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The Original Welsh Border Morris Men – The 38th Christmas Tour 2011

by Mike Finn

So try and envisage 50 men from all corners of England searching whatever passes for organisation in their homes to find the once-a-year Original Welsh Border Morris kit – finding, perhaps, little surprises from last year’s tour in their bags like pieces of uneaten black

to be perfectly acceptable.

The Rogers coach arrives at 9:00. Jim, the regular utterly obliging understanding driver, is as excited as the men about the tour.

Driving through Worcester, watching the unenviable last minute shoppers dashing around, we pick up others on

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pudding, (still in surprisingly good shape!), a broken short stick, a list of important notes - never to have been followed up - messages, etc..



An early start then to get to The Fox Inn in Wichford, Worcester for a wholesome breakfast at 8:00am with many old friends from other sides – somehow a pint at this hour on Christmas Eve in such company seems

the way, JB, our fool, with his fresh trout firmly stuck to his hat, (don’t ask), the others patiently waiting outside the Cathedral acknowledging the amused smiles from shoppers that pass.

The anticipation of a day to remember is reinforced on the coach by “waiter” service with first, Richard’s black pudding on a stick and then Derrick’s chocolate liqueurs served on a silver salver not to mention the countless hip flasks being passed round and a barrel of Barker’s Best Cider.

As we pull into White Ladies Aston older members will have recollected the one or two spectators who might have grudgingly watched from their windows in the earliest tours but now we are greeted by at least fifty

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Squire's Capers

Boxing Day in Harthill is always a joyous occasion. Three Shires Ladies Clog team joins Harthill Morris for dancing displays outside the Bluebell and the Beehive before retiring to the warmth of the latter hostelry for a few pints and a lusty singing session of traditional and Sheffield carols. It is rewarding to know that there are countless other Morris sides turning out all over the country on this traditional day of dance and evoking memories of that pivotal meeting between Sharp & Kimber on Boxing Day at Headington Quarry in 1899.

The Christmas and New Year Mumming season coaxes Harthill Tappers from their aestivation resulting in a local hospice benefitting to the tune of £2,300 this year thanks to the efforts of our Derby Tup. It should not be forgotten that so many member sides do legion works for charity and we salute them all for these efforts. The true potential of charitable collecting by the Morris has never been fully explored but we have determined to address that this year by combining with the Federation and Open Morris for a national fund-raising drive in favour of Children in Need. We have high hopes that all sides will contribute and that a substantial aggregate sum will result.

It is vital that clement weather dawns in early January blessing the annual gathering of Jockey MM and their friends for the Plough Day dance in Birmingham city centre. We were amply rewarded this year and a splendid time we had. Our hosts admitted to being nervous having invited a mixed side to join them for the first time; but they need not have worried. Bedcote Morris acquitted themselves well despite their own



The Squire with Immediate Past Treasurer, Ed Worrall

initial nervousness, as did all the attendant MR sides.

The reward for a grand Plough Day out was a trip up the road to Stafford Morris Men's annual feast that same evening. This gourmand's delight failed to disappoint as usual and I can't decide whether my champagne moment was the exquisite roast beef, the calorie-strewn dessert tables or the discussion on composting with Jack Brown. Quite a night! A great deal of effort is being applied to the encouragement of youth in today's Morris and it was a huge boost to be entertained by some excellent solo violin performances by the young lads in the Stafford side. Well done!

John Colbert's illness had prevented his attending the 2012 Stafford feast. Together with BfB, I took the opportunity to visit him in hospital later in January but sadly this was to be our last meeting. The huge numbers that turned out for John's funeral at the end of March was testament to his popularity and achievements. We can but offer our condolences to John's family and those of all our colleagues who have passed on recently.

Friday 13th is probably not the date of choice to have a knee operation but my second keyhole arthroscopy went well in January and reintroduced me to the pleasure of pain-free dancing. There is life beyond the operating table and I would encourage any knee suffering dancers to seek early consultation for such problems, as modern intervention can be quick, simple and extremely effective.

Geoff Jerram and his hard-working crew obliged as usual in January by running an excellent and rewarding jigs instructional. Doctor's orders prevented me from dancing of course but I was honoured to be invited to the feast and to deliver the toast to the immortal memory. A verbatim rendition of my narrow boat story there recounted may be obtained from Joe Oldaker or Tony Ashley (Anker MM) whose Squire-stalking activities have led to them hearing the tale now on three occasions!

Ripley MM host one of the best-attended feasts of the year at the end of January and once again they extended their usual brand of hospitality to an enthusiastic guest list. It is always nice to bolster these functions with local dignitaries and 2012 saw not just one but two local mayors at the function, one of whom is a member of the Ripley side! The only complaint heard that evening was from 'The Wellington' across the road where takings were down apparently due to the non-attendance of Richard Hankinson (Saddleworth MM).

We should always be mindful of the encouragement we get from our womenfolk and it is nice to seize an opportunity to demonstrate our thanks. The extended Von Garland family have brought much to the Morris Ring over the years

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and thus it was a delight to help Emma Melville (née Von Garland) celebrate a milestone birthday (21 again) in February. A foot of snow was insufficient to deter the hardiest attendees although many became blizzard bound and never arrived. They missed a super party! It is appropriate here I think to thank all our families for giving us such massive and continued support as we indulge in our noble traditions.

Harthill Morris has never been slow in stepping up to the plate to offer support to the Morris Ring and so it was in February that representatives from across our world gathered in Spinkhill for the ARM hosted by my home side. A high quality of accommodation together with exquisite cuisine made the cost a little above the norm but to judge by the letters of thanks and praise received subsequently, it was a price well worth paying. There was little of contentious nature to debate and business of the weekend was conducted without fuss. We must not overlook the fact that for

the first time in many years, we accepted two UK sides into full membership of our association. Devil's Dyke Morris Men and North British Sword Dancers each received excellent plaudits from Officers and Area Reps who had assessed their abilities recently and all delegates welcomed them enthusiastically.

I do enjoy ale feasts that have their own distinct flavour and found such individuality at the Kennet gathering in February. The flavour in question was pickling. I have to confess that this was my first attendance of an event where pickled sprouts, pickled root ginger, pickled eggs and pickled garlic were all on offer. Needless to say there will inevitably be a repeat performance! Kennet MM are great hosts, good company and their bonhomie alongside a homely sing-around with lashings of port rounded off a most pleasant evening.

To work again the following day attending the JMO AGM together with Charlie Corcoran. A constructive if rather lengthy

meeting revealed that co-operation between our three organisations is working well. It is useful to hear differing viewpoints and to tackle issues common to or for the good of all three orgs. I am a staunch believer in pooling resources for mutual benefit and a fine example of this was the JMO publicity workshop I travelled to at the start of March. All who attended found content interesting and useful. Few Morris Ring sides have taken advantage of these symposia to date and I would urge all sides to look out for future such events and to attend them. We are not the fount of all knowledge nor should we be reinventing the wheel.

As the summer dancing season plays out, I trust that the tide of drought creeping up my wellingtons will abate and allow us some decent weather to ply our trade through the summer months, continuing to entertain and educate our audiences in the ways of the Morris.

Peter J Halfpenney
Squire of the Morris Ring

Jockey's Double Diamond Jubilee

In an attempt to outdo the Queen, Jockey Morris recently celebrated 60 years of unbroken Jockey membership, from 2 of our earliest and most loyal stalwarts, Ted Cassidy, & Bill Kinsman.

Ted & Bill both joined Jockey in 1952, after being recruited from the Acocks Green Folk Dance Club, along with Stan Smith & David Pearmain. Both of their wives Maureen Cassidy & Barbara Kinsman were also keen morris and country dance teachers. The Club is very much indebted to



Ted Cassidy & Bill Kinsman at Jockey practice January 2012.

Photo JMM

both Ted and Bill, for their unfailing support and encouragement over the past 60 years. As well as being very competent dancers, they have

both held numerous Office Holder positions in the Club, and all members over the years have benefitted from them teaching morris, sword, rapper, and choreographing dances for numerous public events.

It is hoped that both of them still have many more years left with the Club. Their dancing days may now be limited, but they still have plenty more knowledge, experience, and wisdom, to pass on to younger members of the side.

Sean Goddard interviews Bryan Jackson

SG: How long have you been playing for?

I have been playing the fiddle since I was five, and I joined Monkseaton in 1957 when I was 13 years old. At that time Colin Ross was the main musician, and he played the melodeon, fiddle and (Northumberland) pipes and later was a member of the High Level Ranters. Alan Brown was then the squire and knew I played the fiddle and was at his school and that is how I started and ended up in the team.

SG: When you are playing for the rapper, what are you playing to?

Playing for the rapper is a very finely judged thing. You have to watch what the dancers are doing, seeing if they are struggling with the speed or whatever. I could be playing too fast or too slow. You have got to judge finely the speed at which you play. But equally with the rapper it has got to be driven, and this is the thing Alan Brown always stressed to Monkseaton. It has always got to be pushed, and time you have danced 6 or 7 figures and the team is beginning to flag that's when the musician has to work harder. It has got to be kept up to speed, but similarly you have got to keep the thing driving along so that the team doesn't flag too much. It is a finely judge thing, it is like playing for Morris as it is no use playing too slowly for a team that cannot get off the ground which ones sees too much these days. But equally, you don't want to be flogging along at a huge rate of knots ???

SG: Cecil Sharp said the rapper was played at a barbaric speed. How fast do you play?

It varies with the performance, the surface you are dancing on and the audience reaction, the

usual speed is about 160 beats per minute (bpm). On a good day when everything is going with you it goes up to about 180 bpm which is about the fastest you can do it and get away with it. But usually it is around 160 or 170 bpm. (During the Saturday evening performance in the Thaxted Ring Meeting 2011, I recorded the speed at 178 bpm)

SG: Is that also the speed you would practice at?

Yes, once we have the basic steps with a new member in and through the figures at a somewhat slower speed, then we tend to practice at around 165 bpm.

SG: And the tunes you are playing?

They are a slightly re-work of what is called the Jimmy McKay's selection. Jimmy McKay was the fiddler for the Royal Earlsdon Sword dancers in the days of Joey? Osbourne back in the 1940s and 50s and he play a set of tunes which Alan Brown was able to get a copy of. I have changed to order slightly to get a better start with the key of A with The Blackthorn Stick, whereas Jimmy started with the A minor tune The Tenpenny Bit which was not such a good tune to start with. You need a tune that grabs the attention of the audience, grabs the attention of the dancers so I want the rising note to hit the top A, rather than the slightly flatter start of The Tenpenny Bit.

SG: And what are the other tunes that you play?

Blackthorn Stick	A
Tenpenny Bit (nominally G, but it finishes on an A!)	
Ballybunion	G
The Laird o' Cockpen	Am
Humours of Donnybrook	A
Father o' Flynn	D

SG: And these tunes, do you play them in the same set order and

length?

I always play the tunes in the same set order, and it tends to be twice through each tune, but by the time I am getting towards the end there is a particular tune that works well with the somersaults and I need that for the double and also for the triple somersault so that tune gets played longer. I also play the tunes in this order to get a better rotation of key changes

SG: So what is special about the tune for the somersaults - does it have a push-up?

Yes it as a push up. It has a push-up to start it and they have got to land in 4 beats, so the tune does have a little break after 5 beats.

SG: So it takes 4 beats to swing the man over the top?

Yes, and to land on his feet. And then he can go off again. By using that particular tune I can match it to the somersault. The other reason we changed the order slightly was so I can get that tune in the right place.

SG: So it takes 4 beats to swing the man over the top?

Yes, and to land on his feet. And then he can go off again. By using that particular tune I can match it to the somersault. The other reason we changed the order slightly was so I can get that tune in the right place.

SG: Was there a fiddler that played before you?

Yes, that was Colin Ross. I was 13 or 14 at that time and I was dancing and I was watching and listening to what he was doing and when I started playing for the rapper I obviously pick up things that Colin did. He was a very good mentor and gave tips – you might want to try

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this tune as it is a better tune than that one. He was a very good tutor. The other thing that is important that I would like to stress that playing for rapper there are only really two instruments that work. One is the fiddle, and the other is the penny whistle and those are the traditional instruments for the

rapper. Colin occasionally would play the melodeon at practice if he had forgotten his fiddle. The melodeon is the only instrument that can get close to the drive the fiddle can make, but if you ask Alan who plays the melodeon occasionally for rapper he will say it is very hard to play at that speed and to keep the drive

because of the blow suck reed. Unlike the accordion which is just continuous, you can get that bit more drive out of the melodeon than the accordion. Fiddle is really the instrument for the rapper.

Sean Goddard is a member of Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men and Bryan Jackson is a member of Monkseaton Morris Men.

Boxing Day 2011



Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men, with 'Dearest Dicky', and a Mummer's Play: 'Well Doctor, try your Skill.'

Photos: John Goddard



Ravensbourne Morris Men, left, have been dancing at the Greyhound in Keston since 1963, at the request of Dr Kildare (Richard Chamberlain) who spent Christmas in the area! Perhaps he will turn up on the 50th Anniversary next year!

Photo: Steve Archer

From Geoff Jerram

Dear Harry

I was looking at the this village scene (picture, right) in a model village on the island of Tenerife and said, to no-one in particular, 'that reminds me of a time many years ago Morris dancing in Spain at a carpet of flowers festival'. The chap next to me, also English and obviously having overheard my comment, replied - 'so if you've tried Morris dancing have you also tried incest?'

In my haste to find a suitably witty response I think I said - 'Not yet!'. Our conversation came to a fairly abrupt end. Can't think why!

Cheers

Geoff

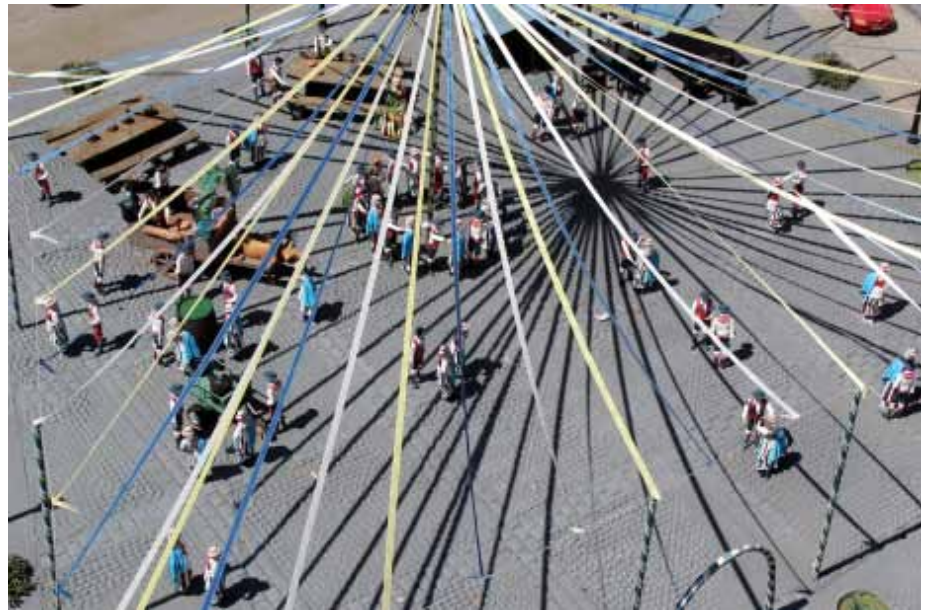
Both from Steve Archer

Dear Harry

Further to the letter from Bill Holt (September 2011, MRC Issue 64) comprehensively correcting the errors in my report of his 90th birthday, published in the previous circular, I would like to profusely apologise for my inaccuracies. I can only claim the journalist's excuse of "never let the truth get in the way of a good story"

Bill also mentioned my son Russell's award of the Military Cross and so I would like a further case of sloppy reporting to be taken into account. My report of his action at the time was as follows.

Fellow Morris Men



For those of you who remember the little boy who started dancing at the age of 4 with a perfect performance of Swaggering Boney, learnt only from watching the men dance out; I have news. His early courage, shown fighting other Morris Men twice his own size, has developed somewhat recently. Having grown the statutory Morris Man's beard he seems to have rounded up a few other bearded blokes, whilst on tour in Afghanistan, and gone in for some fighting rather more dangerous than the Ring insurance would normally cover. As a result he has been awarded The Military Cross.

You will find that the official MOD citation differs somewhat from the above. I can't promise that such errors will not occur in the future.

Yours

Steven Archer

Dear Harry

Following Will Partridge's article in Circular no 64 about the discovery of a long lost tradition at Headington, I have been trawling our archives and discovered this rare photo of my Grandfather Dan practicing with the Warmington-on-Sea Morris Men in 1940. Dan Archer moved from Ambridge to Warmington-on Sea to support the Home Guard and trained the men in the rarely performed Borsetshire tradition. Their dances were truly indescribable and guaranteed to repel any foreign invader. Like the Headington discovery, they too have been immortalised on television and now in stage productions throughout the country. If you would like to ensure that you avoid this repulsive sight, make sure you miss any production of the Dad's Army version of the Godiva Affair.

Yours

Steven Archer

Picture on page 7



The Morris Ring Circular Editorial



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Congratulations to Robin Springett on his elevation to the high office, as Squire Elect. Peter Halfpenney will dance out at the Hartley Morris Ring Meeting, with Robin dancing in. I am sure we all wish him well when he takes up the Staff.

Let us all hope the weather will turn and enable an Indian Summer to flourish before the onset of a

glorious Autumn. We all deserve that.

Despite requests for Christmas and New Year reports little was forthcoming so we are grateful to Chanctonbury, Ravensbourne and especially the Original Welsh Boarder Morris for their respective reports and photographs.

For the next edition it would be good to feature 2012 Morris Ring

Meetings and any special Days of Dance that you attended. The Copy Date is 30th September 2012 and look forward to receiving your contributions.

The Editor offers his apologies for the lateness of this edition due entirely to his unexpected redundancy and urgent need to secure employment, which has now occurred.



**Warmington-on-Sea Morris Dancers, circa 1940, attrib to Bresson et al. Clive Done (sic) on piano.
(See Steve Archer's letter page 6). Ed. assumes Steve's grandfather is dancer far right.**

[Norman] Geoff[rey] Hebditch - 1 July 1947 – 11 November 2011

I have been asked to say a few words about Geoff ... how about: irascible; stubborn; argumentative; eccentric; skilful; humorous; gentle; thoughtful; mad as a hatter. I think that John Miller and I were responsible for teaching Geoff to dance the morris at King John's from about 1982/83. He was a natural dancer, elegant despite his height, although that occasionally led to problems.

As in all things, he took to the morris with enthusiasm; by Christmas of 1983 he had become an integral part of the King John's mummers, appearing as the Doctor in an enormous stove pipe hat which had a presence all of its own. At least he probably qualified as a noble Doctor, given his entry in Burke's peerage.

Naturally, he adapted the Doctor's part in the play; it still includes one of his jokes about "van aerial disease" to accompany the production, with a flourish, of a large fake "hypodermic" syringe with which to cure the Turkish Knight.

As Turkish Knight, I was once pinned to the floor with the hypodermic by Geoff at the Queens Head in Titchfield, in front of a roaring fire; Geoff milked the audience for all it was worth, oblivious to the fact that my cloak was singeing and that I was about to expire in the heat!

In the winter of 1983/84, Geoff's blue Transit van, Gloria, was stopped by the police in the early hours, as he was on his way home after a mummers' tour. They wanted to look inside and invited him to get out. He did, in full kit, with black face and the stovepipe hat.

One of the officers, with the



Geoff Hebditch, Fool

sarcasm only the police can muster, looked him up and down and enquired "Theatrical, are we, Sir?" to which Geoff responded, at length ... and collected £3.00 from them!

Geoff's fooling for King John's started in about 1985 when Harvey Green decided to hang up his bladder. As ever Geoff approached it with enthusiasm and a particular penchant for glove puppets. Quite what the children thought of him and the puppets is not recorded, but the manic twinkle in his eye certainly made their mothers giggle.

Julian Kohler, squire of the Illustrious Order of Fools and Beasts, claims that Geoff was his inspiration to start fooling – now I think I know why!

When King John's went to the Babylon International Folklore Festival in 1989, the trademark yellow jumper and bow tie stayed in his bag and red braces were the order of the day, except in the pool

at the Sheraton Hotel in Baghdad where he didn't want to get his hair wet. However, at the main show in Babylon he excelled.

King John's had danced Northwest, Cotswold, rapper and border. Geoff danced and fooled for the Cotswold and Border and Bettied, in red boots, for the rapper.

For the final bow, in full border kit at approaching 40° Celsius, we ran out in two lines to cross through and end on the stage edge; Geoff led one line, I the other, but Geoff leapt clean over my head and landed with his feet hanging off the edge, to a cheer from the audience, including the British Ambassador! It was all broadcast on Iraqi TV, but, sadly, the recording never made it out through customs.

Geoff also joined Winchester Morris Men as a dancer in the late 1980's; he had a habit of turning up to the dance spots in whites on either his Norton ES2 or Benelli motorbike. His height and enthusiasm were not always a blessing – on one occasion at practice in "Old Woman Tossed Up", Bledington, he put his stick through the fluorescent lights hanging from the roof; the resulting shower of broken glass and fittings took a long time to clear up and extract from his hair and clothes. When the hall was later refurbished, the lights were moved to less vulnerable positions!

His view that haircuts were unnecessary more than once a year brought him to the attention of the wardrobe team when Winchester took part in the BBC's 1992 film of Miss Marple "Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side". The rest of us needed no more than a light trim to fit with the late 1950's theme.

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Geoff however, was whisked away for serious remedial work and emerged with the shortest back and sides and neatest beard we had ever seen on him. Photographic evidence exists!

Geoff had joined Wickham Morris in about 1992, but after he later became ill, we only saw him intermittently at King John's and Winchester. He and his latest prop, the red wheelchair, found a niche with Wickham, where he continued to dance, in the chair, and talk to

anyone who would listen, about any and every subject possible.

Geoff was also a thoughtful, if irregular, Godfather to my son, Michael, who was always amused that Christmas presents arrived in the early hours of Christmas morning, delivered by motorbike and either pushed through the letter box or left at the front door.

We knew that it was Geoff by the oil patch on the drive. If Geoff saw Michael at some event, he would always start with "... you've just

had a birthday, haven't you?", but he took a close interest when Michael took up chemistry in earnest. I think that Geoff was relieved that Michael had taken up a proper subject.

Geoff had been attending Sidmouth folk festival for 37 years – perhaps the first paragraph in last week's Sidmouth Herald article sums him up:

"A colourful character".

John Burke King John's Morris Men

Derek Bradburne 1947 – 2011

Derek Bradburne, musician and dancer with Thelwall Morris Men, died on December 19th 2011, having eventually lost his struggle against cancer.

He is very sadly missed by all who knew him.

Derek was born and educated in Widnes. He worked as a mechanical engineer with ICI, advising on the design of chemical plants, at an international level, and, in later years he worked at the Environment Agency, on the 'Permitting Team'.

But Derek was a man of very many parts beyond his work.

As well as playing and dancing for Thelwall Morris Men and playing for Black Bear Morris Dancers, he performed regularly in folk clubs, singing and playing mouth organ, guitar and concertina, as well as melodeon.

He met Sue Rutter, his wife to be, at Frodsham Folk Club in 1976, and they were married in 1978.

His interests extended into mountaineering and hill walking, skiing, horse riding, building and riding motor cycles, water colour painting, model railways,



Derek Bradburne

Photo: Thelwell Morris Men

photography, astronomy, ornithology, cooking and DIY, and no doubt much more!

The presence of so many at the funeral and at the event to celebrate Derek's life was a fitting tribute to his influence throughout his time with us. As well as family and local friends, many singers and musicians travelled from many

parts of the country to attend.

Thelwall Morris Men formed a fitting Guard of Honour for Derek's coffin, and at the service, Geoff Bibby led the singing of 'Bright Morning Stars', Derek Britch led 'Amazing Grace', and Geoff Clough and Brian Roberts sang 'Wayfaring Stranger'.

Past members of the Thelwall side and regulars at the Warrington Folk Club that Derek helped to run, contributed to the afternoon's entertainment.

Among others, these included Ian Goodier, Gina le Faux, Dave Hanvey, John Gregson, Alan Rawlinson, Geoff Clough and Brian Roberts, and 'Nelson Peach'.

There were no flowers by request, and donations were given to The Woolston Eyes Conservation Group to help with maintenance of the Woolston Eyes Nature Reserve (www.woolstoneyes.co.uk) of which Derek and Sue were staunch supporters.

Geoff Bibby
Thelwall Morris Men

King's Men Lichfield Tutorial

by Mike Stevens

In November last year, I had travelled through fog, but suddenly the sun was shining as I drove along the raised embankment of the River Great Ouse, a little upstream from King's Lynn. I was on my way to Wiggenhall St Germans to join The King's Men in a tutorial session on Lichfield. As I approached the village the narrow road crossed a couple of waterways (known as "drains" in this area) and I stopped to take a photograph of a cormorant perched on a pillar remaining in the river from a long-gone structure. I could see that it had chosen the highest point for some miles. Where each drain joined the river there was a substantial sluice gate, open at this time as the tide level was at its lowest, exposing mud at the base of the embankments. This is the Fens.

Entering the village, the road left the top of the embankment to run down to the level of the farmland and the village street. I was early, but the three or four of us waiting were soon joined by a dozen others and the hall was opened to reveal a generous dance space and an adequate kitchen that was put to immediate use for the production of tea and coffee.



The King's Men and guests

Photo: C/o Mike Stevens

The tutorial had been arranged by the Squire of King's with the aim of introducing Lichfield dances into the team's repertoire and it was hoped that the day's workshop would establish a common grounding on which to base further practice sessions. Tutor for the day, past Squire of the Morris Ring, Mike Garland, got started. The whole side was there and Mike soon found that they spanned all Morris abilities and ranged in experience from three weeks to more than thirty years.

Nothing daunted, he worked patiently through the steps and figures of Vandalls of Hammerwich, The Sheriff's Ride and Ring O' Bells, offering praise and encouragement as we went. Music was

provided by King's own musicians, eventually numbering four.

There were two breaks, the first for an account by Mike of the sources of information about the dances, developing into a more general discussion about origin and attribution of dances and their naming. Brief mention was made of the opportunity to document newly invented dances and variants. The second break was for lunch. This involved a short walk to the local pub where a generous buffet and jugs of beer were provided. The route to the pub included the local highest point – the bridge over the river - and the pub itself nestled below the embankment, the top of the bank being about roof height!

Back to the hall and in the

afternoon session we got off to a slightly uncertain start, but patient revision won the day and the whole team was left with a feeling of satisfying achievement. As one of the side commented afterwards; "It was not only an excellent lesson in how to do the dances but also how to teach". I'd like to add my thanks to Mike for an enjoyable tutorial and to King's Men for inviting me to join them.

As I drove home along the river bank I noticed that the tide had turned and the water level had risen. Thank goodness for high banks!

Mike Stevens is the Morris Ring Eastern Area Representative

Nights at the Opera

by Roy Fenton

If one is in the Morris for long enough, it's possible to accumulate the 15 minutes of fame which Andy Warhol promised each of us. For instance, over the last 30 years Greensleeves men have 'starred' in one TV commercial, two game shows, a Noel Edmonds programme (yuk), 'Argumental' on Dave, a dance off with a Bangla group for CBBC (much more adult), and spots on Radio Five Live and Radio London. Then there have been live performances at Cecil Sharp House and the National Theatre (OK, actually outside the National Theatre). Late in 2011, live opera has been added to the club's media exposure, together with that of Thames Valley and London Pride.

Vaughan Williams' 'Hugh the Drover' is set in the Cotswolds in 1810. Given the composer's involvement in collecting folk songs, he not surprisingly uses a number of traditional musical themes. The original stage directions have Morris men simply entering, led by a pipe and tabor player, and walking round before exiting. This wasn't for director Angela Hardcastle: if she was going to use Morris dancers, she was jolly well going to have them dance. Angela 'auditioned' various local sides by attending Spring Grove's midsummer bash in Richmond and Twickenham. Greensleeves and Thames Valley were intrigued enough to volunteer, even though the performances were in north London, well away from our turf. London Pride were also duly auditioned and enrolled. The Morris spot came about 14

minutes into the first act. The dramatic intention was that the crowd from the previous scene were enticed away to watch the dancers, leaving the heroine alone with her aunt, lamenting that next day she is to be married against her will. In Angela's production, the chorus's call 'Here come the Morris men!' heralded the entrance of a fool - a member of the company, wearing items of Morris kit from at least two sides and wielding a bladder. He was followed by a hobby horse and two other dancers. Although short, the dance sequence had to be worked out very carefully, and needed not a little rehearsal at practice sessions, especially as at various times 11 different dancers were involved. The hobby horse entered to a Winsterish tune by the orchestra, closely followed by the two dancers who simply double-stepped round the stage for 16 bars. The chorus beginning a different tune (and with a different time signature) was the cue for the two dancers to face the audience and perform a couple of short figures from Fieldtown jigs. Getting off had to be brisk, as virtually the whole company was to exit behind the dancers and hobby horse.

Although ridden by each of the sides, the hobby horse was supplied by Thames Valley. It was a splendid beast, currently known as Shergar for the name's story-telling potential, and manfully (beastfully?) appeared in each of the ten performances. It was only a shame that, in such a short sequence, Shergar's many apps could not be used: these included mouth opening, ears rotating, and eyes lighting up. Indeed, learning how to actually get into Shergar's harness took a Greensleeves man

two visits to a Thames Valley practice (where he was made very welcome). Shergar did have a small personal tragedy during one performance, when both his ears dropped off on stage. Fortunately this Van Gogh moment only happened once, and the ears were retrieved during the interval.

The Morris sequence in 'Hugh the Drover' was over in about 90 seconds, so was it worth all the practice, rehearsal and travel? All the participants agreed that it was a thoroughly enjoyable and memorable experience. There's surely a bit of the luvvy in most Morris dancers: isn't that why Mummers' plays are so popular with today's sides? Being involved with sympathetic professionals like Angela and her superb cast and orchestra was both delightful and edifying. The company, Hampstead Garden Opera, was augmented by specialist soloists, and are one of a number of small groups producing operas simply for the love of it. It certainly isn't for the money: with 95 to 100 per cent houses for each performance at the Gatehouse theatre in Highgate, the financial result was 'only a small loss'.

The present writer regarded himself as operaphobic thanks to once having had to sit through three hours of Italian opera sung in Czech (or it might have been vice versa). But he was entranced by the production of 'Hugh the Drover', especially given the intimacy of the 100-seat theatre (which is above a Wetherspoon's pub in Highgate, so a decent beer could be enjoyed by the audience). Peter Judge of London Pride agreed: 'I've not experienced opera in such a close-up setting, and *(continued on page 12)*

found I was quite overwhelmed by the sheer immersion in the music - and the enthusiasm of the amateur cast'.

The last word should come from director Angela 'The company loved having you all take part and your whole-hearted and cheerful commitment to the production was outstanding. Your

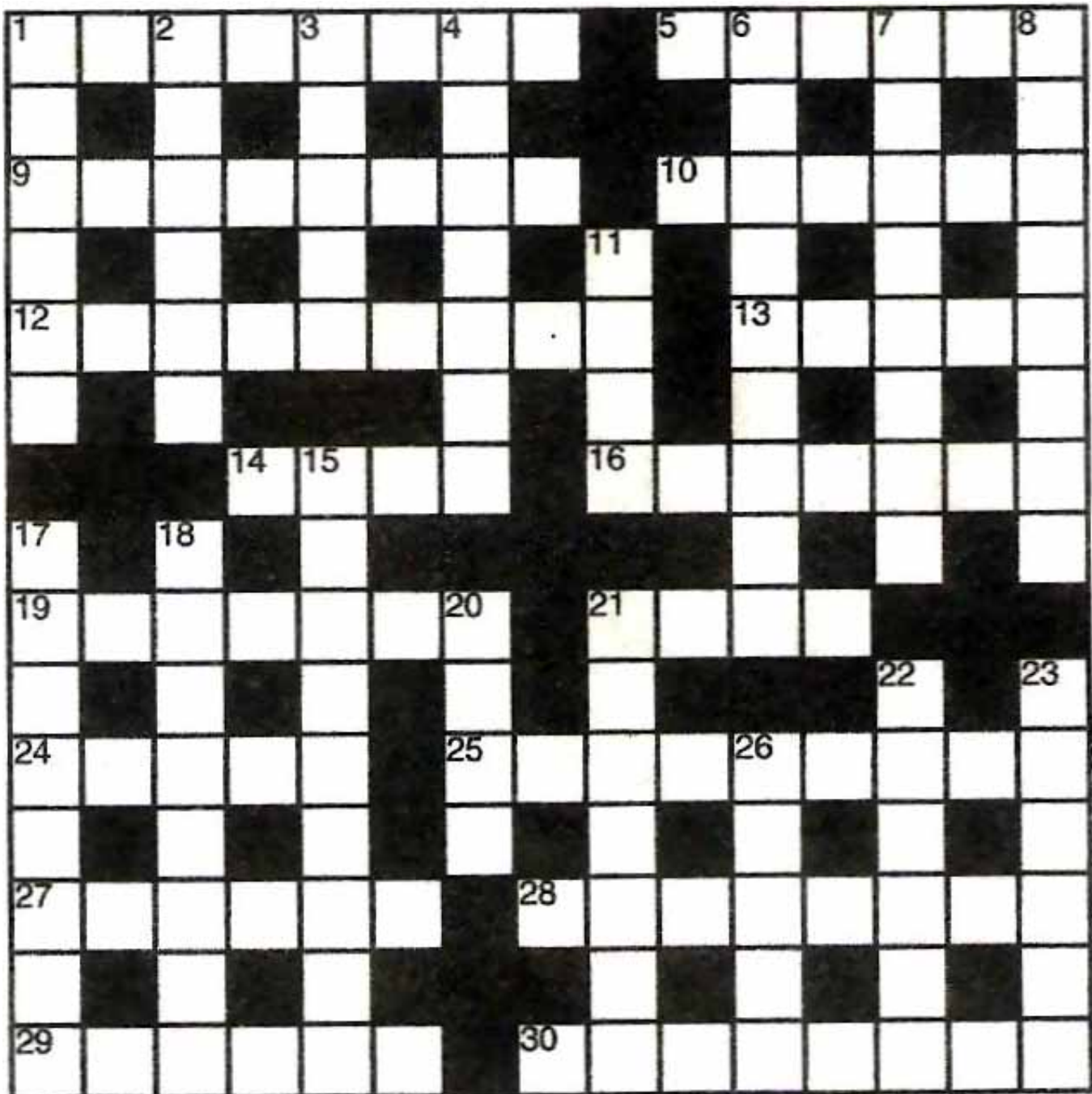
disciplined respect for and love of the dancing (as well as the beer!) does you credit'.

If the English National Opera ever need Morris dancers, London sides are at their disposal.

For the record, the men involved were John Elkins and John Walsh of Thames Valley (plus Shergar); Allan Edmunds, Peter Judge, Peter

Kanssen, Barry Lloyd and William Marsterson of London Pride; Chris Benson, David Cooling, Roy Fenton, Gerald Killingworth, Dave Legg and John Marshall of Greensleeves. Thanks to all of them, and to Angela Hardcastle, for contributions to this piece.

Crossword



Compiler: Barn Bar Ale (sic) of 'Pool

ACROSS

1. Dimmocks – or the Ring Bagman’s? (8)
5. Hound graduates groups of dancers (6)
- 9 & 19. Suggestive group of Squires helpers? (8,7)
10. Why bagman can’t take booking with Posh? It’s why we don’t know what’s to eat (2, 4)
12. It’s red on board – wine that’s not heavy after the feast? (4, 5)
13. Get attention for Adderbury postman (5)
14. A Bedford Morris dance spot severely curtailed to be ready for sleep (4)
16. About last month back in exercise – as the musicians do the dancers in the processional (7)
19. See 9
21. You French twice for dance dress (4)
24. Skate around bag from dance spot maybe (5)

25. Morris step if seasoning flower bud isn’t eaten (5, 4)
27. Joint in Tyree fertility dances. (6)
28. Twelve inches below figure (4, 4)
29. Go and do this for tar in Sherbourn (6)
30. Mumming champion of the red cross (2, 6)

DOWN

1. Molly’s seven from the Kent Treacle Mines (6)
2. A French green containing a large number (or dancers perhaps?) might attract new men. (6)
3. Antiseptic in totally solvent morris side (5)
4. Angered about – like Foreman when dancing is awful (7)
6. Cotswold step – one hanger isn’t right (1, 4, 4)
7. Pets back on top – to get past sleeping men at a crowded ring

- meeting perhaps? (4,4)
8. Chest - the French follow Headington dance (8)
11. A single or a double – in Bampton maybe? (4)
15. Reverse several 11s. A characteristic of many a Cotswold tradition (4, 5)
17. Ascot beheaded before release – but unhurt and uncharged (4,4)
18. Saturday Night village (8)
20. A nut on the canal? (4)
21. A carrot maybe? Not a morris step on one’s true home (3,4)
22. Diversion - on de coach trip at de ring meeting? (6)
23. Position of good man on beheaded dance (6)
26. Draw again? Maybe **the** squire’s shoelace was undone? (5)

Answers to the Editor: harry.stevensonis@gmail.com
Winners named in issue No 67

Squire Elect



A proud Robin Springett of Dartington Morris Men, following his election, in front of the new display boards, on show at a local school

How I lost my (jigs) virginity

by Dan Dewdney

Everybody remembers their first time. Mine started ominously with being asked to write an article on it for the Morris Ring Circular. So, jigs weekend, “was it as good for you as it was for me” I ask. The reply: “Most definitely, shall we do it again?”. “I would love to” I answer.

After arriving rather early on Friday afternoon I set about investigating my home for the next two nights. After a few initial introductions with those that were there, I set up camp in the library. The next half hour or so involved me wandering around the hall whilst the “staff” set everything up, until one asked, “are you going down the pub?”

“So that’s where everyone’s gone then,” I answer and off I went.

A couple of pints later it was back to the hall for some food, Moussaka, which was excellent, and the first Instructional, Headington, which was also excellent. Later in the weekend Geoff Jerram described the Jigs Instructional as “an M.O.T. for your morris”, and this first session certainly seemed like it. It was hard work, challenging and thoroughly enjoyable.

After this it was back to the pub where gentlemen indulged in a spot of music, singing and drinking... lots of drinking. Now my notes get more difficult to read, apparently Cliff borrowed £10 for gin and it was all Albert’s fault??

Saturday morning. I was roused from the Morris Ring standard half-sleep with a cup of tea in bed. Breakfast was served at 8am before walking to the scout hut in the pouring rain for some advanced Fieldtown. The session was again excellent with the instructor



The Pub Session after earlier practises, and below, Steve Adamson on his pipe.

demonstrating the wonderful Greensleeves’ style to perfection (which I failed miserably to emulate).

Back to the hall for tea and biscuits and another advanced session, this time Bledington. Again the session was superb and much was learned, including how to not do a feint step. Lunch of cold roast pork and salad followed, along with a well deserved rest before the afternoon

sessions.

Sherborne was next on the menu and after two advanced sessions I opted for the basic. One exhausting but very rewarding session later and I’m not sure how my legs were keeping me upright.

Tea break next (I see a pattern emerging here) and on with the dancing. Bampton was very well received by all and caused my Squire to comment “I like Bampton now”. So after four sessions we all had a couple of hours to ourselves, time which I spent moving my bed down to the Scout Hut to attempt a better night’s sleep.

The feast was a delightful array of Greek style food provided by Head Chef Albert and included a wonderful beef casserole made with pork, and cayenne pepper rice



(continued on next page)

Jigs continued



Mike Wilkinson of Dolphin Morris Men takes a class

pudding. The usual toasts were given and songs sung then it was all off to the pub for more revelry into the wee small hours.

One more night of almost-sleep, four cups of tea and one breakfast

Paul Reece of Thaxted Morris Men handling a meaty tome!



later and I was ready for the penultimate instructional. Oddington was good and I felt quite comfortable with it, being quite close to what I had learned in my previous life as a bad morris dancer.

Ascott-under-Wychwood was a different kettle of fish entirely. For me this was the most enjoyable session of the weekend as I had no dancing experience of Ascott so it was refreshing to learn something entirely new, even if my brain did go walkies halfway through. More tea and rest then some Bucknell and by this point both my brain and legs were refusing to work properly. Nonetheless it was a very enjoyable session. A review of the traditions completed the weekend's dancing and going back to the start caused havoc with my memory, "how does Jockey Headington



Albert Wilkins of Winchester Morris Men, takes a breather between cooking

go?"...."ah, now I remember... sort of". I can't say whether anyone else was suffering the same problem as I was concentrating far too much on what I was doing to notice. In spite of my befuddlement I do feel, and I'm certain the rest of the congregation feel similar, that this weekend has turned me into a better dancer, which is surely the objective of such an event.

A final feeding was last on the programme and off back to sunny Sussex. I had a marvellous weekend with a fine host of gentlemen, fine food, plenty of beer and seven excellent and enjoyable instructional sessions. Shall I do it again? I would love to.

Dan Dewdney is a member of Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men

All Photos from Andy Pamore

The Original Welsh Border Morris Men – continuing the 38th Christmas Tour 2011

locals, and a table groaning with welcoming hot punch and mince pies arranged by villagers, all adding to this unmissable day's evolving tradition.

There being no "facilities" and it now being two hours since breakfast, a line of men customarily remark about the "gap in the otherwise healthy hedge" and whether this annual "visit" perhaps is to blame.

The tour continues to Evesham this year – a promise kept to return



there after an absence of ten years. Then on to Pershore for the AGM where we celebrate a traditional English democratic process of officer election – not sure what ever happened to nomination and seconding, but somehow it works brilliantly. New members are "greeted" and "credentials" checked and enrolment is

completed with a kiss from aforementioned trout and a pint from the Fool. Additional "garment accessorisation" is distributed to those who have fallen foul of the Fool's understanding of the way things should be – wearing of a mac is not a tail coat, nor is a long black leather coat, coloured feathers are not approved of and

nor was the forgetting of one AGM item by an officer when there are only two items!

Then as the light fades we head to Upton on Severn eating Pat's much appreciated in-flight sustenance and mince pies. In Upton we perform for the gathered masses – two huddled people, on the aromatic evidence of the hunt who'd earlier visited.

Finally, to one of the world's finest pubs, The Three Kings in Hanley Castle, the dingy cosy rooms made magic by a coach load of blacked-up men in black coats. Such a fabulous session of hearty song to round off a perfect winter celebration. Christmas, for most will have just started in earnest!

(Mike Finn took the photos and is bagman of OWBM..)

