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Happy New Year! It's the time of year when your thoughts may turn to festival bookings and tours, so there are a few articles along those lines - how about visiting a far-flung morris team? And while it is too dark and cold to go out dancing how about reading the book about Lancashire morris (Rose Queens...). It is hard to get hold of but can be obtained through the Morris Ring shop: Steve Adamson BFB, 12, Flockton Road, East Bowling, Bradford, West Yorkshire, BD4 7RH,UK; Tel: 01274 773 830

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Discordant Comicals: The Christmas Hoodeners Of East Kent, Tradition And Revival

In 1909, Canterbury solicitor Percy Maylam published his book *The Hooden Horse*, detailing the old Christmas custom from East Kent. This rare book is now said to have cost over £500 when it last appeared on E-Bay! George Frampton has updated this *meisterwerk* in "*Discordant Comicals*". The hooden horse is a wooden effigy which over a hundred years ago was taken round by costumed farmworkers in East Kent to the big houses in their neighbourhood at Christmas time in an effort to secure money. Many children who witnessed the event all remembered the clacking of its jaws made by its hobnail teeth, if nothing else. Elsewhere, people recalled the singing of country songs or carols by the rest of the team. Today, many teams who have revived this custom prefer to perform a short playlet, usually featuring someone trying successfully or unsuccessfully to mount a rather unruly horse.

George, who lives near Maidstone, is recognised as an authority on the county's traditional music. A seasoned musician himself, he is best known in Faversham as concertina player with the Fabulous Fezheads, who at the annual Hop Festival never fail to appeal to the crowds with their unusual and entertaining Morris dancing. Elsewhere, he is well-known for his work on East Anglian Plough Monday custom resulting from his membership of Kent's Seven Champions molly dancers. "In this book", he says, "my aim has been to produce an authoritative and comprehensive account of an East Kent custom which used to generate a lot of fun. I have put it in its historical context, surveyed it through the centuries, and compared it with analogous civic practices in Tudor England. I have scoured old press reports and other documentary evidence to portray how the hoodeners parodied their employers and sponsors in their efforts to solicit money. I've also been able to track down, and reproduce, rare old photographs and other illustrations. I've included words and melody lines for some of the hoodeners' songs, not to mention brief biographies of some of the leading participants."

As well as looking at the Tradition up to and around the First World War, the book brings up to date the numerous revivals that have taken place at odd times in the 1950s and continuously since 1966 in St. Nicholas at Wade, Whitstable, Deal and other places. The book is fully indexed with a gazetteer in the style of key Folklore Society publications, with notes on the songs used, and the performers taking part up until 1925. It is now available exclusively from the Faversham Society at the Fleur de Lis Heritage Centre, 10-13 Preston Street, Faversham, Kent ME13 8NS, price £6.95 (£8.95 by post to UK destinations). Call Arthur Percival (Honorary Editor) - 01795 533261 or George Frampton 01622 832461 for further information about Faversham papers.

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The Ferrette Morris Men

The small, rather sleepy town of Ferrette is in the French region of Alsace, about half an hour's drive from the Swiss city of Basel. It nestles in the foothills of the Jura mountains, its steep but pretty main street of half-timbered houses dominated by the imposing ruins of its medieval castle. The town wakes up a few times a year for a party: notably the Fête de la Musique, the annual music festival that takes place throughout France on 21 June, and – when the organising committee isn't engaged in internecine strife – a truly excellent medieval festival complete with jousting and siege engines. It also has a fair scattering of English residents who work across the border in Basel. All it lacks is a morris side and a proper pub serving real ale.

Well, we've put the first of those right. At the Fête de la Musique in 2003, Peter Sandbach and Andy Beadle, two Englishmen living in Ferrette, hit on the beer-inspired idea of learning a couple of morris dances for the following year's festival as the local expat community's contribution to the fun. Still being able to remember the idea the morning after, Peter and Andy roped in a few other local Englishmen, and practices duly began in Peter's garage. To begin with there was rather less than a full side, a ghetto blaster for a musician, only one member (Peter) who had danced before and warm-ups that involved pushing Peter's Morris Minor out of the garage. It was clear that more dancers were needed, so a recruitment drive among the English-speaking community in Basel was started. This turned up two other people who had danced before. One of these, Mark Hawes, was made Foreman within thirty minutes of arriving at his first practice. Peter and Andy became Squire and Bagman respectively.

Suddenly there were six dancers and things were really starting to move. In anticipation of the first dance-out, a kit consisting of whites and a black waistcoat with a patchwork version of the Ferrette crest of two back-to-back carp on the back – symbolising the town's long association with fish farming -was agreed upon. These were augmented by red spotted neckerchiefs and straw hats decorated with flowers in the town's colours of red and yellow. As members set about purchasing the necessary clothing, the industrial clothing suppliers in Basel suddenly had a run of Englishmen coming in to buy painters' trousers and performing strange contortions that must have made the salespeople wonder quite what their customers were intending to paint and how.

Peter started to talk to his old side, Kennet Morris Men, about coming over to visit for the music festival, thereby solving the problem of the lack of musician and giving us safety in numbers. In the meantime Mark was trying to pass on to the novices in the side the half-remembered fragments of Cotswold dances he had learned during a long but intermittent dancing career with various sides. The idea of a two-dance spot at the Fête de la Musique was burgeoning into an altogether more ambitious Three Countries Weekend of Dance, with a tour of Basel and a day of wine-tasting and dancing in Germany hooked on to the Fête de la Musique appearance. It was becoming clear that the Ferrette Morris had a

future beyond June 21. As the weekend of dance loomed nearer, it was decided that the side needed a Beast, and not a hobby horse, but, in honour of the Ferrette coat of arms and the local speciality of carp and chips, a hobby carp.

The only question was how to make this animal. The answer lay over the border with Basel's Fasnacht. Like morris dancing, the Basel Fasnacht, or carnival, is an ancient tradition, dating back to the Middle Ages. There are other parallels too in the dressing up, the noise, the sense of doing something for its own sake rather than for commercial gain – and the drinking. Like morris dancing too, there is much lively and passionate debate about just how “traditional” it should all be!

Fasnacht lasts for three days and always takes place in the week following Ash Wednesday. It kicks off at 4 a.m. on the Monday morning with a lantern-light procession of fife and drum players through the darkened city centre on a scale that would make pipe-and-tabourers weep with envy. Everyone who takes part in the Fasnacht processions wears a mask, and the “drum majors” of the various fife and other bands who take part in the procession often wear huge papier mâché masks that protrude far above their head and shoulders.



Figure 1 Typical Fasnacht fife and drum band with masks

These masks are lovingly made by specialist workshops in Basel, and one of our members, Mike Wadham, managed to persuade a Fasnacht mask-maker to build our hobby fish for us in Fasnacht drum major style.



The “beast” was duly named George in memory of a carp Mike had once caught at a family barbecue but not had the heart to turn into fish fingers.

Figure 2 George the carp with admirer on May morning

George is everything you'd expect of Swiss engineering: impressive to look at, made to a very high standard and definitely built to last! He is bolted onto a steel breastplate worn over his operator's shoulders in a style rather reminiscent of an early diving suit. From the inside, he's also as claustrophobic as an early diving suit. His mouth can be opened to collect coins, and he certainly never fails to make an impact when he goes out with the side.

In Mike's words, "George has a personality of his own but looks like a cross between a 'Knight Templar', the Ku Klux Klan and a mini submarine. The fact that his centre of gravity is at about 6 feet 6 inches can make wearing George a dangerous occupation – especially when coupled with high gravity beer. However, drunken locals seem to enjoy talking to him."



Figure 3 Close-up of George's head



The Three Countries Weekend was a huge success. Kennet were excellent guests, who, in addition to enjoying themselves to the full, did invaluable work in helping the fledgling Ferrette side to raise its profile and gain the goodwill of the local communities. Moreover, during the tour of Basel, Ferrette even managed to recruit a musician in the form of English concertina player Jonathan Taylor, who just happened to be in town with his wife. A full account of the weekend can be found on Kennet's website.

Figure 4: Ferrette on location with George

Encouraged by a first season that was far more successful than its founders could ever have imagined, the side has since gone on from strength to strength, dancing out regularly during the summer and attracting a fair number of paying gigs. Our dancers have even nobly donned singlet and hose to perform at two medieval festivals. For one of these the current Bagman volunteered to recreate ancient tradition and don drag as Maid Marian. It was only part way through one of the livelier dances that he began to question the wisdom of wearing a velvet gown and pantomime dame boobs on one of the hottest days of the year... We have even been on French television too – in ordinary kit – when we were filmed dancing at Ferrette Christmas market. We have also made visits to the UK, dancing at the Sidmouth and Woodbridge festivals, and this year hosted Windsor Morris for our second weekend of dance.

It isn't always plain sailing of course. Establishing a morris side abroad brings its own unique set of challenges. Isolation is the biggest, of course, making it difficult to learn and teach new dances. Since most of our members are relative newcomers, we sorely miss having other more experienced sides nearby to act as inspiration and mentors. We try to overcome this by visiting the UK as often as we can and by hosting sides who fancy a weekend abroad. Some of the problems will be more familiar to British sides, most notably that of recruitment.

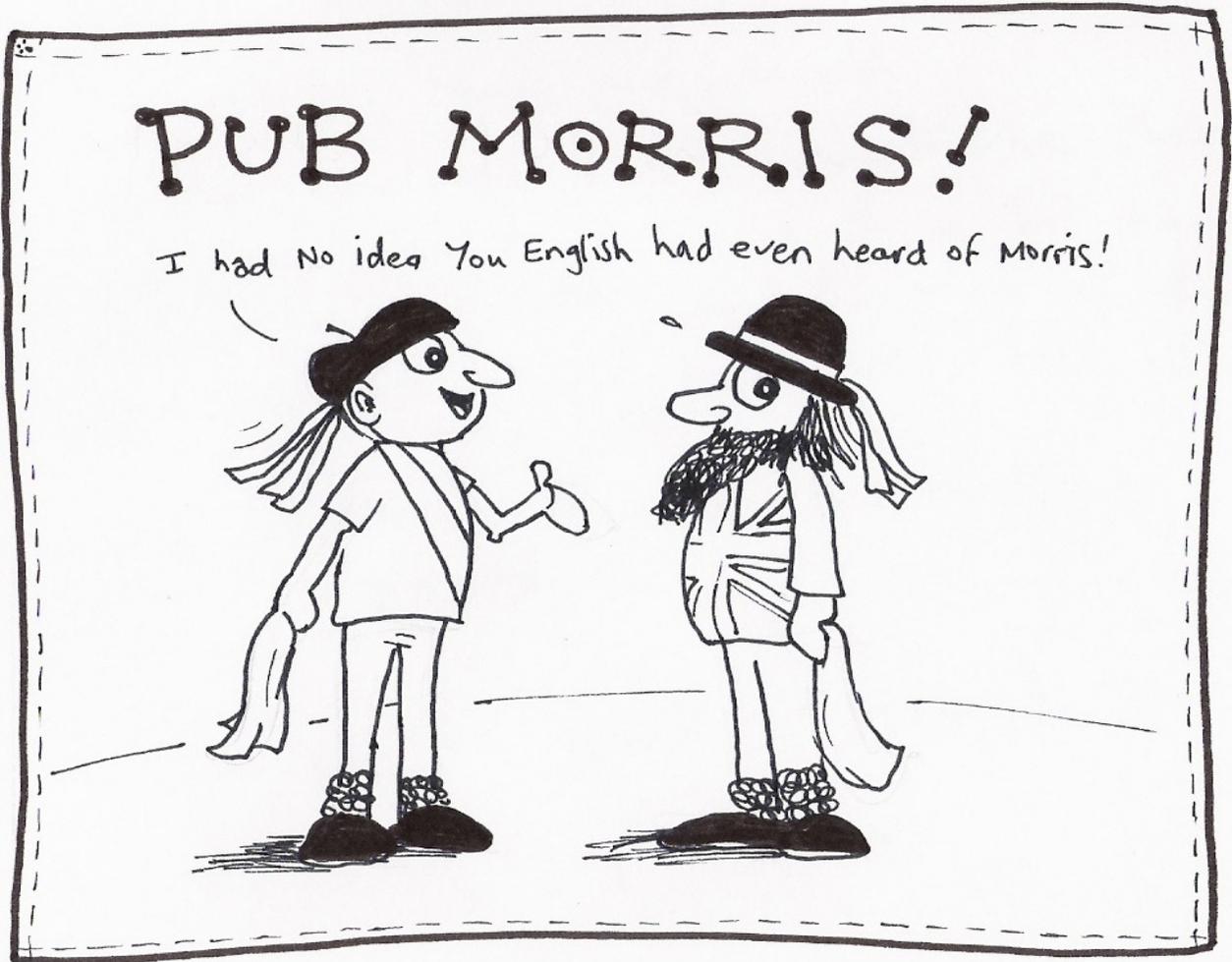
Globalisation has substantially changed the nature of the expat community. It is no longer a small yet relatively stable group, but a large one in a constant state of flux, with people regularly moving on to new jobs in other countries. This change has already cost us two members, including the original Bagman. Furthermore, people are less willing to get involved when they know they will only be staying in the area for a short period of time. None of this has deterred us though, and as long as we have an enthusiastic core of dancers we will keep going.

One final peculiarity about Ferrette to close with: the Count of Ferrette is none other than the Prince of Monaco. We're sure he really wants to be the patron of his own, loyal morris side, but doesn't know it yet. One day maybe we'll get our 'By Appointment' honour from him at some big reception in the Principality. Well, even small, exiled morris sides need to have dreams!

John Gleaves, Mark Hawes and Mike Wadham
October 2006

(For more information about Ferrette Morris Men, please see our website www.ferrette-morris.org or e-mail the Bagman john.gleaves@wanadoo.fr)

photos by Mike Wadham (1,2) and Clive Allen (3, 4)



© *Andy Hilditch*
December 2006

View from across the water

This view is not across the Atlantic but across the North Sea and most of the Baltic, to Finland where Helsinki Morrisers are the sole exponents of the morris art – if our skills quite merit the description. In fact the side has been going all of 11 years now, having celebrated the tenth anniversary in suitable style with an Arctic Morris Ale – 2 years ago! Indeed morris at these distances from the mother lode maybe could be expected to deviate from that in places where the original traditions are still ‘strong’, and where exposure to watchful expert eyes doesn’t occur. Only expat eyes here.

None of our current members had ever danced morris before joining the group, so adoption of new styles or traditions was essentially down to participants’ own enthusiasms. Initially two styles were taken uncritically from Eken Morris of Stockholm, who accepted my invitation to visit (unknown to them, armed with a video camera) their practice session and who then ran the first training workshop on Finnish territory. The traditions we ‘inherited’ were Bampton and Adderbury, suitably the easier of Cotswold styles, although I am sure not all easy to perform well. Over the course of the last 11 years the preferred choice of style has come the full circle, due to fluctuating numbers and interests of members, and not least due to the inputs from our various visitors, invited and otherwise.

Excluding that first workshop with our Arctic colleagues, the first real visitor hailed from the Ring community, and he admitted once that he only realised that HMs may not be an all-male side as he was finding his way to his first practice. His forte was Adderbury again, but included a number of dances that we didn’t know of, as well as a cassette of the music to go with them. Despite the advent of digital technology that cassette is still occasionally used! I can say he is also responsible for making possible one of my most cherished morris memories: following the turns of the Shropshire Bedlams and Martha Rhoden’s, dancing outside a pub in the Shropshire Beacons, performing Lollipop Man to single pipe and tabor accompaniment. Contrast! Brian Cox of Isca Morris I thank you wherever you are.

Maybe not the second in time or in impact on our repertoire, but of considerable interest for us, was a passing visitor to Kaustinen Festival, the biggest annual folk event in Scandinavia, although still rather modest by UK standards! This dancer was a stalwart of Rumworth Morris, who with the musical assistance of his missus on accordion, introduced us to the wonders of North West, a style we had seen in the UK on our Shropshire trip. With both of the original British members originating south of Watford Gap, and one even south of the Thames, long lines of stomping, kicking processional dancers was as alien to us as rugby league. One Saturday morning, in our limited practice space in downtown Helsinki, was not quite enough to master the style but it was a fun and challenging experience. At a later date when a Helsinki Morrisher got married, she being the only one ever to have had morris experience before coming to Finland (with Jabberwocky in Oxford), a procession from church to reception was requested. Common sense

prevailed and we didn't try to conjure those half remembered NW skills, but somewhere in the subconscious surely they helped us along with our processional Shepherd's Hey.

And so to this summer, when we have been treated to two types of contrasting visitors, both finding us in the throes of full Scandinavian summer, whose most typical feature is not endless sunshine (like this summer, you luckless travellers) nor incessant rain (a rather typical experience), but the near total absence of local residents. Almost all Finns have access to a cottage or cabin, preferably by a sauna and a lake, whence they retreat for as long as they can afford, to forget the pressures of the modern world, like morris practices.

Despite the limited attendance the first visitor-session in June was with Bob and Dave from Adelaide Morris Men, recently fêted with their whole side in Thaxted Church by fellow Ring members, and shortly to continue their migration back down south. If truth be told Bob was a familiar face for many of us, having invited himself earlier to a mini ale organised by 2 members of Hong Kong Morris currently resident in Tallin Estonia. "I'm in Finland for the weekend of the 5th - what are you guys doing?" This time was slightly more prepared: accommodation was offered, a dance-out in Helsinki planned, a short workshop arranged with sunshine laid on, and a great time was had by all. Two new dances have entered our repertoire, and the concept of swagger has now entered the Finnish vocabulary, even if ours is a pale imitation of that of Adelaide.

Later in the holiday we welcomed Hara Reiser from Ring O'Bells of New York City, stopping off in Helsinki on a short European holiday. Again we had contrast in style and input, but again introduction to aspects of the game that we had never witnessed: from the Aussies it had been the all-male Adelaide tradition, and from Hara an all-female Ascot under Wychwood version of Lollipop Man, including a very colourful version of the song! Despite the even more limited turnout in mid-July (the height of holiday time), and the limitation of just an evening in the park by Helsinki harbour, here in the flesh was only the second practising American dancer I had met. And despite having to represent the whole north American tradition on her own, she lived up to all my expectations: knowledgeable, capable and keen. Surely she knows about swagger, though probably not in Finnish.

So if you are planning your foreign holiday next year, maybe you should consider checking out the local morris representation. Scandinavia is covered (a rapper side in Oslo, and in Denmark a Ring member in Silkeborg), Utrecht in Holland, and now I hear in Switzerland a new side (Ferrette). It can be a very rewarding process from the hosts' side I can vouch, and you might even add to your own vocabulary. In case you are in Helsinki some time the Finnish for swagger is *patsastella* - you probably won't learn it from Helsinki Morrisers, although we will teach you 'cheers'.

Tony Shaw
August 2006

Festival Man

What to do now that summer's here
Up in the attic's the camping gear
For lots of music and too much beer
Here comes Festival Man

Onto the campsite to put up your tent
Can't understand why the pegs are all bent
Then it snows and you wonder where summer went
Keep going Festival Man

Head off to a session when you've had a few
With two violins and a didgeridoo
There's twenty-eight bodhrans just waiting for you
Play on Festival Man

The man in the street thinks that you're just a racist
The band's All Blacked Up and so are the faces
The dye always gets in peculiar places
Clean up Festival Man

So it's off to the food-tent with smacking of lips
For cajun potatoes with exotic dips
Reality dawns...and it's ketchup and chips
Yum yum Festival Man

You go to a dance that looks like a collider
Your partners are getting progressively wider
There's Pepper in the Brandy and Sheep in the Cider
Dance on Festival Man

The drinking goes on well after hours
You dance in a tent and you sing in the showers
Surrounded by men with their hats full of flowers
Sing up Festival Man

You get up next day and say 'never again'
Your ears are both hearing the chimes of Big Ben
And you feel like you've gone fifteen rounds with High Spen
Boom boom Festival Man

The dance groups are here from all over the nation
The dancers are rising to every occasion
But seventeen Border and nine Appalachian.....
Zzz zzz zzz zzz

Clear up the stage and collect your fee
Groupies as far as the eye can see
Cos it's money for nothing and chicks for free
Dream on Festival Man

Here we are all in one place
A generation lost in space
With eighty-nine percent of the human race
Heyyyy, different festival, man

Awake the next morning you haven't a care
Catch sight of the kid with the luminous hair
And then you discover that you brought him there
Calm down Festival Man

You contemplate life while you're trimming your beard
And wondering where your lost youth disappeared
And then he returns and it's just as you feared
Kids eh !!!

The morris men, they all look ever so slick
But there's only two dances so please take your pick
There's one with a hanky and one with a stick
Well spotted Festival Man

Taffy's up there doing his story-telling
You wait for your turn and then you begin yelling
And it's verbal, so no-one will notice your spelling
Speak up Festival Man

You go to an alehouse you used to frequent
You tell the landlady your money is spent
You ask her for credit but don't get a cent
Stop crying Festival Man

The bar staff are looking amazingly sprightly
The drinkers are getting a little unsightly
You wish it rained beer but it only rains nightly
Keep wishing, Festival Man

Pack up your tent and head back to the city
The last time you'll be here and it's such a pity
Next year's in doubt 'cos they've banned the committee
Boo hoo Festival Man

Unpack your tent and examine the leak
No cash to spare and the future looks bleak
And then you remember it's Sidmouth next week
Here comes Festival Man

Cliff Woolley

[first published on Folk Around Bristol web site 2001]

Some Thoughts On Morris Dancing At Launton, Oxfordshire.

“GENERAL and Local History differ, in that the one is for the most part a record of courts, camps, and councils, of the deeds of sovereigns, statesmen, warriors, and great writers, who have each played an important part in the days in which they lived; and the other is a humbler record, descending to the ordinary life of the common people, especially of those who lived in the country. Most persons are more or less familiar with the former, but not so many are acquainted with the ways and doings of those millions of persons who tilled the fields, produced the food, built the houses, moulded the characters, paid the taxes, administered government, and carried on in their respective stations the varied business of civilised nations, through all the ages in which the great deeds of our national heroes were done”.¹

These sentiments, expressed by the Reverend James Charles Blomfield in 1889, were radical for an historian of the period, anticipating trends in historiography which would not reach fruition until well into the following century. Blomfield was born two weeks prior to Whitsuntide, 1821, in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk. His father was Rector of Launton, a small village on the Oxfordshire/Buckinghamshire border, just to the east of the market town of Bicester, during the period 1837 to 1842, and Blomfield himself assumed that role in 1850, remaining in post until his death in 1895, at the age of seventy four.² In common with every resident clergyman, he was in a unique position to document the popular customs and activities of his flock.

Over the course of at least two decades Launton fielded a team of morris dancers, described by participant William Cartwright as 'a first-rate side'. The performers involved at both Launton and Bucknell, he claimed, comprised, 'the best sides of the district, and there was great competition between them, which sometimes ended in blows if the rival sides happened to foregather at the same place.'³ John Botley, one of the dancers in the set,⁴ was born in 1815, and is likely to have been active during the eighteen thirties; while Cartwright himself, born in 1842, 'when a boy often accompanied the dancers as one of the fools, of whom there were two or three',⁵ perhaps during the eighteen fifties. The dancers ceased activity about 1862 ('about 50 years back' from 1912), the reason being, according to Cartwright, 'the lack of interest shown by the younger men'⁶. This trend is documented for many of the communities where the tradition of morris dancing had been strong, and was undoubtedly a contributing factor in the general decline and disbandment of many sets.

In the case of the Launton Morris a more likely reason presents itself. One of the major venues for the gathering of morris dance sides had been the annual Lamb Ale held during the week beginning Trinity Monday at nearby Kirtlington since the late seventeenth century, at least. In common with similar celebrations elsewhere throughout the region during the first half of the nineteenth century, the Lamb Ale had been gradually but steadily declining in importance.

In 1879 it was observed how there had been no procession around the village in the customary fashion for 'about a dozen years';⁷ while a report dating from the following year speaks of the festivities having been carried on in the old style, including the procession and morris dancing, 'Until twenty years ago.'⁸ The aged paternalistic patron at Kirtlington Park, Sir George Dashwood, was succeeded by Sir Henry William Dashwood on 22 September 1861, and the regular annual payment of two pounds and twelve shillings given towards the maintenance of the event immediately ceased⁹.

Reverend Blomfield would certainly have been privy to the ongoing activities of the Launton Morris set and is even likely to have acted as regular patron. But in neither his extensive published *œuvre*, nor his surviving manuscript, does he convey even a hint of this activity, and precious little about any other cultural forms practised by the 'common people', which his inclination as an historian appeared, from the statement which opened this piece, to favour.

Keith Chandler

October 2006

NOTES:

1 J.C. Blomfield, *History of Cottisford, Hardwick and Tusmore* (Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1889), 1.

2 Andy Boddington, 'James Blomfield: zealous historian of the Deanery of Bicester', *Oxfordshire Local History* 7, number 4 (Summer 2004), 17.

3 London, Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, George Butterworth MSS., f.3, interview with William Cartwright, Launton, 13 April 1912; published in *Folk Music Journal* 3, number 3 (1977), 194.

4 Keith Chandler MSS., interview with Peter North, at South Leigh, Oxfordshire, 24 August 1992, recounting information gathered from Ada Reeves, Launton, circa 1982.

5 Butterworth MSS, f.3 (*Folk Music Journal*, 194).

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Bicester Advertiser*, 13 June 1879, 4.

8 *Bicester Advertiser*, 28 May 1880, 5.

9 Percy Manning, 'Some Oxfordshire seasonal festivals,' *Folk-Lore* 8 (1897), 313-315.

I gratefully acknowledge the unstinting assistance of, and stimulating exchange with, Patricia Tucker on many matters relating to the cultural life of Launton, over the past sixteen years. For further contextual details see my 'Popular culture in microcosm: The manuscript diaries of Richard Heritage of Marsh Gibbon, Buckinghamshire', *Folk Music Journal* 9, number 1 (2006), 5-55.

Revival of the Shaftesbury Byzant, 18th June 2006

Shaftesbury in nineteenth-century Dorset had a problem. It was and is a hilltop town. Without modern technology, its water supply had to be obtained from the valley and carried back up the hill. Two factors were involved: the steepness of the hill itself, and the fact that the neighbouring parish of Enmore Green from where the water was drawn, lay outside the town's limits and within the manor of nearby Gillingham. Assuming that the lord of the manor was amenable to the townsfolk, that was no bother. Thus it was they devised a remarkable piece of pageantry that took place every year on the Thursday after Holy Rood day (the first Sunday after May 3rd) up until 1830, when the practice was abandoned by mutual consent.

The tradition became known as 'The Byzant' and comprised a half-mile long procession with dancing from the town down the hill to Enmore Green. Its participants would carry and present a mace (known as the byzant), a calf's head, a pair of gloves, a gallon of ale and a penny loaf to the lord's bailiff. Enmore Green lies immediately to the west of Shaftesbury, formerly on the main road into the town from Yeovil and Sherborne, and is best illustrated as home to the Fountain Inn whose name is commemorative of the water course used by Shastonian aquarians. A full history on the subject, with notes on its revivals was written by me and published in *Folklore* (Volume 101, part 2) in 1990, but it had always been my intention to witness any future revival, and analyse the ceremony and its dance. The last such celebration was in 1988, when the event was tagged on to the annual Gold Hill Fair in early July. Since then, there has been little or no interest in assembling a corps of people to repeat the custom until now. Unfortunately, opportunity knocked three days beforehand and I was unable to cancel plans I had for that weekend. However, I am indebted to Peter Robson of Bourne River Morris for indulging me with newscuttings covering the event, which I used to chase up its key players.

Enter Common Ground: a community arts body based in Shaftesbury. Their remit is to 'encourage people to explore, express and celebrate what places mean to them through projects such as parish maps, community orchards, field days, and the water market.' Sue Clifford of the group told me: "One of our projects called 'Confluence' was about encouraging people of the Stour valley in Somerset, Wiltshire and Dorset to make music for the river. All about improvising our relations with water, the project covered many other things including an exhortation to the people of Shaftesbury to revive the ancient Byzant festival. We were neither the first nor the last to encourage it back into existence." Although Common Ground were unable to complete the project, the idea was taken up by members Jan Rutter, Rosemary Wharfe and Myra Wood, who wrote and directed the reconstruction.

Myra Wood is the chairwoman of Shaftesbury Arts Centre. The idea was to centre the pageant around two playlets: one performed in the town, the other at Enmore

Green. The press release published in the *Blackmore Vale Magazine* on 9 June 2006 described the day's programme:

'The celebration will begin at 2 p.m., when a group of actors perform Christine Sims' short play "Joseph Goes Over the Top". The 15 minute play vividly illustrates the town's historic water shortage. The only well was within the confines of the Abbey, so any other water had to be carried up from Enmore Green by water carriers. The story sets the scene for what became known as the Byzant ceremony ... This object (the Byzant) was presented by the town as a token offering to the Bailiff of the Lord of the Manor of Gillingham, who owned the tything of Enmore Green and therefore controlled the water supply.

After its ceremonial handover, the Byzant was immediately handed back to the town, in exchange for a pair of white gloves, a calf's head, a penny loaf and a barrel of beer, kept by the Bailiff for his own use. The ceremony took place on the first Thursday after Holy Rood Day and was regularly performed up until 1830 when the ever forward-looking Shaftesbury town representatives applied successfully to Lord Grosvenor (the then Lord of the Manor) to discontinue it.

By that time, Victorian ingenuity had ensured that water could be pumped out of the ground for the town's use and so the ceremony had lost its significance. But it is part of Shaftesbury's history, and visitors and locals will be able to see this traditional ceremony re-enacted.

After the play, a procession with music and dancing, complete with a contingent of local morris men, will head off along Park Walk to Castle Hill and down the steps to Enmore Green.

There will then be a community drama performance of Keeping the Faith, a play written by Myra Wood tracing the history of the idea of the paying tribute for the gift of water, from its pre-Christian roots right through to the present need to conserve and treat nature with the respect that it is due. Nick Crump is musical director and has written a special Water Cycle song for the festival. More than 40 performers, including members of the Shaftesbury Junior Youth Theatre, will enact this romp through Shaftesbury's history in this unique ceremony.'

The review in the same magazine two weeks later adds little more to the story, apart from five fabulous photographs of the event. Add to that ten more on the website owned by Shaftesbury town council, comprising shots taken outside the Town Hall and on Park Walk; and another ten on the Royal Chase Hotel's website, documenting the day from the Town Hall, Park Walk, and onto Enmore Green recreation ground. From that, we can deduce the story of the day, and identify some of the key characters involved – many being very generous in advancing me further information when asked.

Central to our interest is the 'dance' element. Bearing in mind how steep Tout Hill is – the lane connecting the town with Enmore Green – it was intriguing how this

might be tackled, also realising that roads would need to be temporarily closed to allow any procession to take place. Myra Wood described the occasion: 'The Morris men and some children made up the dance element of the Byzant revival. Also there was a circle dance performed by the whole cast. The Morris Dancers fulfilled the dancing part of the parade, with the children doing a very simple jig holding garlands formed up in pairs. In Chris Sims' play *Joseph Goes Over the Top*, there was no dance element. This was a short comedy to illustrate the situation in early mediaeval times in relation to the only good wells being within the precincts of the Abbey. After this was presented outside the Town Hall, we formed up on Park Walk and paraded down into Enmore Green via Castle Hill with the White Horse morris men and Nick Crump's musicians leading the way, followed by the ceremonial procession of the Byzant, with the usual attendants carrying the gifts of gloves, beer, bread and calf's head.

On reaching Enmore Green my 'romp through Byzant history' (viz. *Keeping the Faith*) was performed and the dance elements within it covered an early fertility 'May Day' type dance, a circle dance performed in pairs, and a short minuet which illustrated the way the ceremony dissipated into the holding of a ball instead of the dancing procession down the hill.'

Musician Nick Crump added: "We used Winster Processional and some (Tielman) Susato to process to. I wrote the original music/song about the Water Cycle for the plays, plus tunes that I had written previously. Cliff (Spey) worked out a dance for all the cast at some point in the play ... In general, it wasn't a very Morris-connected event. The White Horse men were used to lead people from one part of Shaftesbury to another." Nick and his musical partner Karen Wimshurst are described in the magazine's photo captions as 'pied pipers' who play the serpent and clarinet respectively. The Hamelin connection is relevant inasmuch that the twosome 'led' the procession and its followers from place to place, since each were adorned in tatter jackets rather than any distinctive two-coloured costume. Nick lives in Shaftesbury and is a musician and self-employed gardener. Both are members of the Common Ground organisation, taking part on the Confluence project as composers and musicians – which explains their involvement.

The Town Crier, dressed in tailcoat and tricorne hat, was Cliff Skey – another Shaftesbury man, who doubled up as one of the White Horse morris men. Cliff is also known for his recent work with Rose Moresk, who have devised a show re-enacting Morris as it might have been performed in the sixteenth century. He described the dances to me, some of which he helped devise, all of which were performed at the final stand at Enmore Green as part of the *Keeping the Faith* playlet. The dances were kept simple as "we only had two rehearsals!"

There was a procession of small girls, each carrying garlands in a scene dedicated to Astarte, the goddess of water. The scene was intended as a wedding reception, although the script says that a young couple come through with a priestly figure and a carrier who bears an early depiction of what will become the Byzant. The dedicated Byzant dance is a fifteenth century tableau, and comprised a country

dance to the 'Bacca Pipes' tune. Dancers process on in couples, then turn to face the couple behind in a duple minor set, then perform right- and left-handed stars with the hands held low "as done during dances of that age", then a back to back between couples, then on the sides. The 'minuet' described elsewhere was devised by the four dancers who took part in it, and represented a Regency scene. Lastly, there was a Circassian Circle to involve all members of the cast and public.

Keeping the Faith comprised eleven pages of script and was Myra Wood's interpretation of the Byzant through the ages. A green man played by Mark Hebditch acted as narrator throughout. The play opens in the times of the Ancient Britons who worshipped the goddess Astarte (pre-Christian fertility ritual!) The story then highlights the problem of water supply in a hilltop town with Shaftesbury Abbey having the sole borehole and unwilling to share it. The Byzant ceremony is then witnessed – more or less in the manner stated in the history and folklore books. Its development is then hypothesised during the austere years of the Commonwealth – a cue for booing and hissing Cromwell's 'thought police'. The demise of the custom is then selected, with the town council deducing better ways of spending money rather than such redundant antics. And lastly, the play features its revival, partly in the light of its infrequent twentieth century revivals.

A few points need to be added here. Firstly, the route taken this year was novel in the context of tradition and revival. Enmore Green has been used in the past before, notably between 1972 and 1974, but the more recent occurrences have taken place in the town itself – usually on a weekend so that more people can see it. Even the Gold Hill fair, which brings to mind the Hovis bread advertisement used on commercial television, takes place in the town rather than on Gold Hill itself. How could the hill be used by any Byzantine perambulation? The road has a 1 in 5 gradient at its steepest, and comprises pebbles set in cement rather than any cobblestone pavement.

Park Walk is a wide footpath overlooking Cranborne Chase and the escarpment, and lies outside the walls of the former Abbey – a perfect venue for the dancing and pageantry, and off the town's roads. The Royal Chase Hotel photographs also show a grassy footpath, which further suggests a meander from the town down to Enmore Green rather than any great conceptual procession. The costumes used seem to continue the pattern adopted during the revival years of the 1970s and 80s, comprising that of the early Tudor period, although photographs of the 1907 Revival show the key characters in Regency dress. The question now is, will there be a similar event in June 2007? Once more, this author awaits with interest.

My thanks go to all those people who answered my queries as if out of the blue: especially Myra Wood, Nick Crump and Cliff Skey, and of course to Peter Robson for alerting me to the event.

George Frampton
September 2006

The Development of Morris (Part 9)*: *The Great Socialist Experiment*

Few people have commented upon the impact of the student unrest of 1968 on the folk scene in England. It was of course the height of the folk revival in the Universities and the politicisation of the students and intellectuals led to a growing interest in the protest song within the folk tradition. Songs about strikes, mining disasters, unemployment were rediscovered and *The Hard Times of Old England*, *You Tyrants of England* and *The Dalesman's Litany* became the popular chorus songs of the moment in clubs across the country.

As part of this movement a new theory developed of Morris as social protest. Social historians pointed out how, throughout the early part of the 19th century, the masses were vigorously suppressed: there were the Peterloo Massacre, the Tolpuddle Martyrs and the Chartists riots. In response to this State terror, Morris dancing spread amongst the rural labouring classes as a protest against their subjection.

The researchers were struck by the similarities between Morris and popular acts of protest: it was performed in public places on holidays where the crowds would make arrest difficult; it was performed in the evenings, sometimes in the dark hindering recognition; morris sides toured villages, obviously to avoid capture and they were usually armed with sticks.

In the early to mid 1970's there was a move to rediscover Morris as a subversive activity and a group of socially motivated individuals, including myself, sought to establish a Morris side based on sound left-wing ideological principles. Most of those involved have long since passed on to more important things or else gone into active politics so now I can reveal the true facts of the great Socialist Morris Experiment

Our first effort, which took a Nihilistic stance, failed for obvious reasons and we ultimately condemned this as counter-revolutionary. We did try an Anarchist approach but the lack of co-ordination made the stick dances very dangerous (though the blood did add to the drama). We had more success with our Stalinist interpretation and for some years we performed as "The Red Flag Gang". Ultimately however, a Maoist faction gained control, our Bagman was denounced and new dances selected from the Red Book. During this period we became known as "The Gang of Four" because there were so few of us left after all the purges.

Finally we went back to our roots and adopted a highly disciplined Trotskyist structure. This gave us the level of discipline needed to organise ourselves but the "cell" concept of nobody meeting or knowing more than four others in the group made practising awkward. We got over this problem by recruiting sleepers, though they proved very difficult to get to meetings and on a few occasions we were actually caught stealing them from the railway line.

Illustrating the repression of the working classes through our dance was equally fraught. First of all we tried Long Sword. This was fine until the figure where you decapitate the squire by putting the star over his head and pulling the swords away. The first time it really was an accident, but it got such a rapturous applause that we kept it in thereafter despite the mess and the obvious inquests afterwards. Ultimately though the Coroner's Court started asking questions and we had increasing difficulty recruiting new "squires". A change of style was needed as well as new members, not to mention ears and fingers.

Our first Border Morris display was at a Poll Tax protest. Unfortunately this was misinterpreted by the Police observers – many of you will have seen the footage of the ensuing "Poll Tax Riot". After this we tried North West or Clog Morris but found the mass rallies and high stepping disciplined formation too fascist. Besides we could never recruit sufficient numbers.

Finally we adopted the Cotswold style; solo jigs were however frowned upon since they encourage the cult of the individual rather than the common good. We chose to dance in a tight set to symbolise our unity and initially met with considerable success. Looking back though we got too tight: the alcohol clouded our judgement and misplaced capers caused so many problems that we quite literally folded up.

Audience participation has always been a contentious issue amongst Morris sides. Some discourage it completely while others might have some token involvement. For us it was always central – indeed obligatory and our May Day processions were a wonder of mass participation (not that we gave the audience much choice in the matter). Collecting or "bottling" was also encouraged, though we found it much preferable to forget about the bladder on the end of a stick to cajole the audience to pay. We just used the stick (usually a fairly large one).

The dances, as best as I can remember them were:

Hunting the Capitalist Running Dog
Commissar's Ride
The Squire's Last Dance
The Blue-Eyed Syndicalist
Morning Star
Johnny So long at the Barricades
Speed the Revolution
Soviet's Joy
Communist Billy
Not for Joe Stalin

The music and the musicians were a constant source of tension. The main problem was that restricting the role to those who could actually play was considered elitist. The issue was finally solved by applying the old principle "*To each according to his need, from each according to his ability*". All our

instruments were held in common so we simply allocated them only to those who we actually expected to get a decent tune from.

Looking back it seems a most improbable episode but I like to think we contributed to the development of Morris in the same way that Neanderthal man contributed to the development of the human race. Anyway a few of us have got back together and are thinking of reviving the old Plough Monday custom of ploughing up the lawns of the rich, though we may not give them the option of paying up first.

Long Lankin

November 2006

*Note: this is the ninth section of a planned 10 part series on the development of Morris which I have never got around to writing. It is based on an article that originally appeared in **Unicorn** (no. 58) April-June 1997*

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* cartoon courtesy of Rupert Besley (www.besleycartoons.com)