

A MORRIS AT MALVERN

A R Williams wrote to the EFDSS describing a performance of the morris at Malvern many years ago. A little short of technical description it evokes the impact of the dancing. The dancers has learnt from older men for use in bad winters or in weather when they could not work. They wore heavy boots, breeches, thick grey stockings or gaiters. Most had a second waistcoat on top with sleeves instead of a jacket, of knitted brightly coloured wools, stripped flannel or moleskin, woolen wrappers round their neck. Some had hard hats, others slouched felt. Two or three had short drab tailed coats. Round their ankles, knees, wrists and hats they wore bands of coloured ribbons with strings of bells around ankles and legs. The short sticks had ribbons on the middle.

1. Walk (strut with feet lifted high) in circle.

2. With sudden change of tune they ran nimbly round in a circle. The tune changed again, regular intervals being emphasised by a loud aforsando. At these burts of melody the dancers leapt into the air. The tune quicken again. Hopping lightly from one foot to the other the dancers twirled round as they leaped, waving their staves. Suddenly concertina and dancing stopped with a final loud chord and a crash of the little bells and staves on staves. The men stood still for a moment as if petrified, their sticks held above their heads.

3. In two lines, pairs facing. Raised their staves and held them resting arch-like - slow wailing tune - men slowly clashed their sticks together, stooped, dibbed at the ground, clashed them together, then leaped into the air so that their bells rang their utmost. They shuffled a little to the side with a twisting heel and toe motion and repeated the slow clashing in the air and the dibbing and knocking together of sticks at their feet. The movements were all slow except the leap and the final clash, but very precise and determined, thorough and entirely rhythmical. After several repetitions of these strenuous motions the men suddenly relaxed.

4. A lively jiggling measure. Dancers formed up into two rings, one inside the other, facing opposite ways. For a minute or more they danced round so, one ring keeping the outside all the while. At a quickening of the tune, they zig-zagged each man alternately passing in and out before the next one. As he did so they skipped lightly turning out the toes and knees with a fling much like a hornpipe. The staves were flourished in the air, thrown from one hand to the other and occasionally tapped together most often irregularly but at intervals with a simultaneous crash and stamp of the feet. Like the previous dances this one ended with a jerk as though music and energy were cut off at one clash.

5. In two lines. Danced forward with quick springing movements accompanied by plentiful flexions of the hands and arms and legs and feet. Passing each other the dancers danced forward till they were back to back several yards apart. At a louder chord from the concertina they all spun round in the toes, danced toward each other and passed again, repeating this half a dozen times with a light click of the staves in passing. Marked by only a slight acceleration of tune, the dance changed so that the men were together in pairs, prancing round each others, a pair keeping together as partners. This dance seemed to allow for considerable variation in each couple's performance as they hopped and skipped, turned and twined and twisted and twirled, joined hands or arms in different positions, loosed again, tapped staves together, danced back to back or side by side and executed a whole galaxy of fancy steps within the bounds set by the tune of the music.

6. Two lines - no music. Men stood shoulder to shoulder. Setting their faces sternly they marched towards the opposite line of men. The march was made with the greatest dignity and hauteur, every muscle strained, feet were rigid, chins out, hands held up, chest arched, left fists clenched in front and staves grasped in a tight grip before the faces. At this step the knees were raised high, the toes pointed and the

feet put down firmly. Then almost touching, the two ranks of men stood facing staring each one to his vis-a-vis with a threatening scowl. They clashed their staves together once, hard and loud and in perfect unity, gave one heavy stamp with the right foot, then assuming a disdainful expression of countenance retreated in perfect order but not turning using a peculiar rear-kicking step. Three times this proud and fierce set of minatory movements were gone through, each half dozen men moving in perfect accord as one body.

7. After this display of masculine bellicosity, the twelve young fellows threw down their staves on a heap and danced round them. The accompanist played a lively jig as fast as he could and the dancers went round in a ring with endless variety of individual motions. They threw their bodies and arms and legs into all manner of postures joining together in twos, threes or fours and separating again, excuting as many fancy steps as their wit and ingenuity could devise.

Transcribed by R L Dommett