

ORRIS

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EDITORIAL

Another year on – I anticipate this will be a year of “nostalgia” as people plan their acknowledgement of the approaching Millennium. Will we morris dancers get more or less invites to fetes and processions? Will folks be too busy planning for next year to remember about this one?!

As ever, the Christmas holiday was for me spent in a worry of “will anyone ever write to me?” – not long forgotten friends who haven’t sent a Christmas card but you, my dear readers! One or two regular contributors but what about any new subscribers sending us something about themselves, their morris interests, how and why the team started (or folded), problems of organising tours.....

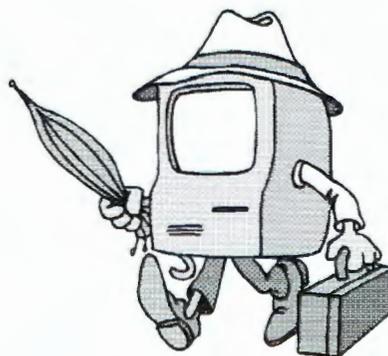
We had an odd experience on the subject of taking children into pubs. I can quite understand that some publicans may wish to keep a certain atmosphere which is not appropriate to the presence of children and also that some drinkers may want to get away from a reminder of their own families! Last year, one of our members arranged a tour and one pub when we got there had a clear “no children” sign – so those of us affected stayed outside while the others did jigs inside! However, this year she asked in the same pub and was told, if they’re with morris dancers then kids are OK. We must have some sort of good reputation then!

Another interesting tour was on a day when we danced at a venue which was “shared” with a group who were re-enacting forced marches during the Napoleonic Wars – in full kit. Partly to find a group of people who would be viewed as about as eccentric as morris dancers and equally enthusiastic about their hobby – and also for the agreement that they wouldn’t shoot while we were dancing!

I ran my spellchecker (different system from a year or so ago) and found one really nice one which the author concerned has probably already found. The article on Half Moon was co-authored, if you are to believe my PC system, by one Rhino Collision.

Best wishes for 1999

Beth



WALDRON SMITHERS' KNOCKHOLT MORRIS DANCERS, 1909-1913

To my knowledge, no comparison has yet been attempted between the influences that Cecil Sharp's English Folk Dance Society and Mary Neal's Esperance Guild had on the revival before the 1914-18 War.

This is the story of one which I stumbled over whilst browsing through books on local history in Bromley Central Library some years ago, which then developed a life of its own when asking permission to reuse photographs from its copyright holders. The Esperance Guild took its repertoire everywhere in what they saw as a pedagogic role. Like all good things, requests came in to share this new-found knowledge amongst a greater public.

One disciple of this was Waldron Smithers (1880-1954), the eldest son of Sir Alfred Smithers M.P. - the Conservative member for Chislehurst. Waldron Smithers himself followed in his father's footsteps in more ways than one, almost succeeding him in a political career from 1924 until his death, firstly as M.P. for Chislehurst until 1945, then at Orpington until his death, likewise being awarded a knighthood in 1934. At the age of 28 years, we see him at his father's house at Homefield in Knockholt, Kent.

His obituary in the *Bromley & District Times* describes him as being "deeply interested in country life since his early youth, farming, hunting and horse riding. He was always extremely fond of cricket and tennis. He remained a member of the Band of Brothers, the Butterflies, the West Kent Cricket Club (of which he was at one time joint secretary) and played whenever possible for the village team ..." He had been educated at Arlington House at Brighton, Charterhouse, and the Lycee d'Angers. He was very musical, and played the organ at Knockholt parish church until his death. Although it is unknown how he came by the acquaintance of Mary Neal or any other leader of the Esperance Guild, it is evident that he co-operated with them fully to progress what he saw as their cause.

Miss Neal detailed Blanche Paling to teach the dances to the Knockholt villagers, with the schoolmistress Mrs. Herbert Root continuing the instruction. Mary Neal's two Esperance Morris books described the work of the Guild, giving words and music of the songs performed, and the music and steps of the dances where possible - at a time before dance notation had become standardised. In the second book published in 1912, there are four photographs taken at Knockholt of some of the participants who performed there in 1910 - presumably at the June gala, of which more later.

The first performance given by Waldron Smithers' morris dancers is quoted in full by the *District Times* on Wednesday 9th June 1909. It described how Mr. and Mrs. Waldron Smithers "personally trained over 70 dancers As the time for commencing drew near, large numbers of ladies and gentlemen began to arrive, and at three o'clock about 250 people had assembled on the terraces overlooking the lawns (at Homefield) ... As the orchestra struck up, the dancers, who had been concealed in different parts of the grounds, tripped gaily on to the ground from their various hiding

places to the strains of the light and pretty music that is characteristic of the accompaniments to Morris dances. The girls were dressed in plain cotton frocks of different colours, with bonnets to match, and Peter Pan cuffs and collars. The men wore turn-down collar shirts and knee breeches and top hats, their hat bands and braces being decorated with red, white and blue ribbons; while all had bells fastened to their ankles. The boys wore the smock and slouch hat of the good old days, a glimpse of which was being enacted". Two performances of a repertoire comprising eleven dances, three children's games, and eight songs were performed, the evening's show finishing at ten o'clock.

Knockholt brass band provided musical interludes, and the newspaper commented that "The lawn and pavilion looked very pretty, outlined with fairy lamps and Chinese lanterns. A display of fireworks, followed by the National Anthem and hearty cheers for Mr. and Mrs. Smithers and their family, concluded a most enjoyable evening." The morris dances used exclusively comprised those taught to the Esperance Guild by members of the Headington Quarry morris team who had first visited them in 1905: i.e. 'Blue-eyed Stranger', 'How do you do, Sir?', 'Bean Setting', 'Jockey to the Fair', 'Laudnam Bunches', 'Country Gardens', 'Bacca Pipes', 'Shepherds Hey', 'Trunkles', 'Rigs of Marlow', 'Blue-eyed Stranger (reprise), and 'Morris Off' - as well as songs between each dance item. Of course, these dances are normally for a set of six dancers, but the press report failed to state how many people danced on any one occasion, or how many musicians played at any one time. The article mentions an orchestra rather than any solo musician which one might have expected, although it is obvious that Waldron Smithers was resolved to create as impressive a spectacle as he could muster.

Only one more performance is quoted by the local press in 1909, at the Vicarage gardens at Otford on 30th August. The *Sevenoaks Chronicle* speaks of it as part of a patronal festival to St. Bartholomew, which goes on to say "The programme consisted of folk music in dance, song and game, some twenty items in all ... The performers, amongst whom were tiny tots of four or five years, as well as the village ancient, seemed quite tireless. The pretty, simple rustic attire of the maidens, the smocks of the smaller boys, the gay braces and top hats of the men and youths presented a most artistic tout ensemble ..."

With two exceptions, all the outings of the Knockholt morris dancers during this five year period took place in Knockholt itself or a nearby village. Otford lies in the Darent Valley to the south of the North Downs ridge relative to Knockholt which is on its northern slopes. Cudham cited later, is the next village westward to the latter. Shipbourne is about ten miles away towards Tonbridge, and Greenwich about fifteen miles north-westwards. With a team of seventy dancers - many of them children - there are obvious difficulties in shipping them around. One could imagine whole families tramping the local country lanes, but one assumes that charabancs, waggons or some other vehicle must have been used for further afield.

The son of Waldron Smithers takes up the story in his *A History of Knockholt in the County of Kent*: "By 1909, the Knockholt Morris dancers were in full swing with folk music to go with the dances. A pantomime play was added in 1910 when 20

items appeared on the programme. The director was Waldron Smithers and the dance troop performed at *Homefield* in Knockholt and elsewhere. Their activities were reported in the *St. Mary Cray District Times*. The Knockholt Morris dancers appeared at Otford, at Fairlawn (sic) in Shipbourne, and in Greenwich Park in May 1913 ...” There are four photographs of the team at Knockholt in June 1910, including one of five adult men and five adult women who are listed as Waldron and Marjory Smithers, three of Marjory's brothers and sisters: Freddy, Cicely and Nancy who came over from nearby Halstead. There was also a Mr. Longridge, who could be a relative of the village butcher cited in the 1891 Census. Doris Ruecker was presumably the daughter of the owner of Cudham Hall. It is possible that Hugh and Winnie North were the same friends listed among the guests at Waldron and Marjory's wedding at Strathfield Saye in 1904.

Only Oscar Bishop evades identification, not being listed among the local residents in the Kelly's directory or in the Electoral Register for the area at that time. There is also a photograph of the author aged two years, posing as a jester complete with cap and bells. Elsewhere, one further photograph of the dancing was donated to Bromley Central Library by David Smithers, and his daughter Mrs. Margaret Ackroyd has a further six postcards giving further detail. In fact, Professor Sir David Smithers (viz. the boy jester!) has already alerted us to some of the history of his family in the March 1990 issue of *Bygone Kent*, and was renowned as a pioneer in radiotherapeutic techniques in medicine, before starting his career in literature upon his retirement.

The pantomime referred to seems to be a Country Play which was performed at *Homefield* on Wednesday 8th June 1910, into which the country dance and morris dance repertoire of the group are intercalated. The scene is the 'village green near Seaport on May Day' - which provides a good enough excuse to imbue the drama with May pageantry and festoon it with sea shanties. The plot hinges about Nancy Brown who is elected May Queen who fancies John Henry, a smuggler. At her coronation, she is approached by William Prigg, an informer, who also fancies his chances and puts the Excise Men onto Henry to gain advantage. The latter hides inside the Hobby Horse to escape detection, and the populace takes against Prigg. Despite this, the press gang arrive and take John off to sea anyway, and William is pilloried in the stocks.

All is forgiven in Scene II, with John back from sea a year later to regain his Nancy, whilst William takes up with her successor Audrey who is the May Queen for that year, and all ends happily ever after. An intended double entendre was added to the script by the usage of some of the songs, such as *Heave Away, my Johnnie* and *Oh, No, John*, and John himself singing *I'll Go No More a-Roving* before he was seized by the press gang.

The second known outing of the dancers that year was at the Knockholt and District Flower Show on Saturday 13th August amongst the entertainment, which also included a cricket match and selections by the Knockholt and District Brass Band.

Curiously, nothing was said in the local press throughout 1911 or 1912. One has to assume that either the group had folded for one reason or another, or that their

outings were never cited. Their success lay in the omnipresence of Waldron Smithers, and it has to be assumed that if he was preoccupied with other matters, then the dancing was not a priority. Certainly, there was no repetition of the Homefield gala in either year, nor were they listed at the Flower Show. The Coronation of 1912 was celebrated in the village with a fete at Homefield hosted by Smithers, at which mugs were presented to the children assembled, but no mention is made of any dancing.

However, if interest had been perceived to have been on the wane, the 1913 season began with a bang at Greenwich Park on Saturday 3rd May when the Merry England Society hosted a festival attended by, "girls and boys from Knockholt, Bromley, Chelsea and Catford ... The most charming feature of the programme was the Morris dancing by 14 little boys and girls from Knockholt, who marched on to the green headed by a girl fiddler playing the old tune of *Morris On*, and gave delightful music supplied by Mrs. Waldron Smithers". The *Kentish Mercury* is more forthcoming with the story of the event. It was an attempt to provide a central showcase for London's May day pageantry, by which one May Queen was crowned, chosen from among the attendees from Chelsea, Brixton, Bromley and Lewisham. Hundreds of children took part, and the procession included a Jack in the Green, but the newspaper rued that an occasion such as this which should have attracted thousands of spectators, was so poorly advertised with regard to the spectacle on show.

Two more performances were given by the group in June. The first on Saturday 1st at *Homefield*, and the second on Wednesday 19th at *Mariners Lodge*, the latter being where Waldron and Marjory Smithers now lived. By now, the dancing had diversified slightly, inasmuch that it now included the Flamborough sword dance, 'Lively Jig' (Ilmington), and 'Sally Luker' (Abingdon) to complement 'Rodney', 'Old Mother Oxford' and 'Drawback' which had also been added to the repertoire. Where necessary, they had a processional dance Long Morris, presumably derived from the Morris dance of Lancashire and the Cheshire plain. There was also another morris dance called *The Rose Tree*, although the source for this is not stated in either Esperance or other archival source. The newspaper made a great play in its description of the dance finale, the *Morris Off*, saying it 'always receives prolonged applause, was splendidly performed.

It is interesting to note the difference between this tune and other Morris tunes. The dancers are now supposed to be somewhat weary after the day's revels, and there is, in this dance, a suggestion of pleasant fatigue and a home-going through the lanes and meadows to cottage, supper and bed.'

The second June performance was a costumed affair for allcomers. Although the newspapers seldom listed any of the dancers or musicians (apart from the Smithers), the *Bromley & District Times* went to great pains to describe how some of the spectators (!) dressed up in period dress, such as 'Jimmy Flint, the village chimney sweep, with his wife and family, watching the fun from his pony cart. There was the old black and yellow village bus that plies between the village and the railway station, with Tom Gibson, the driver, in black silk hat and buff coat, illustrative of the coaching days.'

Although they weren't to know it, August was to provide the group's farewell tour. To begin with, there was the three day-long event Cudham Fair. On the opening day, Saturday 1st. August, the dancers took part in a scene reminiscent of the 'Village Green of Olden Days', whereat a white-bearded beadle and crier shouting *Oyez!* for all he was worth, decreed there was a large party of Morris dancers on its way from Knockholt, to the tune *Long Morris*. On this occasion, we are told that the solo jig *Princess Royal* was performed by Miss Blanche Payling (sic), and that a Miss Collins acted as 'the indefatigable and sympathetic accompanist' for the *Morris Off*.

On August Bank Holiday, 'upwards of eighty performers' were at the Fairlawne flower show at Shipbourne in 'an extremely enjoyable entertainment (of) folk music and dance.' The following Saturday saw them at the Knockholt flower show once more at Homefield. There was an afternoon performance, and one during the evening. The maximisation of possible spectacle was once more to the fore: 'The evening performance of the Morris Dancers was then awaited by a large audience and presently could be heard the jingle of the Morris bells, followed by two long lines of performers numbering nearly one hundred, who, from different points, gaily tripped on the lawns to the well known Morris tune.' Later in the evening, music for dancing was given by the Knockholt and District Brass Band.

As mentioned in my opening remarks, this project took on a new lease of life when I wrote off to the presumed estate of the late David Smithers, acting on a local history article written by himself on the Smithers family in Knockholt some time before his death. Not only did his son, Andrew Smithers give me his permission to reuse the photographs from his father's book on Knockholt local history, he copied my request to his aunt, Mrs. Margaret Ackroyd, who had another six photographs which she was prepared to lend me! Add to that the photograph which David Smithers had already donated to Bromley library, there was quite a lot of visual information to hand as well as that found in newspaper archives.

The panoramic photographs show that a tourney horse and beadle were included among the supernumeraries. Apart from that, the dancers' costumes could be defined broadly into five groups; viz boys, girls, men, women and Waldron Smithers' inner circle. The earlier newspaper accounts quote one impression of some of the costumes used. The photographs used by the late Sir David Smithers seem to confirm this account. However, the six photographs lent to me by Mrs. Ackroyd give a modified story and are possibly derived from a different time than those of her brother.

The younger girls wear light-coloured sun bonnets, smocks and petticoats, with dark stockings in one photograph showing them posing holding sticks crossed with their partner - the implement being longer than that we would normally associate today with the Headington morris! No bells are visible, since the smock line falls just below knee level in the group of six featured. The older girls also wear sun bonnets, but wear long light-coloured dresses with matching pinafore.

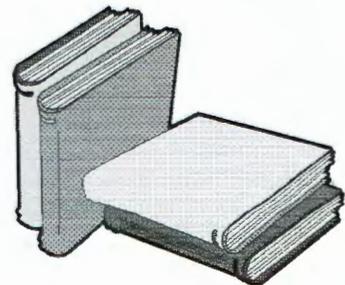
The men and boys all wear their 'slouch' hats as described earlier, but are pictured wearing agricultural smocks, and dark-coloured trousers covered with bell-pads and boots - not a bit of the Bidford-type costume cited earlier by the local press. The party surrounding Waldron Smithers are dressed much more grandly as early nineteenth century country squires with tailcoats, knee breeches, buckled shoes, and wide-brimmed hats for the men, and with long dresses and hats for the women. It is doubtful whether they acted in any greater role than as supernumeraries or as supervisors, given the fact that none seemed to be wearing bells.

Any thought to continue the effort into 1914 seemed quickly abandoned. The prospect of warfare in Europe was widely trailed before Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo on June 28th. which would have been round about the time that the Homefield gala would have taken place. One assumes that the public spiritedness of Sir Alfred Smithers' sons had overtaken events and they had already taken steps to enlist - certainly, nothing is noted in the local newspapers concerning the Knockholt morris dancers in late Spring 1914. As it was, Waldron Smithers served in Salonica and Egypt with the Cavalry Remount Service during the war, before becoming a partner in the firm of Ackroyd and Smithers in the London Stock Exchange and entering Parliament in 1924 - a loss to the nascent world of the Morris dance revival, as some of us involved with tradition might aver with our usual smug understatement!

I've spoken about the dance, "*The Rose Tree*" being of dubious parentage (see above). When I returned Margaret Ackroyd's photos, I asked after a Mummers play that she and her brother took around the village. One week later a package arrived in Marden, with the script and some other information on the Mummers play, plus two notebooks on Morris Dance notation in the hand of the instructress Mrs M. Root, the Knockholt schoolmistress!! One notebook contains "*The Rose Tree*", which I'm convinced is the Bampton dance, begging the question: from whom did the Esperance Guild learn this (or any other Bampton) dance? Jinky Wells? Someone else?

I have taken the privilege of copying the Mummers play script, the notebooks and accompanying letters and will be depositing them with the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library shortly.

George Frampton
November 1998



BUT WHY ARE YOU CALLED HALF MOON?

Who are Half Moon?

Half Moon are a women's sword team based in New York. They danced at Sidmouth 1998 International Folk Festival as an invited team. The interview with Sarah Henry was conducted in the shade of the back yard of the Balfour Arms, a popular venue for events including the now-traditional morris party, to the accompaniment of some exceptionally vocal seagulls. *Editor's Note – I take it this covers any possible transcription errors?! Half Moon Sword were extremely popular when they appeared at Sidmouth Folk Festival this year as a booked team – having wowed the audience at the Dance Competition some years previously and caused some dismay then among a few who realised that they “weren't British”! Morris Matters wondered how they started out – and why do rapper anyway?*

Why rapper?

Sarah explained that Half Moon was founded around 1980 as a Longsword team. The first dance they did was Ampleforth and then they learned Papa Stour at Pinewoods camp from Jim Morrison, who taught it there one summer. In 1983 she moved back to New York. At college she was a member of an established mixed Morris and Sword team called New Haven Morris and Sword where she learnt Rapper and Longsword as well as Cotswold. She joined Half Moon and said that she would teach them Rapper. Some of them didn't know what Rapper was and some were a little hesitant but they consented so since the Fall of 1983 they have been a Rapper as well as a Longsword team.

So who taught who?

We asked where did she learn Rapper to be able to teach them? The response was that she learnt from New Haven. However, she didn't want to bring them the same Rapper as had been done with New Haven but had learned bits and pieces of other things. So, Half Moon tried to change some of the structure of the dance: the basic vocabulary, the way they got into figures, the way they did the Nut. So it varied a little bit. Over the years the Rapper has evolved by people learning figures in various places: at camps, every time Half Moon visit England, they have learnt figures and incorporated some of them and have made up quite a few of their own. Now, the Half Moon dance looks nothing like the New Haven dance.

Morris experience?

We wondered if there any other Cotswold dancers in the team? There are four of Half Moon who have danced with Ring o' Bells (a New York women's team). There's been a lot of turnover over the years so they have a back-members list that is quite lengthy and there used to be quite a lot of overlap. They have eleven officially on the roster now and four are or have been Cotswold dancers but the others came in other ways. When Half Moon do a procession sometimes, they are told to do Bonny Green Garters - most of the team looks around and asks "What's that dance?"

Competitions

Half Moon won the Ritual Dance competition at Sidmouth a few years ago – had they won any other trophies? Yes, Half Moon won at Sidmouth in '91 but there aren't any morris competitions in the US. It's rather a foreign idea, although the organisers of DERT (Dancing England Rapper Tournament) tried to twist their arms last year to submit a video entry. Half Moon declined - being hesitant about entering because they don't quite get "this competition thing". They were glad they did enter at Sidmouth and of course it was nice to win it. They were just glad they danced well and that the audience liked it.

Fools

How had the Fooling aspect of the Half Moon performance developed? Susan Evino was their Fool years and years ago, she was very funny. She was a professional Fool, actually, and used to have a company called 'If Every Fool'. She and Jan Burdick used to fool, then Susan Evino left and Susan Wallach came and they have been the Half Moon Fools for a long time. But now Susan Wallach is married to an Englishman, Charlie Day of Mr Jorrocks

The Foolish Dance is changed regularly. They don't change the choreography so much as the roles that the Fools play. They try to make it now so that the dancers have an equal footing with the Fools. Susan and Jan are so funny they drew the audience away and the dancers did any old figures, the dance wasn't that interesting. They have tried to pep up the dance so the dancers have a chance against the Fools.

Hierarchy or anarchy?

What about the hierarchy in the team? Sarah said they have always had no official hierarchy. They are a "creative anarchy" but finally decided they needed to have a Squire because they needed to have somebody who was the contact person and someone who would make sure that everybody heard about everything. They always ran as kind of a collective and then would show up at a tour and realise that somebody wasn't there because everybody thought someone else had called her. So they decided that they needed someone in charge and made Susan "Squire for Life". As far as practice goes, in effect the most forceful personalities prevail a lot of the time but Half Moon are really run by consensus.

Vying for position?

So are there two dancers for each position, is that how it works? Half Moon have two Longsword dances and three Rapper dances and they have roughly two per position. Three people do number 4 and some people "float". She feels it is a good idea to learn more than one position, to have a primary position but to be familiar with the dance from other places.

Gestation periods for dances

How long has it taken for Half Moon to develop the five dances? The history is that they had Papa Stour for a long time then did North Skelton, their second Longsword dance, also for a long time. When they came to England in '91 they saw Carlisle do the

Cumberland dance, really liked it and asked them could they do it. So Half Moon dropped North Skelton and picked up Cumberland.

The Old versus the New

When they came to England in 1989 they had only one rapper dance. Here they we learned a lot of figures so they made up a new one based on the English figures which they started calling The English Dance. Then they thought that wasn't quite right as it was all supposed to be English so they started calling it the New Rapper. They have kept that pretty much the same so they have the Old Rapper and the New Rapper but the New is nearly ten years old now.

Stepping challenges

Does Sarah have any practice tips she can pass on, like how do you teach the stepping? Half Moon spend a lot of time on stepping. They work on it very, very slowly at the beginning of practice and speed it up gradually. What makes sword good is figuring out how to do it well not just working out where to go - they try to do that in their workshops too, to teach how to dance not just how the dance goes. She feels that women have a challenge in any of this dance, particularly to figure out how to make it exciting. The men have the virtue of being bigger and have more mass, they just throw themselves through and all they need is the weight. Also they have more upper body strength so they can get away with being reckless and carry off the excitement by their sheer physical force. Half Moon aspire to have that much energy but they can't get it from the same source.

Walking...

For example, they work a lot on how to walk in the circle. Its not just the stepping but how to get from here to there. They work a lot on a really assertive heel toe walk, not to trudge, not to do it flat footed or walk on the ball of your foot. Sometimes it's hard for the Cotswold dancers because they are used to springing off the balls of their feet but in Sword you really need to have an aggressive heel step so that you drive..." driving the circle". They work on how to drive round, how in the circling to make the hilt point ring.

..without treading on the person in front

One of the problems of Rapper, which is probably accentuated for women who are politer in the set, is that you have to figure out how to move forward when there is somebody right in front of you. So you tend to take these little steps. You have to work out where to put your feet and Half Moon solve that somewhat by leaning their shoulders in and keeping their feet out so the feet are actually making a wider circle than the bodies. If you keep your feet directly under you it slows down to a little mincing, trudging thing. So if you lean your feet out and are off balance, you can't do it standing still, (*you have to do it with four other people as well!*) then your feet can almost run and you can get that really aggressive step.

Peeling an onion

An interesting thing in Sword dancing is that you always discover that there is more and more in it. Every time they bring a new member on she asks a question that none

of them know the answer to, even though they have been doing it for fifteen years. It's like an onion, you keep peeling the layers away.

New folks in the team

What do Half Moon do about getting new members? Sarah explained that they have auditions every two years or so. They do auditions as a workshop, open to the general female community, so that anyone can come. At the end of the workshop they invite however many people they want to join and its never been more than three. After you have taken on new members you need to be just the team so that the new members coalesce.

Team dynamics

They like to have a team of around twelve; below ten it's a waste because you can't have two sides up at practice. They also have a height requirement - to be between 5'2" and 5'6". Then they look for people who seem like they will be able to dance well and who will also get along with everyone because you really have to in a Sword team. If you're mad at someone who is holding your sword or who you don't like dancing with, you are so close to them, connected, that you have to have a feeling of team. Sarah feels they are a really good group now.

Performances

Where do Half Moon dance in the United States and how often? They practise every week from October through May on Thursday nights at a dance studio. They try to dance out in September and June though it doesn't always happen - July and August are too hot. The biggest event of the year is their Sword Ale, held in February so they spend the whole Fall and Winter preparing for that; about twelve groups come. They often travel quite a way, one from Texas this year. Two English groups have come: East Saxon (1995) and Snark (1992); Sallyport are coming in 1999.

Festivals

There is a festival outside of Boston in April, NEFFA (New England Folk Festival) - before the Sword Ale started that was the major place that you would see Sword dancing. It was always in the cafeteria which had a horrible slippery floor and when the Sword dance was on everyone would come and see it and you would know that there were there these other people out there who were doing it and that they would be watching you. It was very high pressure and really uncomfortable and sort of miserable.

Genesis of Sword Ale...

Susan Evino wondered why it was like that? Why can't we meet these people and do something co-operative with them? Because it became almost like a competition, they would all come out and see what the other teams were doing. It did seem uncomfortable, very nerve-racking. So it was her idea that then blossomed into the Sword Ale. Originally they started with the idea of inviting teams to come and dance together and do workshops. Then it evolved into just partying and performing so there were no workshops. That has made NEFFA a much different experience because they all know each other and everybody's friends and can support each other.

..and of new teams

The Sword Ale has called a lot of teams into existence. A lot of groups have formed to come to that so it's really made a big difference to Sword dancing in the US. Although it seems that it's in somewhat of an ebbing situation right now. A certain number of teams have dissolved and some are forming. Is that general or is that specifically the Sword? Sarah felt it's mainly affecting sword. Maybe it's on its way up again because new groups are forming, but if you look at who's been there over the last thirteen years, a lot of good groups aren't dancing any more.

Numbers of teams

How many Sword teams are there in the States? It depends on whether you count those that just do Sword. There are probably about twenty five or thirty groups that only do Sword. If you count Cotswold teams that have an occasional Longsword or Rapper side, the number could double. It's a big country so they don't know most of the people that do it.

Gender bias?

What about the gender mix in terms of teams doing Sword? As for all-women's teams: there are Half Moon, Toronto, Charles River Rapper, Swift River, Mystic Garland, Six in Hand and Short Sword. If you counted all the Sword dancers you would find more women than men as the mixed teams are predominantly women. There are very few that are all-men. People of necessity seem to make mixed teams because that's who's there. Orion [from Boston USA] were at Scarborough Sword Spectacular: they are fantastic. They are a mixed team and would like to come to England. They were angling for an invitation this year but Half Moon were ahead of them. They are really good, you have never seen Longsword like they do it. It is astounding. Marlboro women do brilliant Longsword also but they only do it seasonally.

Transatlantic style differences

What about the differences between the US Rapper and the UK Rapper? Does she see a stylistic difference? Half Moon dances are different, but they are different from other US dances and they have gone a whole different direction with fooling. Partly its because they are a women's team. And you have to invent something different because the traditional Tommy and Betty don't make any sense.

Tommy is rather English

Do you get Tommy and Betty in the States? Some, not Tommy but you see Bettys. The Newhaven team has a woman cross-dressing as a Tommy. She is very good and has an under-stated wry humour rather than belly-laughing. Susan and Jan in Half Moon do something different. They came out of theatre rather than Folk tradition so they came in with a different approach. They took it in a way that Sarah never would have dreamed of. They didn't want to be there as hangers-on.

Reaction in UK

What about the reaction that Half Moon have had from the UK teams? Sarah felt that it's changed over the years. It's almost ten years since their first visit. It's really

shifted. For one thing, now more women are doing Sword in England. That's a big difference. When Half Moon came to Sidmouth in '89 all the men swore that there were no women's Sword teams. Women didn't do Rapper.

Support

They had some wonderful boosts though among the men, who have been really supportive and thought what they were doing was great. It just divides. The first time they came, the Captain of Handsworth said he loved their dancing. There have been others who just didn't want to have anything to do with it. When they went up to Scarborough in '96 there were a couple of women's teams. It does help to be accepted if you are good.

Papa Stour

How did the Half Moon interpretation of Papa Stour evolve? Usually there is a speech: each person comes out and does a little jig. If you did that in New York City one at a time, taking 10 minutes to introduce everybody, the audience would be totally gone. You can't hold them. So they have the leader come on and do it, then they do it two at a time. It has nothing to do with the way it is supposed to be done. They had to keep it snappy, moving on. Other than that they haven't really changed anything except to work really intensely and find their own way to do things. They've set some things like the directions of the tunnels and formalised some things that weren't and filled in gaps where there was room for interpretation but don't think they deliberately changed anything.

Eye Contact

Sarah also noted that they try to do a lot of eye contact in the set and eye contact with the audience. She found that really helpful in pubs in England. They don't usually dance in pubs because they don't have them in New York! Sometimes you have a bit of a hostile audience in a pub here, rowdy and unreceptive. You can nail them with your eyes and pick them out one at a time. They shut up one at a time because they've been singled out. So they've been invited in, in a way, and you kind of get them, in the Longsword or the Rapper.

Music

Onto the music – Half Moon have two fiddles and a concertina. Michael Gorin, Sarah's husband, is Half Moon's main musician and he's been with the team since '83. Paul Friedman played for the team before '83, before they started doing Rapper. He was the original Papa Stour musician. He also danced with Greenwich Morris Men. On one of the occasions when Michael couldn't make it for some reason they had invited Jody Kruskal who plays concertina. When Half Moon came a few years ago Jody wanted to come and that was nice. Michael and Jody play in several performing groups together so they play a lot.

Volume versus control

Then, when Sarah and Michael moved away last year Half Moon invited Paul to be the musician. Then they moved back so now there are three musicians. But it is very rare that Half Moon would go anywhere with three. Since this was a big trip they

brought three and actually it turned out to be a good thing for some of these outdoor things to have a bit more volume. Its tricky to have two or three people playing for Sword, driving the speed, the tunes, the whole thing. They have to watch and speed up and slow down. The concertina adds a whole lot of excitement to the dance that it's hard to get from just the fiddle, like the Foolish Dance when it gets really raucous and rowdy. Jody also plays washboard and kazoo.

Sidmouth 98

What were Sarah's impressions of Sidmouth, having been before? This was Half Moon's second time; they were even having a good time dancing on the Arena stage which is something that's not really a Rapper or a Longsword venue. It's very hard to follow all those big national groups with their costume changes and musicians, covering the stage. Dancing on a stage is never their favourite thing but they were having fun there.

Informality

The informal dancing, that's what they really like. The point is to mix with the other groups. Half Moon were lucky. Being a booked team, the Festival organisers gave them housing so, unlike last time, they didn't have to bring tents from the States. They were housed with the international teams and that was fun because they had made friends there. They led this dual life, sometimes with the English Cotswold and Sword sides and sometimes with Eastern Europe teams. They were aware of being at Sidmouth instead of a UK side. But this year they also had Kesteven so there were two Sword sides. It was less pressure for Half Moon this time round because they felt much less of "these American female interlopers"!

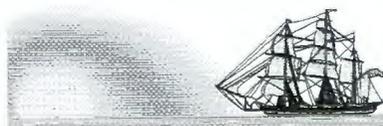
And there we left them to listen to the seagulls.

*Jill Griffiths and Rhian Collinson
August 1998*

Editor's note – stop press – we got a reply back on why they're called Half Moon:

"Half Moon is the name of the ship on which Henry Hudson sailed into New York Harbour and up the Hudson river to Albany in 1609, looking for the North West passage but he turned back when it got too narrow"

I'm glad I asked the question! How morris can broaden your knowledge.....



THE FORGOTTEN MARY NEAL

This was the title of an interesting event at the Sidmouth Festival last year. Subtitled 'The true spirit of Morris dancing', it portrayed the work of a woman who was instrumental in the dissemination of knowledge about Morris in the early years of the century, but whose contribution has largely been overlooked due to differences of opinion with Cecil Sharp. The show was the brainchild of New Esperance Morris, who, as their name suggests, see themselves as the spiritual heirs of the Esperance Club which Neal ran for working girls in the St. Pancras area of London, and Janet Dowling also published a biographical piece on Neal in the latest issue of the Morris Federation Newsletter.

With the anniversary approaching of Sharp's first encounter with Morris dancing, these are part of a move to reclaim Neal's place in the history of the Morris. It was she who began the task of publicising and teaching Morris dancing, Sharp having devoted himself to the folk song revival until Neal consulted him nearly six years after his meeting with the men of Headington Quarry.

The dramatisation, written by Sue Swift, not only illuminated these events of ninety years ago, but provoked many thoughts on the state of the Morris now, at our turn of the century. Jan Grayson, Black Annis's fool, was excellent as Neal, convincingly dignified and enthusiastic in a very well-bred way, and Meg Holdsworth of Stroud Ladies did a good job as Herbert MacIlwaine, expressing sympathy and enthusiasm in her non-speaking part as well as playing the piano in turn-of-the-century parlour style for the Esperance Girls' performances.

Malcolm Lawrence of Seven Champions had his work cut out to be credible as Sharp, given his magnificent moustaches. Much of his performance consisted of reading the letters which he had written to Neal or to the newspapers, and since Sharp was apparently not noted for mincing his words when arguing for a cause in which he passionately believed, Malcolm's personification of him could have little of that 'good humour' and 'enthusiasm' which Maud Karpeles and others remembered of him!¹

The dance performances within the play pointed up the arguments on style which were the basis of the controversy between Neal and Sharp - but could have been used to do so more intentionally. New Esperance danced as an introduction and in conclusion to the piece, and they certainly have the enthusiasm with which Neal infected the Esperance Club. In their stepping there is no 'raising the thighs and moving the the legs violently up and down after the manner of a high-stepping horse'² (of which Sharp accused the original Esperance dancers), but they do have a distinctive swinging, almost Bampton-style step, but with the emphasis on the down-beat rather than the up.

The original Esperance dancers were played by Stroud Ladies, which seemed an odd choice, since their style of dancing, swinging alternate arms, cannot be anything like

¹ Maud Karpeles; "Cecil Sharp: His life and work", London 1967

² *ibid.* p. 80

that taught to the Esperance Club - and certainly did not look as though it derived from the short lesson given to them by William Kimber (played here with just the right mixture of modesty and authority by Jameson Wooders of Berkshire Bedlam). However, they were, as always, a pleasure to watch. Stroud Men were called upon to impersonate a boys' team, and their stamping style was more convincing as a representation of what Neal may have been promulgating - but as boys they were not convincing at all!!

Kirstie Mair of Stroud was well cast as Florrie Warren, the head instructress of the Club. She performed folk songs and a solo jig beautifully, and seemed very much 'in period' - but when we read of Warren as an 'exuberant and vital dancer'³, the Stroud Ladies style again seems inappropriate.

It was of course not a big-budget show, and there was no question of attempting to find or train a boys' side, or make any extraordinary attempts at verisimilitude - how could we ask Malcolm to shave off his moustaches? - yet it would be great to see the performance with more plausible dance styles - and especially to see, by way of balancing the arguments, a side performing in the style which Sharp felt to be 'correct', springing from the ankle with the free leg straight.

One of the highlights of the play was the longsword demonstration at a New York party, for which the production was lucky enough to have the services of Half Moon Sword from New York, who were a booked team at the festival. I understand that the Papa Stour sword dance was another anachronism, having not yet been 'discovered' in 1911, but one could be quite glad that accuracy was ignored in this case. Half Moon are always quite magnificent, especially in that dance, but to see them performing it up on the stage was even more breathtaking than usual.

Looking round the Morris scene now, in this last (or possibly penultimate, depending on which system you're using) year of the century of its revival, it seems that Mary Neal's view triumphed in the end. There are almost as many styles of Morris as there are sides performing - and there are a great many sides out there. Neal wanted the Morris to be experienced and enjoyed by 'the folk' - perhaps the teachers and computer programmers who appear to make up the membership of most sides are not quite what she had in mind.

But the Morris is undoubtedly being enjoyed, and in a way of which I am sure she would have approved, in teams working together and playing together to show this great tradition to the public, and to enjoy it while they do so. Cecil Sharp's councils of perfection seemed to be restraining the Morris to an arm of the competition-based folk dance circuit, indulged in by the middle classes - even the upper middle classes, if Elsie Oxenham's *Abbey School* books are an accurate representation. Mary Neal turned to other work during the 1914-1918 War, and afterwards was influenced by the prevailing notions of Morris as a male-only ritual, so it was the formation of the Morris Ring which brought the Morris out onto the street and into the pubs where it belongs. Since

³ *ibid.* p. 73

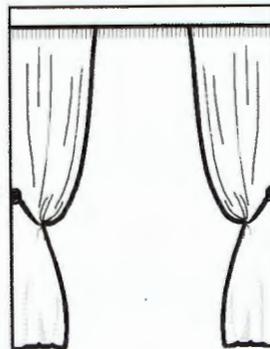
then, of course, there has been a blossoming of different types of Morris from the different areas of the country, and it is good that sides can experiment and do not feel constrained to do only what is judged to be correct. One must be glad that Morris is so evidently enjoyed by many modern teams, but as a member of a side which performs very much in the Sharp stepping style, I regret that he and Neal could not have reached a compromise.

It seems to me that teams are missing out a lot if they do not put hard work into their practices, and risk holding Morris up to ridicule if there is no precision to their performances. Unfortunately, there seem few opportunities to learn 'style', particularly stepping style. Morris workshops at festivals do not seem to address the idea that there might be different ways of executing a Morris step, but it is probably the case that there would be little demand for such workshops.

Sides, and individual dancers, get set in their ways, and it is very much a feeling of our time that there is no such thing as a 'correct' way to perform any part of the Morris. For me, however, a performance is just not Morris unless it radiates that power and thrill which in the case of Cotswold Morris is generated by that springing step.

I believe 'The forgotten Mary Neal' is to be performed at Hastings Jack in the Green in May. Catch it if you can - and let the controversies of ninety years ago set you thinking...

Shirley Dixon
Jackstraws Morris
January 1999



WANTAGE 1998 - ANOTHER REUNION

Dark was closing in as I started out (*late as always*) for the “**Wantage Weekend**”. I had heard of, but never attended, the weekend before. As I drove on through Bristol and on to the M4 I tended to reflect rather on the first time I met Roy Dommett on a weekend workshop rather than the one ahead.

That time I was not alone, in fact we had a complete minibus full. It was a very cold January in 1976(?) heading for East Aberthaw Boys Village, a delightful spot situated between the Power Station and the Cement works just outside Cardiff. A Cardiff Instructional Weekend was on offer with Roy Dommett and “Tubby” (*never an accurate description*) Reynolds. I had only been dancing for 9 months or so, was totally unclear as what morris was, except good fun, and had only the vaguest idea what we would be doing.

Home comforts there were none, only cold bunk beds and showers. A very large proportion of the calorie intake required to keep warm had to be taken in the form of Brains beer, which in itself was a feat of will. But the company was good: Cardiff, Hammersmith and others, with everyone willing to dance at the bidding of that incomparable double act of Roy and Tubby (*was there ever a better way to influence an impressionable young morris man?*).

Since that time I must have attended a dozen weekends (not counting the innumerable festivals) at which Roy or Tubby or both drove on the renaissance of innovation in the morris. With reinterpreted traditions, the collectors’ information revisited, new dances, new influences and new traditions.

Always good fun and great stimulation and some great memories and so, as I made my way following the excellent directions towards the youth hostel at Wantage, I wondered what might be in store, how much new could there be? I was to find out. (*The weekend was in fact devoted to innovation and change*)

Most people had arrived by the time I got there and I quickly realised that I would know by sight the majority of people attending. The evening meal was in full swing and it was good to catch up with old friends. But the dancing started soon enough with tables and chairs swept aside to create space. However this was very different stuff from those early days. The majority present were very experienced dancers with years of dancing behind them, things moved on at a cracking pace

Friday night was devoted to what had been collected of Molly dancing which, however you look at it, gives plenty of scope for the inventive imagination.

Saturday was a move down into Wantage to another great venue. More Molly dancing but this time all from the modern era; the teaching was left to those who had created the dances. This gave a very thought provoking insight into the motivation and driving force behind dance creation and performance.

The evening was dedicated to good food, drink, talk and debate (*what else?*).

On Sunday I was introduced to Raglan - a dance tradition created and developed by the now dispersed Bantamcocks morrismen. A very satisfying style and a new challenge with the Raglan caper and triple step (*I must try again the Bucknell double caper - if my knees will stand it*).

The afternoon was rounded off with a demanding sequence where Roy provided video, as is his wont, of dances from the US and we had to reproduce them in sets. Always thought provoking on the way dances are collected and a sobering lesson on your own limitations on observation and recall.

Amongst all this there was time for a little rapper, more Molly from Seven Champs, video on hobby horses and, all the while, Roy prompting and probing to get the most from all those present.

Morris has certainly moved on in the last twenty years, and when it comes to dance innovation there is no shortage of talent and material to work with.

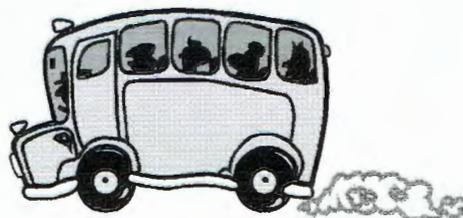
It was great that everybody who taught had no reservation about passing their dances on, no talk of owning or proscribing, although there was a very understandable sense pride displayed as well thought out figures and steps were demonstrated and described. (Although I expect that they would be less tolerant to see their creations abused and danced badly).

A level of sophistication has developed, not only in the dancing, but in what is expected at a workshop, and in the catering and care for those attending. (*Or is it that we have just grown older - a bit of both I expect*). Wantage provided these to a very T. But in essence nothing much has changed, people come together to socialise and have fun.

As I drove away from Wantage I was deep in thought. (*And promptly got lost on the way back to the M4*)

It was certainly worth the trip. The next Wantage will be in March 2000. I'm planning to go for a little morris revitalisation. (*As well as the good food, drink and excellent company*)

John Lewis
January 1999



**OF HECTOR AND LYSANDER, AND SUCH GREAT NAMES AS THESE.
(OR...WHAT'S IN A NAME?)**

Marlington March Magnificent Morris..... Cloughtybridge Clapper
Rapper.....Mullington Mill Molly.....

After helping to put labels onto a recent Morris Federation mailing, I began to wonder where the names of dance teams come from.

Are they of traditional significance? Are they the result of some arcane practice or just the result of too many glasses of the local brew?

Armed with the Morris Organisations' Combined Membership County List, I set to work to see what I could find out about team names. There are about six hundred and fifty teams listed covering the UK each with a different, or near so, name – I didn't count the few non-UK teams included in the list.



Just under half of the teams listed have a name with a geographic base. This must represent the 'tradition' aspect of the Morris, with the local community providing the dancers. It's interesting that this continues even with the wider recruitment and travelling areas common today.

About a fifth of the teams have names which are 'home made'. This is a higher proportion than I expected – does it reflect an innovative nature in these teams – or a penchant for puns? Do the audience always understand the puns?

Around a tenth of the teams have names which reflect the type of dance the team performs with most of these using a combination of geographic name and dance type.

Small numbers of teams use names with historic or industrial connections – breweries feature prominently among the latter with railway companies a close second.

All in all a bit of a mixed bag which left me with one question. What is the name of a Morris team meant to do? Inform, advertise, educate, act as a label?

Steve Poole
January 1999



PRESS RELEASE – A CENTURY OF SONG CD

Just in case any of you haven't seen the advertising for this already, this is a new CD of recordings of traditional singers stretching from the first to the last decades of the twentieth century. They represent a sample of the hundreds of traditional singers recorded over the last 100 years.

The CD is released by the EFDSS to celebrate the Founding of the Folk Song society in 1898. There are 25 tracks, including the first song collected in 1898 "Clauddy Banks" from members of the Copper family.

The CD and accompanying booklet have been compiled by Derek Schofield and Malcolm Taylor, the librarian at Cecil Sharp House – from where it can be obtained for £12.99 plus £1.00 p&p

EFDSS, 2 Regents Park Road, London NW1 7AY

On a similar note – I recently treated myself to just one of the CD's in the Topic records, "Voice of the People" collection – Rig a Jig Jig is lovely listening – lots of morris tunes "from the South of England" recorded over the past 60 or so years and good "sleeve" notes. I wonder if anyone can afford to buy all 20 CD's ?!

Editor

LETTERS

On Plagiarism

I am interested in all this fuss about plagiarism. Once a dance is performed in public, how can you stop people copying it? I get over the "you're copying our dance" by composing the tune as well as the dance. I think if other people (dancers) copied it I would feel flattered. If I watch another side dancing/playing something that takes my fancy, I always ask if they would mind me copying it. It is ~~only~~ fair that if you wittingly copy another sides dance, you acknowledge the source. Courtesy rather than copyright!

If Bampton, Headington Quarry, Ilmington, Adderbury etc actively encourage others to perform their dances, I wonder what is so special about Abingdon, Chipping Campden, Colne Royal, Britannia Coco-Nut that they don't want other people to dance their dances?

Just think, if the sides Cecil Sharp etc "collected" had objected, the revival would never have started!!

Aloha and Wassail

Norris Winstone

On "sell-by dates" etc

This made very interesting reading, but also some sadness as a life- but no longer dancing- member of Gloristears of Brummagem and a member of Holdens Goldens, I feel that I have been there and done that.....Sally Wearing's comments "Who on earth would want us when we're really past our best?" really struck home. I've tried line dancing - I prefer morris music. At the moment I am contemplating Raq Sharki (Egyptian dancing) and yoga - which may be very good for keeping me supple and in shape - but definitely isn't morris.

I think that morris should be taught properly and to a high standard but weak dancers must be encouraged to improve/dance at practice or collect money, distribute handouts etc - or chat to the audience. I hope that morris dancing in all its forms will continue to excite, enjoy and thrill.

Best wishes

Pauline Beighton



CAPTION COMPETITION.....

Some of you will already have seen a version of this on the Internet. Just for fun – can anyone come up with a caption for the picture? So far we've had “but you can keep your socks on”, “pull the other one, it's got bells on” and one or two rather unprintable suggestions.

For anyone who doesn't recognise the team (and you might be forgiven for not immediately knowing them in this kit) they come from the city where *The Full Monty* was filmed.....