980's and early 90's written and presented by Mike Wilkinson, Fool to Dolphin Morris, and reproduced with his permission.

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The Dolphin Morris Men
Workshop Notes
Collected & Edited by Peter de Courcy
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INTRODUCTION

Mike Wilkinson, Fule to the Dolphin Morris Men, produced handouts for a series of Unconvention workshops in the late 1980's and 90's which I’d hung on to, hoping to read them one day... With his permission, (he's still blushing at the praise) I’ve scanned and OCR’d them into this document.

Any errors will probably have been introduced by me but I have not attempted to update the contents. The Union of Fools was the original Morris Ring disorganisation and the gender used reflects this.

Whilst you'll never learn to be a Fool or Beast from a printed page, what follows certainly is thought provoking and whilst we may not agree with everything written, I think they've stood the test of time.

As Mike says by way of introduction, in the following Epistle to Delegates of the 1998 Unconvention in Plymouth, one way to develop you skills is to attend an Unconvention of what is now The Illustrious Order of Fools and Beasts. If the opportunity of a joyous weekend in the colourful company of the like minded élite of The Morris fraternity is not possible, you could instead join the discussions on our Facebook page www.facebook.com/FoolsAndBeasts or at least find out when the next Unconvention is scheduled for. See you there.

And many, thanks Mike.

Yours Foolishly
Pete de C

Epistle to Delegates of the 1998 Unconvention in Plymouth

The United Fools’ Union started many years ago when there was a move afoot to exclude Fools from shows at Ring Meetings. The original Gang of Four - Morris Sunderland, Trevor Hull, Johnny Burke, and Bill Warder - are sadly no longer with us, but we feel that they started something important, and we have built on it.

The Union exists to encourage a high standard of Fooling and Beasting, partly for its own sake, and partly there was some justification for the criticisms which were being voiced around the time that the Union formed. Bad Fooling reflects badly on the Morris in general, and other Fools in particular. The Union also provides an opportunity for Fools and Beasts to swap ideas, learn from each other, and establish a rapport, so that they can work together when they meet at Ring Meetings.

There is no “right way” to Fool, and the Union does not set out to promote a particular style or approach. There are several “wrong ways” to Fool - anything which causes genuine offence to the audience, or other dancers - and we do try to help new Fools avoid the basic mistakes.
It is not possible to teach somebody to be a Fool, but it is possible to teach techniques (juggling, announcing, mime, etc.) and to pass on experience. In former times, a new Fool would have learned by watching his predecessor. The Morris was part of normal village life, and new Fools would have had a natural understanding of what was required. This has now changed: audiences expect more (they are used to TV, cinema, etc.), and new Fools often have no model to follow.

The format of the F&A varies from year to year, with the emphasis varying between formal workshops, “talks”, and simple discussion groups. This reflects the wide range of styles within the Union. Some Fools base their performances entirely on their own personality, and improvisation; others use set pieces and techniques bordering on street theatre. We can all learn from each other. I find that I do most of my learning in the weeks leading up to the Unconvention, if I am preparing workshops, and in the weeks after, when ideas I have picked up mature and develop to fit my own style.

Over the years, certain subjects have become more or less fixtures in the discussions, but there always seems something new to say. New members often have their own ideas, or, just as importantly, ask new and unexpected questions. An unusual problem experienced by a Fool in his own side can provoke interesting and productive discussions at the Union.

A few common subjects are:

**Kit/Costume/Garb.** These days, the choice of costume available is wider than it was in Sharp’s day. Popular choices are smock, tail coat, and jester’s costume (“motley”). Some Fools wear specialised costumes, perhaps related to their trade, or to their local area. Some Fools think that it is important to develop a costume and stick with it; others like to change their costume from time to time, believing that it keeps their performance fresh. Some like elaborate costumes; others prefer simplicity and comfort. Most agree that a costume should be easy to maintain, and should identify you as a member of your side.

**Announcing.** Not just techniques (and there are many), but should the Fool announce at all?

Most Fools agree that it depends on their character, and role in the side. Assuming that you are going to announce at least some of the time, what should you say? How can you say it? How can you make sure that you are heard?
Collecting/Bagging. Similar questions to-announcing. Is it your job? If so, how can you do - it better? What to avoid.

Tricks and Props. Some Fools use only a bladder on a stick. Others carry juggling balls, puppets, fire eating gear, unicycles, stilts, etc. If you want to use props, and do set piece routines, how do you choose? Props should be versatile, portable, and replaceable. What else? Where is the line between Morris Fooling, and street circus? Does it matter?

Bladders etc. Traditionally (which I think means, “sometimes in the past”), the Fool used an inflated pig’s bladder to hit dancers and members of the crowd. Most Fools agree that a weapon is an important part of being a Fool, but that it does not have to be a bladder. Think of Charlie Chaplin’s cane, or Ken Dodd’s tickling stick. I am a vegetarian, and don’t use a bladder. What are the alternatives to a bladder? How do you make a slapstick? If you use a bladder, where do you find one? How do you prepare it?

Fool’s Jig. Discussions have ranged from the basic Bampton Jig, to one or two experimental and controversial sessions working on improvisation and free expression. Most Fools agree that the Fool should be able to do a jig of some sort.

Dancing Number 7. It is generally agreed that a Fool should be a competent dancer. Many Fools like to improvise a 7th position in some set dances. How do you do this? When is it appropriate? How do you avoid collisions? How do you deal with them when they inevitably happen?

Role in the side. What is the Fool’s role in the side? If you’re not careful, you can be dumped on in a big way, collecting, announcing, policing the crowd, and never dancing. How do you establish the ground rules? What are they? How do you stop your side spoiling your performance by trying (unsuccessfully) to be funny at crucial moments? What is your role outside the show?

The Fool is the link between the dancers and the crowd. (As every skoolboy kno.) How do you establish this link? How far do you go? How do you judge an audience? Is it better to work with small groups and individual families, or do you prefer grandstanding? What if it all goes horribly wrong?

Working with Beasts. Does your side have a Beast? Do you come across Beasts at ring Meetings? How do you interact with them? How can you help them? When should you avoid them? Are there any standard routines which work? Bring some ideas.

The F&A works best if everyone has something to say, whether it’s a question; an idea, or an opinion. Spend some time thinking about this year’s dance season: what worked? What went wrong? What should you have tried, or avoided? Did something impress you, or bug you? How would you like to develop your Fooling next year? The Unconvention gives you the opportunity to raise the subject, either in the bar, or in one of the discussion sessions, and see what develops. Borrow ideas, and develop them for your own use. Pass on a couple of ideas of your own.

May your bladder never burst.

©Mike Wilkinson Fule to The Dolphin Morris Men
ANNOUNCING

(Or, circumloquacious, oratorial extravagance and declamatory communication techniques.)

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT?
1. To attract attention to the show
2. To hold the audience’s attention
3. To fill in gaps whilst the dancers are getting ready
4. To give continuity to the show.
5. To convey facts: name of the side, dance titles, time of next show.
6. To be entertaining.

Consider the Three C’s, Context, Content and Style:

CONTEXT
1. Where are you? Pub, shopping centre, fete, ceilidh?
2. Are there other sides performing in the same show?
3. How big is the crowd?
4. How is it made up? Family groups, kids, adults, scattered groups?
5. How keen is the crowd? Paid to see you? Happy to see you? Can see you?

CONTENT
1. Facts: name of side, dance title, reason for show (charity?) etc.
2. Description: “in this next dance you will see…”
3. Humour

STYLE
1. Should be consistent with your “character.”
2. May be declamatory: “Ladiesssss annnnd Centlemennn…”
3. May be conspiratorial: Communicate with wry comments and asides.
4. Could be like a TV presenter, sports commentator etc.
5. You can stand still.
6. You can prowl along the front of the audience in a sinister manner.
7. You can wander through the crowd declaiming as you go.
8. With a big crowd, two of you can announce in relays.
9. You could announce in verse/rhyme.
10. Or mime.
11. Or Franglais.
12. Think about choice of language: simple or elaborate? Dialect?

The fourth ‘C’ is PRESENTATION
1. Be prepared: not necessarily word for word, but have a rough plan.
2. Be confident. Project not only your voice, but your personality.
3. Don’t be apologetic (unless it is a deliberate style.)
4. Direct your announcement to the crowd, not the side, the floor, the ceiling, your shoes...
5. Try to get momentary eye contact with members of the crowd.
ARE WE FOOLING QUIETLY?

The imaginative Fool can find many ways to annoy a wide variety of people, particularly members of his own side, members of other sides, and last, but not least, the person who is watching - or, as we say in the trade, ‘Crowd’. The Fool has an ancient licence to break taboos, prick the bubble of pomposity in those in authority, and, indeed, to fulfil any number of clichés. However, let’s face it, no one likes to get smacked in the mouth, so there are times when it might suit our purposes to avoid causing offence and annoyance. Such a climb-down, of course, needs a face-saving formula, and I suggest that ‘a real challenge to our creative ability’ more or less fits the bill.

One ‘real challenge to our creative ability’ which serendipitously reduces the risk of causing offence or annoyance is Fooling quietly. You know: not shouting.

Consider the typical Fool. He bellows an announcement at the beginning of the show; he charges through the middle of the set; he strikes people on the bottom, usually, but not always, with his bladder. Oh, how zany he is! Say, for the first 10 minutes, then it wears a bit thin.

The quiet approach is less obvious, more challenging, and, when it works, more rewarding. The Fool’s job is (all together now...) to be the link between the dancers and the crowd. Driving the crowd away by shouting at them does not, on the face of it, seem an obvious way to do this. Instead, try working with gestures, winks, facial expressions and so on. If you stand in the middle and bellow, some people will listen, but others will just switch off. If you do something a bit quieter they might watch and listen to see what you’re up to. At the very least, you’re not going to get some disgruntled thug come up to you and say, “Oi! Keep the noise up!”

I’m not suggesting the use of mime. Mime is mainly for French people. I am saying try some of the following, and see if they work for you:

- Work hard at forming eye contact with a few individuals’ in the crowd (One at a time is easiest.)
- Use big, precise gestures.
- Move one part of your body (an arm, or your head, for example) at a time. **Contrast.**
- Plant your feet firmly, and move the top half of your body into a pose.
- Hold poses for a few seconds.
- When you look at the front row of the crowd allow your gaze to move slowly from left to right (or vice versa) catching the eye of each individual for a moment.
- When threatening’ someone with your bladder, bauble, slapstick, etc., just holding it and smiling at them is often more effective than something more obviously aggressive.
- Another advantage is that if a child is frightened, or if an adult is not inclined to take part in the fun, then it is easier to back off.
- The quiet ‘aside’ is sometimes very effective in gaining the attention and good will of a small section of the crowd.
BLADDER SUBSTITUTES

I don’t have a pig’s bladder myself- I don’t really drink enough to justify it. However, many Fools feel strongly that the pig’s bladder is the only true symbol and weapon of the Fool. Well, that and the cow’s tail. And the horse’s tail of course. Oh, and the Ox bladder.

In many ways, the pig’s bladder is the ideal weapon for the Morris Fool. It is widely seen as the traditional item. It has a certain mystique and has various connotations of rusticity, paganism, eccentricity etc. Also, it makes a wonderful noise without causing any real pain to the victim.

Nevertheless, the bladder is only one option. Some other options are more contemporary in feel and are easier to obtain, prepare and maintain. Furthermore, pigs’ bladders can cause genuine offence to vegetarians and people of certain religions.

Let’s not argue about it.

Whatever your final choice, it is essential that you have some staff of office or “Bauble.” You cannot be a Fool without one, although you may be a very good clown, comedian or whatever. Your Bauble is the symbol of your special authority as a Fool. It is your licence to break certain conventions. It is a vital comic tool. Some people also think that it’s phallic - they should see a Doctor.

Throughout history, Fools have used a variety of Baubles. Think of the Jester’s Head-on-a-Stick, Charlie Chaplin’s cane, Ken Dodd’s tickling stick, Timmy Mallett’s Mallet, The England Cricket Team’s bats etc.

So, given that you are looking for an alternative to the bladder, what are you looking for?
• Something which is easy to obtain, maintain and replace; something amusing and versatile.
• Something which doesn’t cause damage or pain. Something distinctive.

As a rule, things which are almost but not quite bladders just don’t work. I have seen and/or tried rubber gloves, balloons, condoms, bladders from wine boxes, pedal bin liners, sponges and surgical gloves. Of these, the most successful seems to be the hugely inflated washing up glove, but this only seems to work with a certain type of Fool. Otherwise, it can look a bit, well, like a rubber glove, really.

Slapsticks are very versatile and have a long tradition. They are, of course, the source of the expression “slapstick comedy.” Anyone wanting advice on how to make them, see me.

Tickling sticks are popular, but they have strong echoes of Ken Dodd. I feel that you need to personalise them a bit. Ticklers are great for a gentle style of Fooling.

Baubles (Heads-on-Sticks) are not common in the Morris but can be used to good effect. Like the bladder, they are an unmistakable badge of the Fool.

Joke Shop novelties are seldom satisfactory. We shouldn’t need to buy someone else’s imagination. However, there are some good ones, so keep looking.

My next experiment will be with foam pipe insulation.
BREAKER OF TABOO

The Fool can get away with a lot of things which would get anybody else criticised. He has a special licence to act outside usual social rules, subject to the consent of the other people present. As soon as this consent is lost, the Fool becomes a Pariah.

In a normal social situation, the consent must be earned over a period of time. In a Morris show, the Fool’s distinctive kit and his bladder will give him a good start, but he still has to establish his credentials.

Once the consent is established, the Fool may break a number of social rules: he may hit people with an inflated pig’s bladder, for a start! He can also talk familiarly with complete strangers, put his arms round ladies in the crowd, borrow hats from bald men (and polish their pates) shout and sing and dance on the tables etc.

However, there are a number of rules which the Fool cannot break: he must not hurt anybody, insult them to the point of causing genuine offence, cause damage to property etc. He can touch up ladies in the crowd as long as it is a joke and he doesn’t go too far, but he is in serious trouble if he takes advantage of this.

So what the Fool does is to define a new set of limits to social behaviour. He draws a distinction between necessary social rules (not hurting people) and arbitrary social rules (not talking to strangers.) Most people feel quite tightly bound by social rules, some of which do more harm than good. They need someone like the Fool to break the rules occasionally to re-establish a sense of perspective. For the duration of the Fool’s performance, the people affected enjoy something of a holiday from the demands of social convention.

This places quite a burden on the Fool. If he goes just far enough, everybody loves him. If he goes even slightly too far, he suddenly becomes unpopular, and, in extreme cases, in trouble with angry boyfriends/husbands or even the law.

Often, although the Fool crosses the limits of normal behaviour, he cannot take the crowd more than a little way with him. However, as he explores those limits on his own, he is there as a representative of the crowd. A common reaction from a member of the crowd might be “I wish I dared do that” or “I wish I’d said that.”

The Fool also breaks taboo by being able to mock authority. Although most people in the crowd are pleased to have a Squire making serious announcements about the dances etc. throughout the show, they feel a natural distaste for anyone being too serious or pompous. The Fool can deal with this by mocking the Squire if he gets tedious, and, once again, the Fool is the spokesman for the crowd.
1. Safe but boring. Repetition can irritate.

2. Ideal. You’ve been pretty cheeky but you’ve not ruffled any feathers.

1. The victim feels in control.

2. Brittle. If you get it just right, you’ll get a good reaction. If not,

3. You are starting to annoy.

4. Oops!

Remember that individuals will have different toleration levels, dependent not only on whether they are “good tempered” or “bad tempered” but also on their social background and status, who is watching etc.
CHARACTER AND COSTUME

There are many important considerations when choosing or designing a Fool’s costume: comfort, ease of maintenance, appearance, compatibility with your side’s kit, etc. For now, we are interested in only one factor: the effect of your costume on your ‘character’.

Most good Fools have a clearly defined character; this is often no more than their own personality, turned up a notch. Spike Milligan once said, ‘Eccles is me, only more so.’ Other Fools have a character which is not directly related to their own personality, and is more like acting a role. In either case, the Fool’s costume is important because it affects:

1. How the audience perceives the Fool
2. How the Fool feels (comfortable, scruffy, formal, etc.)
3. The Fool’s freedom of movement.

These three things, combined with the Fool’s physical appearance, have an effect on a Fool’s character. A tall, portly Fool in an elaborate formal costume would neither feel nor appear Puckish and mischievous. A young lively Fool in rags or patches would struggle to appear dignified.

In both cases, of course, comic effect can be achieved by contrasting manner with appearance, as in Chaplin’s tramp character, who tries to behave with great dignity, but always fails.

Mike Cogan’s costume is that of a Cavalier. He chose it originally because the Parliamentarians tried to ban Morris Dancing. Over the years, he has been mistaken for King Charles and Captain Hook. In particular, the kids at regular Greensleeves events always look out for Captain Hook.

Mike Cogan’s costume is distinctive and eye catching. It encourages people to come up to him and make conversation, which gives him a fine opportunity to interact with the crowd. Also, the splendour of the costume commands attention, helping Mike when he needs to announce to the crowd.

Mike Wilkinson’s costume changes at least once a year, developing in fits and starts. This started as a deliberate attempt to be different from his predecessor, and then became something of a standing joke. Now the costume changes in a more considered way. Mike finds that slight differences in the costume (a new hat, a new weapon) highlight different aspects of his performance, preventing it from going stale. Although the costume changes, people in the crowd still recognise him at regular events, and often comment on the changes.

Neither Mike is right or wrong, but in one sense, they are at opposite extremes. Where there is agreement is on the fundamental importance of their costume on their characters. Either Mike would have difficulty Fooling in the other’s costume. (Oops… Sounds dodgy…)

Choose, design and personalise your Fool’s kit so that it enhances your Fool’s character. This is far more important than following any alleged rules about odd socks, smocks, colours and so on.
DANCING NUMBER 7

1. Dancing Number 7 is an essential part of Fooling. It is one of the things that make you a Morris Fool instead of a clown.

2. Some Squires/Foremen dislike the Fool dancing number 7. Compromise is essential, but if they try to forbid it absolutely they are ignoring an essential part of the tradition. They might as well try to forbid pipe and tabor music, or wearing bells.

3. By dancing en apparently random 7th part, you emphasise the fact that the other 6 men are following a strict pattern. You are not disrupting the shape of the dance, you are enhancing it.

4. It is usually best not to dance a choreographed routine throughout an entire dance. Instead, build a repertoire of moves which can be mixed and matched.

5. Dancing number 7 includes walking through the set, standing still in the middle etc.

6. Practice with your side. Get them used to you being in the set.

7. Establish a rule: they ignore you; you avoid them.

8. For the purposes of the performance, all collisions are your fault, irrespective of the facts. You have the skills and personality to hide mistakes or to make a feature of them. An ordinary dancer will just be embarrassed.

9. Learn from your mistakes.

10. Be selective. Some dances do not take a 7th man. Others are more versatile.

11. Take extra care with new dances and new dancers. Keep out of the way if everyone isn’t completely confident.

12. If you keep going up and down the middle, you will bisect the set. Go round the outside as well to bind it together. Emphasise that it is a set of six dancers.

13. The musician is also part of the set, so include him from time to time but don’t put him off.

14. Do not repeatedly pass between the musician and the dance otherwise you will appear to separate them.

15. Take the dance with you into the crowd, but always return to the dance in time for the finish.
FOOLING, THE MORRIS, AND STREET ENTERTAINMENT

The Morris is no longer a pure tradition. From the moment that the middle class, well educated, Cecil Sharp looked out of the window, saw the Morris, and decided to learn more about it, write it down and, ultimately, teach it to others, it has developed in a way which some people would regard as artificial. Others, with equal sincerity, believe that the transition from a quaint Cotswold custom to a hobby pursued by enthusiasts worldwide is just another stage in the development of the tradition.

The Morris is widely perceived as having its roots in pagan fertility rituals. Whether this is true or not, there is little real evidence to support the idea - after all, for centuries, paganism was illegal, and punishable by death, and most people, especially the workers, were illiterate. Ultimately, it is a matter of personal choice whether to believe that the Morris is a distorted remnant of a pagan ritual, or whether this is a charming myth attached to it by romantic late Victorians.

Whatever the truth, the Morris today is different from the Morris of 1899 when Sharp ‘discovered’ it. I dance the Morris as a hobby, whilst having respect for the fact that it is a tradition which has survived at least 400 years, and which is a unique part of our heritage. The Morris is now danced by a wide variety of people, most of who have other interests, and bring other skills and attitudes into the Morris. As a result of this, skills such as juggling, mime, fire-eating, stilt-walking, unicycling sometimes find their way into the Morris show.

Somewhere, the Morris stops and the street theatre begins. The Morris is an ancient custom, but street theatre is ‘just entertainment’. Most of us would broadly agree with this. However, it must be remembered that when Cecil Sharp saw the Headington Quarry Men for the first time, he did not see bucolic peasants dancing a May Day ritual to make the corn grow; he saw a group of quarry workers dancing on Boxing Day to make a bit of money from the ‘folk at the big house’ by entertaining them.

The Morris generally used to be danced by a single team of local people to local audiences who had little to compare it with: no TV, cinema, or theatre. Now the Morris is usually danced to an audience of strangers, often at an event where several teams are taking it in turns to perform. Also, members of the audience are saturated with entertainment. They probably watched a couple of hours of TV before coming out, listened to their car stereo on the way, and even the pub has a TV and/or juke box as well as a pool table, fruit machine and space invaders.

This presents us with a dilemma: we want to attract audiences, and we want the Morris to be seen and enjoyed for its own sake, but getting people to come out of the pub to watch something widely perceived as boring, old fashioned and slightly embarrassing can be difficult.

My own feeling is that anything which the Fool or Beast can do to grab and hold the attention of the crowd is legitimate, but that the Fool or Beast must remember that the Morris is the ‘core product’ and he should always be conscious of the central importance of the Morris dancing. Many of us overstep the mark from time to time, but the rule should be that any street circus style activities must enhance the Morris show, rather than detract from it.
So where do we draw the line? I don’t! What is important to me is not where you are standing, but which way you are facing. The purpose of little juggling routines, conjuring tricks and stick balancing tricks is to get the attention and good will of the crowd, so that you can return to the dance and they will then watch it and enjoy it. When you are in the set, the eye contact, nods, winks and gestures to the kids in the front row are so that they feel that they are involved in what is going on, not just passively watching a formal display. The odd bit of “watch me!” between the dances is fine, as it fills those unattractive gaps in the show when the side can’t decide what to dance, or can’t find a sixth dancer.

Whenever your activities are designed to keep the people interested in the Morris you are Fooling. Whenever you become the centre of attention at the expense of the Morris, you are doing something else. If you do a set piece ten minute routine of fire-eating, it may be excellent entertainment - it may even be a great way to add variety to a long show - but it is not Fooling. The defining characteristic of the Fool is that he is the odd one out in the side, so he must be part of the side in the first place.

There is one area where I personally feel that a bit more leeway is allowed: the big show, like Thaxted, where there is a huge crowd and a lot of teams are dancing. Here, I feel that the Fool takes on a roving role, adding variety to the show by performing to small groups within the audience, talking to them, performing little routines, and generally jollying people along. Even in this situation, the Fool should keep moving, be sensitive to what is going on in the main show, and generally keep the noise down.

So, the distinction I am trying to draw is between street theatre, which is great in its own right, but isn’t the Morris, and street theatre skills which can be used in a Morris context to enhance the Morris show, attract, and keep audiences. Or something.
FOOL’S JIG

WHAT IS A FOOL’S JIG?
- Is it the Bampton Jig of that name?
- Is it simply ANY JIG danced by a Fool?
- Is it ANY JIG danced by the Fool in a particular manner?
- Does it have to follow a fixed format?

WHAT DISTINGUISHES A FOOL’S JIG?
- It is danced by the Fool.
- He uses a stick, or broom, or bladder, or bauble, or slapstick, or
- It has a ‘novelty’ and/or gymnastic aspect, like passing a stick under the legs.
- Perhaps the Fool interacts with the Crowd more than a normal Jig Dancer would.

BAMPTON FOOL’S JIG
- Simple stepping: singles and capers.
- Various traditional options with the stick.
- Variable/versatile sequence.
- Not necessarily impressive unless performed rather than simply danced.
- Not the be all and end all, but a good starting point.
- Could you adapt the jig to a different tradition?
- Bampton is a relaxed, casual style. Perhaps well suited to a Fool?

PERFORMANCE
- Introduction: big build up or come on suddenly.
- Rapport with musician is essential.
- Eye contact or other interaction with crowd
- Use the space.
- Build to a climax.
- Possibility of failure. Perhaps deliberate.
FOOLS’ JIGS
(Or, Terpsichorean Improvisation and Athleticism with Comic Pretentions.)

OBJECTIVES
I am NOT suggesting that we abandon, discard, get rid of, alter, amend or change the Bampton Fool’s Jig.

I am NOT suggesting that we set up an alternative to BFJ which is in any way preferable to or “better” than BFJ.

I AM hoping to widen the scope for Fools’ Jigs: Jigs danced by Fools.

THE PRESENT SITUATION (A personal view.)
Jigs are generally regarded as a poor relation of the “real” Morris. They are seldom included in shows and, when they are, it is usually as an emergency “fill in” whilst the other dancers are at the bar.

Jigs are often danced far too seriously and, in keeping with this, they are greeted with polite applause rather than enthusiasm.

Jigs are seen as set pieces: a prescribed series of steps danced to a specific tune.

Bampton Fool’s Jig is seen as something of a curiosity and is often danced by Fools out of no more than a sense of duty.

On the other hand, when jigs are performed spontaneously in a crowded pub, with the audience heckling or shouting encouragement, something of the true spirit of the Fool’s Jig survives.

WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO SEE
Jigs should be regarded as an opportunity to show off your skill and to allow your personality to show through your dancing. A jig dancer should not just perform a sequence, he should dance for joy.

Jigs should not be a display; they should be an entertainment. The Jig dancer should use the floor space and interact with the audience. There should be plenty of eye contact and communication between the dancer and the crowd.

There should be plenty of improvisation. Most jigs have only a short sequence which is distinctive. The rest can be ad-libbed. This is in fact traditional, although this is often forgotten.

A Fool should be able to improvise a few bars of jig to almost any tune, drawing on a number of styles, including non-Morris sources.

A Fool should dance a Jig in a way which is consistent with his character, and should make use of his bladder, slapstick, duster etc.
HOW TO SWING YOUR BAUBLE
(Or, How to Control Your Bladder.) (Entertainingly.)

In this session, I will use the term “Bauble” to include bladders, slapsticks, tickling sticks etc. “Bauble” is an old name for the “head on a stick” used by jesters.

The Bauble is the Fool’s most important accoutrement. It is his symbol of rank and authority; it is his licence to break normal social rules and touch members of the audience; it is his best comic prop. However, many Fools do not think clearly about how they use the Bauble. As a result of this, it is common to see a Fool using his Bauble indiscriminately and irritationally or, just as bad, failing to use it at all. I feel that the Bauble should be used sparingly but intelligently.

Remember the acronym, “STUPID”: Sudden, Tension, Unexpected, Predictable, Ingenious and Dancers. (Thinks: “Hey, this is clever stuff!”)

**Sudden** Attack without warning or preparation. Snatch an opportunity (someone bending over...) or shock some noisy kid who’s asking for it. Too much “Sudden” can irritate the crowd and will devalue the comic effect and ritual power of the Bauble.

**Tension** Create Tension by stalking your victim. The victim and/or the crowd can see what’s going to happen. Build up the feeling of anticipation before attacking. An added advantage is that this gives you a chance to gauge your victim’s reaction and, if necessary, gracefully retreat.

**Unexpected** Not the same as Sudden. The trick is to get the audience or victim to expect the wrong thing. Prepare to attack the child then wallop the parent, aim for the head then hit the bum, that type of thing. This is a good escape route from Tension if the intended victim looks nervous or hostile.

**Predictable** Sometimes it’s funny BECAUSE everyone knows what’s going to happen. Develop a pattern: always the same part of the dance, always the same victim, everyone on the front row.

**Ingenious** Trick your victim. Get two kids to have a shoelace tying race then wallop their bums.

**Dancers** Don’t forget to occasionally discipline or “encourage” the dancers. Don’t overdo it and don’t put them off.

**Victims:** Think carefully about your choice of victim. An important thing to remember is the victim’s perception of his own status within his group. As a rule, don’t attack the highest or lowest ranking member first.

If you go for the highest ranking member first, they may feel that their dignity has been threatened and they may take offence. Leave them until last and they will happily join in to show family or friends what a good sport they are.

If you go for the lowest ranking member first, they may feel intimidated and the rest of the group may become defensive. Leave them until later, when they feel a bit braver and more confident.
Juggling
(Or, for Motown fans, Jurrgling.)

A useful addition to the Fool’s repertoire? Juggling is quite easy really. Juggling with four or more balls or clubs is for the expert, and I think it takes you beyond Fooling into Street Circus. A Fool should use his presentational skills rather than technical skills to achieve his results. (Except when dancing or playing, of course.)

To juggle three: put two balls in the right hand and one in the kit hand then throw one of the two up in the air and slightly to the left then just as it passes the apex throw the one in the left hand up and to the right so that it passes inside the trajectory of the one which is already moving which leaves the kit hand free to catch the ball which is coming towards it but of course by now the second ball is apexing so it is time to throw the remaining ball from the right hand so that it passes inside the trajectory of the other leaving the right hand free to catch ball number two. Repeat until one or more balls hit the floor.

With clubs, use a ‘choke’ grip. That is, hold, throw and catch the club from about half way along, rather than the end of the handle. The end of the handle moves further and faster, is harder to catch, and can hurt tender fingers. Use a flick of the wrist to impart a spin to the club.

A good alternative start, and occasional ‘flourish, when you can juggle three comfortably is to throw one ball up from each hand and then throw the third ball up between them. This is easier with balls than clubs.

**Good juggling implements:**

1. Heavier balls are better as they minimise the effects of inconsistencies in the throwing action, and they are also easier to catch as they tend to fold your hands round them as they hit your palms.
2. Those rubber rings or quoits which they make for dogs to chew on. If you drop one, you can entertainingly chase it for miles. How the children will laugh.
3. Bean bags.
4. Hankies. Open them out, and grab them from above, so that you are juggling with your palms facing down. The hankies should float. I sometimes go down one side of the set pinching hankies from three dancers (during a stick dance, obviously) and juggle with them. Not advisable on windy days. (Unless you are indoors, of course.)
5. Sink plungers.
6. Dish mops.
7. Wooden spoons.
8. Short sticks. (It can be done.)
9. Juggling clubs from juggling shops are ridiculously expensive - £15+ each! Cheap toy shops often have sets of three clubs with a crappy instruction book for about £10. (1990 prices!)
In the interests of clarity, I have omitted to draw the hands.
The Fool’s Trick

Comedians tell jokes, clowns perform routines, Fools fool. It’s a different thing. Why ‘Fool’? Are we stupid or something? As Trevor Hull was fond of saying, ‘I may be a Fool, but I’m not an idiot.’

‘Yes, Trevor,’ we would say, not unambiguously.

Let’s face it, the word ‘Fool’ is not exactly flattering. However, you should remember that a Fool is called a Fool in the same way as a surprise is called a surprise: if someone says, ‘That explosion was a surprise,’ they don’t mean, ‘That explosion didn’t know it was going to happen: they mean, ‘It surprised me.’ Likewise, when you say, ‘I am a Fool,’ you don’t mean, Tm gormless,’ you mean, ‘I fool people.’ See?

So, we are Fools because we fool people. We give them what they expect, only it turns out to be different.

Learning to juggle 5 balls is clever, but it isn’t Fooling. Juggling 3 invisible balls and getting the crowd to applaud is Fooling. Steve Ashcroft juggles the insides of balloons.

An ideal Fool’s trick has little or no technical content. It should be obvious to the audience, on sober reflection, that it has no technical content. They could do it themselves. Any fool could do it, in fact. The thing is, you present it with sufficient confidence, patter, eye contact, and flourish to get the audience to suspend disbelief for a few moments. They are playing along with the joke. They are in on the conspiracy.

The trick may take only a second or two (balancing a stick on one finger then, for the finale, standing on one leg) or it may take a minute or two. Much longer is moving out of the realms of Fooling and into Street Circus. Not that there’s anything wrong with Street Circus, but it isn’t the Morris.

Not all Fools do tricks. However, I have always found it handy to have a few little routines which I can dust down and use to fill in the gaps in the show, to soften the impact of collecting, and generally to add to the Morris Experience. Over the years, I have found that it is the little throwaways and silly bits which work. The unicycle only comes out for processions now.
THE JOKER IN THE PACK

You are either a Fool or you aren’t. You can learn techniques and skills, and improve your standard of performance, but unless you are a born Fool, you will only make yourself into a clown or a comedian.

The Fool is the Joker in the pack. He is the individual who is expected to behave in a certain way by the other members of the group, and who can get away with more than anyone else in the group. Every stable group of people has some form of hierarchy, with some individuals fulfilling clearly defined roles. There is a natural leader, whose suggestions seem to carry more weight than anyone else’s; there is often a natural victim, who is teased and criticised by members of the group, although the group would defend them against criticism from an external source. One of these roles is the Fool. Not every group has a Fool, but very few have more than one (or it would be chaos!)

Look at any group of people, in the workplace, on a committee, at a club. There is usually one person who is the natural Fool. He makes the facetious comments, is responsible for notices which mysteriously appear on the notice board at work etc. When something unpopular happens (e.g. a new rule is imposed by the manager) it is the Fool who channels the group’s resentment into humour, by pointing up the ridiculous side of the problem, rather than complaining. People in authority should be grateful to Fools for taking the sting out of resentment felt by subordinates. Often, however, the Fool is resented or feared as a threat to that authority.

So how do you get into this position? You grow into it. You cannot force the pace without risking causing disruption to the established order. There is a progression from being a new member of the group, through being “a bit of a comedian” to becoming established as the group’s Spokesman on Matters Humorous.

Generally, someone who is a natural Fool will end up occupying this role at work and in any sports clubs etc. However, it takes time, and I for one would not presume to become Morris Fool in a new side until I was established as Fool in the minds of the members of the side.

The Fool must remember that he holds the office by consent of the group. If he abuses it, he may lose it very suddenly: “You’ve always been a prat, but this time you’ve gone too far!”. The Fool must also remember that he performs a service for the group. He is their spokesman. In times of stress, he is expected to make a fun of those who are causing the problems. The Fool helps people to stop feeling resentment and start feeling superior because they can laugh at their persecutors.

In happier times, the Fool is there to express the sense of fun felt by the group. Most people are a bit reluctant to stand out from a crowd, but if one of their group (the Fool) stands out as funny and clever, they feel that they share in the credit that this brings.

In the context of the Morris, the Fool is a representative of the crowd, in that he is recognised by the crowd, and they follow his progress through the show. The crowd will seldom recognise individual dancers in the team other than the Fool. The Fool therefore puts a human face on what otherwise might be a rather remote display. The distinctive kit identifies the Fool as such and this accelerates his acceptance by the crowd.
**THE MISSING LINK**

**How can the Fool form the link between the Dancers and the Crowd?**

1. He can dance as part of the Set then dance off into the Crowd. (Taking the Dance to the Crowd.)

2. He can gain the Crowd’s attention with close—up work then take it with him into the Set. (Taking the Crowd’s attention to the Dance.)

3. He can make announcements.

4. He can talk to the Crowd whilst collecting.

5. He can use eye-contact whilst he’s dancing.

6. He can introduce members of the Side individually to the Crowd. (Especially musicians and jig dancers or Dancers who have made painfully obvious mistakes.)

7. He can do tricks and routines like juggling, glove puppets etc.

8. The obvious one: he can use his bladder, slapstick etc. on the Crowd.

9. He can arrive at the dance spot first and break the ice by making small talk and being the patient butt of predictable jokes.

10. In certain instances, he can choose members of the Crowd to join in, for example in Brighton Camp etc.

The Fool is the one who looks different from the rest of the Side. To the general public, all the Dancers look pretty similar. The Fool is the one they should instantly recognise as different. If he speaks to them, or strikes up any sort of rapport with them, they will follow his progress through the show. They will feel that they have a personal interest in the show. The Fool is their friend, the one they know. It’s surprising how flattered some people are if they feel that you, the Fool, have taken an interest in them.
THE RITUAL FOOL

The Morris is a curious blend of entertainment, sport and ritual. Within this, the ritual element is a mixture of social ritual, genuine mystic ritual and a rather nebulous “ritual significance” superimposed on it by the romantic minded.

The Morris is at least 800 years old, and has absorbed so many influences over the years that it is no longer possible to ascribe specific ritual significance to any particular movement or character. We can make what we want of it. Nevertheless, the ritual element is important, particularly to Fools.

The ritual nature of the Fool is apparent in several areas: actions, role within the side, within the set and within the whole show, including the crowd.

Ritual Actions

The obvious example is sweeping the dance area before the show. It is a specific action carried out at a specific time and is therefore A Ritual.

Other actions may not be specific enough in themselves to count as Rituals, but are of a ritual nature and add to the general ritual atmosphere of the show. Examples may include bowing to your hat after placing it on the ground prior to dancing a jig, bladdering the dancers one by one as they walk off, etc.

Role in the Side

The Foreman is worried about the standard of the dancing. The Bagman is worried about bookings and money. The Squire is busy thinking he’s in control. The Musicians are trying to remember the tunes. The dancers are thirsty. This leaves the Fool in charge of remembering that the Morris is a Ritual, and he is responsible for reminding people now and again. The Fool should have a feeling for what the Morris is about, and should communicate this to the side.

Role in the Set

The Fool has a special kind of authority in the set. He can go anywhere and do anything subject only to the rule that he must not interfere to the detriment of the dance. If you get in the way, it is your fault. Every time.

The set is symmetrical, and the movements of the dancers are clearly defined. The Fool emphasises this by providing a contrast. If he wanders “aimlessly” through the set and the dancers never miss a step, this demonstrates clearly that the dance has form and structure. You are the exception which proves the rules.

The Fool is also able to define the boundaries of the set, by patrolling the edges of the dance, and by occupying the centre when the dancers are not there. The Fool can use his movements and position to establish the “specialness” of the dance area.
Role in the Show

The big cliché: the Fool is the link between the dancers and the crowd. What does it mean?

A Morris performance should not be a display of traditional dances; it should not be a set piece entertainment for an audience. It should involve the crowd. Historically, the Morris was performed by village teams to village audiences on specific festival days. This is no longer true in the majority of cases, but we should still aim for that atmosphere. The crowd should feel involved in proceedings, and should be encouraged to feel a proprietorial interest in the dancers. “We know those lads up there dancing; isn’t it great?” The dancers should be representatives of the crowd, dancing on their behalf.

The Fool can take the Morris into the crowd. The obvious way is with his bladder. Also, he can dance in and out of the crowd, stretching the dancing area to embrace them. The Fool can infiltrate the crowd and encourage cheers (and boos) (and booze!) at appropriate times. He can enter the crowd and talk and joke with people. If he does this, the Morris is not being broadcast to all who will watch, but is being addressed personally to individuals.

By joking with and bladdering individuals, the Fool can encourage links between different elements of the crowd, uniting the crowd into a single group with a shared enjoyment of the Morris.

The Fool can take the crowd into the Morris, physically or spiritually. I have walked/run children through the set in stick dances, and I often conscript volunteers for Bonny Green. There are spare places at the end of some dances where the sticks clash thin air. Put a volunteer there with a stick. The Fool finds and supports the victim in Old Woman Tossed Up and Brighton Camp.

Less obviously, after gaining the crowd’s attention and good will, the Fool can take it with him when he rejoins the set.

A tall order, and it won’t all work every time, but it’s all possible.
THE SILENT FOOL

The term ‘Silent Fool’ does not refer to a Fool who is completely silent. It is simply a handy way of describing a Fool who uses silence, or at least quiet, to achieve his effect.

Neither does it refer to Mime. Mime is usually a set piece performance and bears the same relationship to Morris Fooling as, say, juggling.

The Silent Fool uses body language, gesture and facial expression to communicate with the crowd.

SOME IDEAS

1. Stillness: Hold a position for longer than is ‘natural’. (The silent and motionless Fool - who says it requires no talent?!)

2. Use a sequence of poses, developing an idea.

3. A sequence can focus the crowd’s attention exactly where you want it.

4. Carry the crowd with you. Get their attention, get their consent. Pause for them to catch up.

5. Use hands and fingers to ‘mould’ the shape of a small section of the crowd.

6. Generally, use slow exaggerated and simple movements.

7. Occasional effect can be achieved with a sudden dramatic movement.

8. Plant your feet and then move the whole body forwards, backwards or sideways from the ankles.

9. Use selective movements: just the head, just one arm, just one finger.

10. Work hard on the eyes: stare, glare, gaze.

11. Lean back ‘for a better look’.

12. ‘Throw-aways’ add depth and texture to your performance.

13. The ‘aside’: Step outside what you are doing momentarily.

Some of the above advice conflicts. It is meant to. It will take thought and practice to find out what works for your character. The only thing which is universal is that it requires complete belief: a half hearted piece of clowning just looks silly.
THE PROBLEM (If problem it be...)

Many Fools make far too much noise.

1. The show can become unbalanced.
2. It can be intimidating for small kids.
3. It can push people back, or even away.
4. It can be annoying to those who aren’t watching
   … your own side
   … other sides at a big event.
5. It provides little scope for contrast, or emphasis.
6. It is not awfully good with deaf, foreign or distant audiences, or with heavy traffic,
   poor acoustics etc.

THE SILENT (or at least, quiet,) FOOL

1. Allows the Morris to take centre stage.
2. Is less intimidating.
3. Draws people in. It is more intimate.
4. Annoys nobody.
5. Allows contrast (sudden noises, shouts etc.).
6. Works almost universally (except on radio).

AND...

1. It allows you to work with Beasts on their own terms.
2. It can be a rewarding way to develop your craft.
3. Your side can’t object to this one!

BUT...

1. It must be done well, or it looks silly.
2. Expect your side not to notice!
A FEW IDEAS FROM HARLEQUIN

When planning the session on the Silent Fool, I made a few investigations into Harlequin, the mischievous Character from the Comedia Del Arte. You’ve probably seen pictures of him in a skin tight diamond patched one piece suit.

My conclusion was that there was far too much material there for me to make any sort of in depth study, especially when planning an hour/ two hour session. However, I did come up with the following, which may give you a few ideas:

1. Harlequin was a mischievous child like character whose role in the Comedia seems to have been similar in some ways to the Fool’s role in the Morris.

2. The costume started life a lot less elaborate. Originally, it was patched to show that Harlequin was a poor, scruffy rogue.

3. Harlequin had a very wide language of gestures which were well understood by his audiences. He had a number of poses and gestures to signify, for example, fear, pleading, love, heroism etc.

4. The number of poses/gestures is far too great for us to learn as Morris Fools, and many of them would not be familiar to Morris audiences. I.e. To set out to learn them all would be too clever by half!

5. Harlequin used distinctive walks: very exaggerated and a bit ‘Monty Python’. These attracted the audience’s attention to him and gave an idea of what sort of ‘mission’ he was on.

6. Harlequin used several poses: these involved the feet being planted firmly. The feet and knees were often splayed out at an unnatural angle, a bit like a fencer taking guard.

7. He had a cheeky little ‘on the spot’ dance to signify joy or excitement.

By keeping his whole body still, he could focus the audience’s attention on the movement of one finger.
TRICKS AND PROPS

Tricks need not be clever, stunning or funny, but they must entertain the audience. As long as a trick can hold the attention of the audience, it doesn't matter how simple it is.

1. Simple tricks take less time to learn, which leaves more time to work on presentation.
2. Simple tricks are less likely to go embarrassingly wrong!
3. The effort put into learning a difficult trick will not be appreciated by most of the audience.
4. A Fool should entertain, not astound.

Props have to be carried by someone. You. They must earn their place in your bag.

1. If a prop hasn't got three good uses, you probably don't need it.
2. The most versatile props are you, sticks and handkerchiefs.
3. Improvisation is an essential skill and is appreciated by most audiences if done well.
4. Props are no good unless used properly. Use them but don't rely on them to carry the show alone.
5. A novelty or toy used for its intended purpose is not all that impressive. The best props are common objects used in a novel way.
6. Presentation is the most important thing of all.
7. Choose your target audience: a family group, or a group at a table.
8. With small target groups, you can repeat the same two or three tricks several times with a decent sized audience. You also get the people to feel more involved than if you perform “at” them from the centre of the pitch.
9. Plan ahead. Spontaneity is great, but if you rely on it, it will let you down.
10. Perform with total belief in what you are doing. The more simple or trivial the trick, the more important it is that you can get the audience to “suspend disbelief.” Don't be half hearted or apologetic.
11. Flesh out each trick. A good trick has a build-up, a climax or main feature and a bit of a follow on. Develop a patter.
12. Timing is essential. Unless you are badly prepared, you are more likely to be too fast than too slow, especially if you are nervous.
13. Establish and maintain eye contact with at least one member of the audience.
14. Perform to the audience, not to the dancers, the air above the audience, or the ground. As your presentation improves, you will tend to make less noise.
TRICKS AND PROPS AND THINGS

Purpose
1. To provide a “filler” between dances.
2. To provide “sideshow” entertainment during a long show.
3. To provide an opening for getting to know the audience.
4. To make the audience feel involved.
5. To aid collecting: value for money.

Problems
1. Danger of distracting from the dancing.
2. Fool unable to react swiftly to other goings on.
3. Props can be bulky and heavy.
4. Necessary for dancers to understand what’s going on to avoid clash.
5. Repetition can irritate the side; they see it every week.

Points to Consider (Tricks)
1. Duration.
2. Target audience: age, size of group, their attitude.
3. Patter: have it worked out in advance.
4. Contingencies (what if it goes wrong?)
5. Materials/props needed. Is it worth it?
7. Do they fit in with the rest of your “stage character”?

Points to Consider (Props)
1. Size and weight. You have to carry them.
2. Versatility. Several uses, especially for larger items.
3. Cost. Is the effect really worth the outlay?
4. Can it be easily replaced?

Selecting Props
1. Best props are common items put to unusual use.
2. Plastic gimmicks are designed to be funny. Using them isn’t clever.
3. Hardware stores etc. are good hunting grounds.
4. Hankies and sticks are versatile and readily available.
5. Clothes pegs, string, elastic bands, safety pins, thimbles, ping pong balls etc. have potential.
6. Doors, tables, windows, walls, kerbs, gates and car park barriers are good (but difficult to carry.)

Performance
1. Spontaneity is great, but may let you down. Have a routine.
2. Pick up new ideas; see what works and incorporate it.
3. Give it your full attention.
4. Believe in what you are doing. Don’t be apologetic.
5. Timing: stretch it out, but keep the interest going.
6. Style: fast talking, or dramatic, or casual.
7. Work with small parts of the audience. You get to know them and you can repeat the trick to others.
8. Keep them wanting more. Don’t do all your tricks in one go. Come back later.
**USE OF THE BLADDER (AND SIMILAR DEVICES)**

**Fools** always have a weapon, be it a bladder, tickling stick, slapstick or whatever else. Without the weapon, the Fool would be something else: a clown, comedian, jester etc. It is the weapon which symbolises the Fool’s special kind of authority over his audience and the dancers, and which allows him to break normal social rules by striking people. The weapon also enables the Fool to involve the audience in the Morris, and to take some of the Morris into the audience. Even today, most people understand this intuitively and react favourably as long as the Fool does not abuse his special licence.

This sheet is intended to sow a few ideas and to reduce two common problems:

1. Fools who irritate and/or bore the audience by unimaginative and repetitive use of the bladder.
2. Fools who “go too far” and cause genuine offence or distress to members of the audience.

These ideas should all apply in more or less equal measure to bladders and all other weapons used by Fools.

**Selection of Targets.**

The first thing you must do before using the bladder is decide on a victim. This is not as easy as you might think.

Traditionally, the Fool should discipline the dancers, using his bladder to encourage straight lines, high jumps etc. However, this does not always go down well with the dancers and sometimes just makes the dancing look worse. Make a point of getting to know which dancers don’t mind and which object. They are doing it for fun too, so don’t bladder them if they really don’t like it. In particular, be careful with inexperienced dancers or you could put them off.

Children are an obvious target, but be careful! Some will be terrified and some will keep asking for more until their demands spoil the show. Children with their parents are usually a safe bet. If you’re not sure how a child will react, do a few feints to find out.

Adults require care ... some react really badly. A feint or “look” should produce enough reaction to enable you to decide. I go for small groups (one table in a beer garden; a family etc.) and it is normally obvious which person will react best. Generally, women will be more tolerant than men, but in all cases, you must let the person feel that they are in control.

People in authority are dubious targets. Get their implied consent first by giving them plenty of time to say no. People in uniforms generally should be left well alone.

Opportunity targets require quick judgement. Anyone bending over to tie their shoe lace is fair game as long as you don’t overdo it.
AUDIENCE REACTION

The audience, and individual victims, may react to bladdering in several ways. It is important to anticipate these reactions and respond correctly. If you get it wrong, it’s up to you to deal with the consequences without allowing the show to be spoiled. Ideally, every member of the audience should go away at the end of the show feeling well disposed towards the Morris. Certainly, they should not go away annoyed.

Reactions to the bladder normally involve one or two of the following:

RELUCTANCE. A reluctance to be shown up in front of friends, or fear of being hurt. The person is thinking, “I hope he doesn’t hit me.”

INVITATION. The person is deliberately encouraging you to hit them. They are thinking, “look at me everybody, I’m not frightened of this prat.”

HOSTILITY. Not the same as reluctance. The person is thinking, “I’d like to shove that bladder up....”

Reactions will usually combine two of these points. Typical examples are:

Reluctance/Invitation. Typically small children and giggly girls. A bit frightened, but disappointed if you don’t bladder them.

Reluctance/Hostility. Typically serious adults, especially men. A lost cause unless you can get their family/friends on your side first.

Invitation/Hostility. Small boys, recognised by their characteristic cries of “Hit me Mister,” followed by “Doesn’t hurt.” A misjudgement here can get you in deep water and ruin the show completely.
SOURCES OF HUMOUR

Usually, you will be using the bladder at least partly for humorous effect. The source of humour is hard to define, but in this context, it will generally come from a mixture of:

**SURPRISE** In the sense of “not what is expected” rather than Shock which is a bad thing.

**ANTICIPATION** In the sense of waiting for something which is unexpected when it arrives, rather than something which is totally predictable.

**REPETITION** A punchline becomes funny through repetition. So can use of the bladder, if the repetition is controlled.