BASICS FOR EVERYONE

I wrote a booklet for the Morris Federation on Cotswold Basics, the last version (V3.4) which I have is a copy done in 1992, but this personal comment is written without reference to it. The idea arose from efforts to establish a basic set of sound principles that all leaders, foremen and dancers could accept without having to rediscover them for themselves. Thus clubs could achieve the degree of excellence that is associated with the best of the tradition which seems so often beyond the grasp of modern teams.

How does a group of mixed ability achieve and maintain excellence?

The Big Questions - The morris when out is properly an event, not just a display of a sequence of dances, and it is up to us to make it seem special every time. The Spirit or Appeal of the Morris which we recognise grows out of what we do, it reflects in what we get out of our events. The justification for its continued performance is the objective of handing-it-on. Does respect for the morris, past present and future, mean anything within the club? We really all care for morris, or we would not commit ourselves to it so much. There needs to be realism in attitudes to the past and an understanding of how the tradition, as opposed to the outside, saw itself. We should have a pride in our own versions of the dances, this being both natural and traditional.

The key to our pleasure is spontaneity - not meaning foolishly fooling around, but by a show each time being a different experience. Life is too short and there are many other things one could do to tolerate a continual "sameness". The onus is on the good dancers to set the example. For some sides that has meant for example never repeating a "stunt". Spontaneity can be rehearsed. Its supression at practices can be counter poroductive. However one must not discourage effective clowning - it is show enhancing and the distinctive tasks for the personages or "characters" involved are precious to the morris idiom.

Peer Group Dynamics

The how - Today no special training is given for working within a peer group of ten to sixteen people, although teams of this size are common, for example in sport. Life is commonly mostly about family and work which are always hierarchal. Similar aged cohorts, such as school classes and military platoons, can unite against a common imposed adversary, but they seldom persist afterwards. Gangs and other social organisations seem mostly to just happen. Those involved make up the relationships and rules as they go along. A leisure based peer group normally has a leader, but they should be one amongst equals, they ought not to dominate, if only because involvement in the group activity is voluntary, and the group is only maintained because of what the individuals gain out of it. In return the group relies on a degree of committment, both by the dancers and by their families. The group also has to achieve a cohesion without necessarily having much close social contact between many of them outside of the club. Although companionship is a reason for many joining, as the lack of it is a weakness of this day and age. Sometimes sides settle on and build around a natural talented leader who is satisfactory to them all in the long term. Other orientated groups, from sports teams to bell ringers and wicca covens, can offer similar insights and lessons.

Numbers - It is apparent that ten to twelve is the maximum number for easy one-to-one training and coaching of performance, and that handling larger numbers requires something more in terms of organisation, even if only six to eight are active for any one dance. How does one monitor two teams dancing simultaneously? Larger groups, like the NW Morris with more than eight dancers, get dictated to and drilled. They find a thrill in successfully completing complex manoeuvres with large numbers. Too few have experienced sets of sixteen to twenty four. It is an idiom in which it is .possible to get lost-in-a-crowd. Even with only eight it is less easy to be self expressive than when dancing with six. Fortunately people expect a larger group to be more difficult to organise, and for all things to take longer to do until adequately practiced, but the down side is that attention wanders and can generate unhelpful activity - particulary not paying attention or following the comments, by chatting, etc.

The group - There are three groups to be considered within the morris club, the beginners, the experienced but not necessarily good dancers, and the musicians. Within each there is always a varied level of skill. It is necessary to consider what are to be the goals for each group, and what are their expectations from their own performance. This would indicate what the club should be trying to provide. Cotswold Morris is not about being lost-in-a-crowd, so one would expect the emphasis would be on personal worth, and one-to-one contact. Within such a club one should treat everyone as individuals, not as a group, so, even when instructing generally, there has to be eye contact, no matter how brief.

One aim could be not to change what is done, but to make it more explicit.

There is a virtue in instruction not being talk orientated but in leading by demonstration. Consolidation is the key to learning. How often is it found necessary to repeat something to reinforce learning a movement or a new instruction? Usually there has to be a degree of reprisé from week to week.

Beginners

Clubs have an implied obligation to provide for beginners the same excitement that the experienced dancers had when they started with the morris. Therefore the organisation has to be orientated to the beginners, not to the old hands. Beginners become experienced in time - it takes significantly longer for Cotswold compared to North West or Border because it involves more subtle control and expression. Newcomers should be competent enough after one practice season not to stand out as inexperienced in shows. Delaying their development does them and the side disservice.

Practice - We all develop through increasing our levels of motor skills. This is not a steady progress but a series of stages of improvement, each of decreasing magnitude, but all of greater difficulty. Having fresh beginners around always allows of a continuous opportunity for everyone to address the basics or fundamentals, both to show them, but also for everyone to think about and practice them to become better. Professional dancers to the highest level always practice and aim to continually improve. It helps to gain greater body control to have a good role model to copy, and being given a better understanding of what one is trying to do. With better

control, existing skills can be relearnt and refined at a higher level. Perhaps we have to think how to recognise or catagorise performance levels.

Warming up and cooling down at the start and end of sessions is now widely accepted as minimising stiffness and strains. They are not workouts. They should be possible whilst socialising. A gentle warm up session also helps to develop body skills. Perhaps there could be a set of movements devised other than a jig which could be done privately as independent practice to improve the desired skills. It may need tailoring to the individual - "morris" physiotherapy! Is there a place for "free expression", people just dancing as they fancy to music? But do morris danecrs ever mature enough under current approaches to appreciate for themselves what movements they need to practice?

Learning movements and learning dances are two separate tasks which can be addressed differently. The first is one-on-one and could even be done outside of or in parallel with a team practice. It is recognised that it helps significantly to think oneself through movements and dances between attempts to do them. So enough has to be communicated to make it possible. In reality, the audience perceive first the paths of the dancers, then the bounce or togetherness, and only finally the detail of step and hand/arm movements. Teaching and practice sessions should recognise this heirarchy.

Beginners progress most rapidly when surrounded by experienced dancers who have no doubts about what they are doing, so that there is no feedback of uncertainty on what is expected, as there is apparently with a tradition new to everyone, eg, at a workshop when it can fall apart. Separate sessions with beginners other than one-on-one are usually unproductive. Therefore much depends on the attitudes of other club members. They all must accept a responsibility to work with them.

There exist teaching tricks few of which seem widely known. For example, Hugh Rippon would teach dance stepping by having all in a circle and start them by simple walking forward and back to the centre a few times to music, then he would encourage them to dance-walk by telling and showing simultaneously. This was then built up into single stepping, into backsteps and finally double steps, showing the dancers their relationships. The demonstration method allowed of showing the varying tilt of the body in going forward and backwards and the subtleties of the arm movements. It builds up by one thing at a time.

Stiffness - Beginners usually control the quality of their movements by balancing the efforts of all their muscles, this leads to stiffness, to snatching, and to quickly tiring. The long term aim has to be to "relax" the muscles not needed and only do that which is necessary. One approach is to work dancers hard so that their body forces this reaction on them - hence the playing fast at some times at practice for dances, when the dancers are conditioned to making large gestures. Another is to set up an enjoyable environment, with fun and noise, and a sense of excitement, so that they are not "trying" so hard, but still matching the effort around them.

The high - Quick rhythmic movement generates an internal "high" - if one does not think about it! Joggers reach it and so do modern dance party goers without drugs. Many morris dancers do - it can be a feeling like floating above the ground. We know some dancers that continue with the

morris because they want to experience it yet again. We need dances/jigs which can be done without having to think through the dance, but in which one can concentrate on other things - it would also help budding musicians to have such things to which to play.

Most teams do not explicitly work their way through what they do, but the best do.

Role models - Most dancers copy their foreman, if their standard is good enough, because that is the main visual image which the dancers receive. Beginners naturally copy whoever is showing them, including picking up their faults, hence the need for more experienced dancers to reach a common acceptable level of skills. It is a common experience that all the good foremen have left something of themsleves in the club's collective style, and one would not want to lose that. The role model is important and the person involved may need extra practice!

Windows or mirrors - It is a normal experience that people copy movements in a reduced form because their perception of their own body movement is significantly different from that which is thought to be observed when watching other people move. Thus stage actors have to be trained to "mimic", and in fact to somewhat exaggerate, just to look "natural" to other people closely watching, something ordinary people never learn. A solution to the difficulty is to see oneself copying, hence the suggestion to have some practice in front of a large mirror or a set of windows. Reflective surfaces are exploitable, even if only for two or three people at a time. I learnt traditions when young by dancing at lunchtime in front of large inter-office glass panels at work. Workshops held in the USA in dance studios in front of a wall of mirrors made everyone's learning so fast. Are there local ones in a club's area that could be visited once or twice? Other teams use video, but the necessary delay before watching loses most of the impact.

Posture

Appearance - Good posture is the secret to looking good. It is the body language of looking poised, alert and ready. This means having the weight over the balls of the feet always and not back on the heels. The head should be pushed up and back by the neck - the Alexander technique. The balance of the head is a key observable in the ballet. Eyes should be level, not looking downward. Shoulders should not be held forward protectively, or held stiffly. Incidentally stretching movements must involve the whole body, not just the shoulders.

Body language is usually neglected and is often a great give away of dancers attitudes. Audiences are not slow to catch the messages. It is avoidable with just a little self discipline.

No one really likes seeing bottoms sticking out when dancers are bending forward in choruses.

Leg problems - Each person is different, and, perhaps surprisingly, usually not quite symmetrical. Thus there are often leg problems, such as slight differences in bone lengths or muscle development, noticably appearing as pains in the joints, which can lead to long term damage. Inspection of shoes indicates some of the difficulties, particularly with over-pronation, when walking the feet roll naturally, but too much causes lateral stresses. It shows up as asymmetric wear on the soles of shoes. If there is a persistent problem, no matter how minor, seek professional advice. Specialists can be found through Sports Centres.

Individual Movements

Morris is about establishing movement habit patterns

The Cotswold idiom aim is some consistency in style but not a disciplined regimentarianism.

Learning - People can only learn what they almost know. Dancers absorb one thing at a time and "fake" anything more and so they build up potential bad habits which will be hard to break. later. So each element has to be learnt in a structured manner and repeated until it is a muscular habit, then they can think about the next thing. The danger of externally led workshops is that the elements are introduced by necessity too quickly and are not consolidated - leaders have usually aimed to give an overall impression, but expect the people to work at it again from the beginning when back with their own club. One needs attention to detail, but without too much talking, and done mostly by example and demonstration. Douglas Kennedy always spoke of the need in learning for distant and close up looks. Often a point can be reinforced by saying "did you see how I went through that?" The brain is in two halves, words go to the wrong half, and the listeners are not at that time moving. It is desirable as well to contrast the "same" element in each of the club's traditions to emphasise the differences wanted.

Emphases - The dance is not just a collection of double steps, backsteps and jumps - it is a set of sequences of movements, usually in phrases that are four bars long, with bridging movements to ensure a flow. Each phrase has a stress and effort profile through the actions which has to be taught and should be reflected in how the tune is played. The coming together is found by dancing in pairs - mirroring each other, as well as in keeping the lines of three. Thinking in terms of sequences allows concentration on the transitions, like switching step type, changing direction, and so on.

Jumps - These are the fundamental movements, as their principles apply to everything, and some dance teachers start with them. It's one of the few movements normally done on the spot. Noise from the feet in stepping and jumps means the slapping of a hard surface which leads eventually to damage of the cartileges. The effort to be quiet also reduces the impact loads on the legs and joints. Jumps can be short jerky movements, but are better as smooth roll ups onto the toes before leaving the ground. Landing has to be the same in reverse, starting with the toes and rolling down.

Jumps do not last very long, but can be made to appear longer by holding the "pose" well into the landing - the trick used by all professional dancers.

One can not jump from an initial position whilst having straight legs - they have to be bent at the knee in order for the thighs to work at all. This is called plié. Most of the lift comes from these thigh muscles which are very strong. The feet and toes allow of tuning the movement. In landing one also has to bend the knees a little. Thus the body's centre of gravity drops below the standing upright position both before and after a jump. This leads to the concept of dancing just "below-the-ground".

Most times the jump is followed by a moving off. To do so the dancer's centre of gravity has to be outside the area of support from the ground, which means that they are "falling". The problem of driving into a movement is that the body normally takes time to do the rotation and this looks from the outside like slackness, if it is not done with the jump. On the jump, the feet must be moved to land off balance, able to immediately push off. As most moves are forward, this requires the dancer's feet to land about a foot's length behind their standing still position.

One must practice "jump and drive".

Plain capers - One footed jumps. Jumps and capers are the essence of Cotswold morris. The problem usually is getting the hands of various dancers to move together in synchronisation. This implies that they have has not agreed in plain capers on where the stress comes nor on the phasing of the hand movements. It's like the jumps, if they are not all together, the audience notices! Some musicians play for them well - there is a special rhythm - the rise takes longer than the fall. One has to decide the speed of plain capers - are they to be of greater height or just involve larger arm movements? The former is prefered and the music has to be slowed a little, to keep to the same level of expenditure of effort.

Stepping - The dynamics of even simple stepping is complex. Since the late Middle Ages it has been all about a flexing of the instep, not stomping or clod-hopping. Traditionally nineteenth century dancers practiced by supporting themselves between two chair backs or similar parallel surfaces (eg. a sheep dip!), or even hanging from a low beam. This got them up on the balls of their feet and stopped excessive knee rise.

In dances we do not normally "step" on the spot except in jigs and so it is obviously wrong to teach or practice it initially when stationary. Foot-ups and half-gips are more appropriate, as the body balance is different when moving. With beginners it may be even better to perform rounds as they can then trail behind someone, assuming that they have been put between two good dancers! Also we hardly ever start stepping from feet together, but either with one foot already in the air or from a jump. In reality dancers seldom ever use "feet together and jump" but nearly always a "step and a jump". There has to be a slight dip to start stepping, it can not be done with a stiff leg.

Gravity makes movements asymmetric - it is quicker to come down than go up. But as most of the time of the stepping's vertical movement is with the foot/toes still in contact with the ground it can be mitigated. Gravity is very powerful and one is out of contact with the ground far less than is realised. What is seen from the outside is the up and down of the body, which is not quite the same thing. This main up and down is twice to a bar (a double step or two single or backsteps). The push is on the strong beat - emphatic in the double/single but not in the backstep. There is difference depending on whether the melody is played as a broken hornpipe, polka ("p'ta'toe crisp" rhythm) or jig. Some traditions were danced "high" with little relative up and down, and others "low" with a much smoother bounce.

The two feet should travel the same distance forward in stepping, the classic morris "step" is not a chasing step. Some people practice facing a wall with just enough room for the movement.

Getting dancers to move together is difficult, but can be helped by joining hands or better still resting hands on neighbouring shoulders, perhaps even in a circle.

Sidesteps - For some reason this tends today to be a restrained movement, yet traditionally it was vigorous, with a strong upwards emphasis. And each team did it differently!

Slow capers - Many of the Cotswold traditions have more deliberate energetic movements called "slow capers", usually at just over half the speed of ordinary stepping. Surprisingly there is little variation in the jumps, unlike those used by cheer-learers.

Arms - Quite a lot of body movement is aided by the proper use of the arms. It is a major contributor to roll inertia so they affect how turns are made. (There's some value in school applied mathematics after all!) The drawing in of the arms during a turn reduces inertia so that the turn can continue at constant speed rather than slowing down through the friction from the ground contact of the feet. The acceleration of the arms upwards increases the force reacted by the feet on the ground and helps the height or ease of jumps and even of stepping. The converse is also true that swinging the arms down does not help the height and moderates the drive on the strong beat. Swinging the arms is a shoulder movement and the shoulders have to move forward and back as well, not just letting the arms rotate at the joint. Sticking has to involve the shoulder and upper arm and not just be from the elbow.

Handkerchiefs - The traditional kerchief or napkin, not a pocket handkerchief, was large enough to hold a snack, at eighteen inches a side (two to a yard) before hemming, unlike pocket handkerchiefs at twelve inches a side (three per yard). They appear in old photographs to reach to the ground when held by one corner - hence why some old sides folded them to keep them clean. They were of heavy material, linen (now too expensive) or cotton, and this weight allowed the dancers to use the handkerchiefs for the movement rather than the arms and hands. It is noticeable that beginners copy the movement of the handkerchief with their hands rather than their hankies, and it is quite difficult to minimise the arm/hand movement without the hankies having a good weight. There is a case for showing beginners the movements initially without the holding of handkerchiefs and then teaching how to use the handkerchiefs purposely. One has to "dance" the handkerchiefs, not just let them flutter at the end of the hands.

Breathing - In general morris dancers do not think about their breathing when dancing - although there was once a woman at a workshop who forget to breathe at all through a dance and she went blue and collapsed. Yet in all sports people are taught to breathe out at moments of maximum effort - hence the tendency to shout at particular points, as in some martial arts. A regular out-and-in breathing on the double step also coincides with the up and down of body movement. It is also a good trick to start with a few deep breaths during once-to-yourself to top the body up - it also steadies the nerves, as actors find before going on stage or interviewees prepare before going into a room. There are many issues of technique that read across from the martial arts, especially the "soft" forms, which after all are also rhythmic activity with learned sequences of movements.

Power - This is a matter of body language. Men's sides who otherwise dance poorly can have it, it is not something that is specifically masculine, but it can be contrary to most women's

movement habits. It's in the size and quality of the gestures, and not in the height of stepping or the speed of movement. It is important to fill all the time available with large movements - particularly when handling the sticks - or if the dancers want slower music. The arm movements have to come from the shoulders and not just the forearm. The old simile is of the carpenter who uses the whole body to drive the plane, not just his arms, contrary to the way women cook, when being careful has to be just the opposite.

Clothing - It is normal to wear shoes and clothes at practices which are quite different from those worn when dancing out. Women do not make any use of the movement of the bottom of the skirt to emphasise anything in the dancing so the choice of clothing does not matter to the dance. It is difficult to see how to use it anyhow in a traditional idiom that arose with breeches and trousers, yet to preserve the skirt must be because it says something about a desired image. The important thing is that nothing should be tight, particularly around the shoulders.

Shoes - Now the issue of shoes - normal shoes do not have a layer of shock absorber under the ball of the foot - do those worn at practices? I believe that the characteristic of the Cotswold step was partly given by the hard leather sole of the then contemporary shoes, but they had to face dancing on irregular unsealed outdoor surfaces. A US specialist doctor was appalled at the wearing of ordinary shoes, let alone clogs, and considered shock absorbing soles essential. Often modern shoes have absorbers under the heel, which of course is irrelevant. Because of the turns and other movements, he thought that the nearest analogue sport was basketball. Ankle support in sport's footwear has proven to just move the damage further up the leg. Professional foorballers and the like now wear side cutaway boots to minimise the stress on bones and joint. The step depends on the ability to flex the instep, and this is defeated by having a significant height of heel. The so called "character" shoes of some women's sides does not allow of good Cotswold morris

Group Movement

Bells - Should bells be worn at practices, either all the time, but then the sound is ignored and it just makes the foreman's task more difficult, or just for the practice of shows, with emphasis on the sounding of the chinks being properly together? It's a factor often ignored. It is possible to select bells for high/low pitch so that the dancer's two legs can sound a little different. It was traditional and again it helps to encourage being on the proper foot. In the nineteenth century competitions the difference was used to judge on this matter.

Size of set - For Cotswold morris the minimum dancer-to-dancer spacing was arms stretched out fingertip-to-fingertip, both along and across the set. This works well for stick dances because the dancers can with some stretch reach both across or diagonally with their sticks. Handkerchief dances can often benefit with more spacing, especially for the corner dances. The set is too large if the dancers start to scurry or run to get round so that the basic stepping style is being lost. Dances with hand-clapping with one's opposite requires a definite approach and subsequent retiring movement.

Lines - The more difficult thing is of the keeping the lines of three straight - it needs the same stride lengths from all as well as the same rhythm. Because the dancers are accelerating and

decelerating, the steps in a sequence are not of the same length or made with the same emphasis. So it is necessary to decide who in the line is to keep it straight, should it be the ends or the middle? As the top is usually concerned with everything else, it could be the bottom's task. It is always satisfying, and looks much better, if there is a drive onto the first step of a sequence - this has to be practiced! Back to the jump advice!

Heys - They are usually too much of a string rather than with a pronounced in-&-out movement like most Upton-upon-Severn interpretations. The tops should always turn in quickly taking a short path and the bottoms take more time with a longer path, because the tops normally pass the middles first.

Mistakes - Inevitably dancers make mistakes. Some times it is easy to recover - other times not. The problem is the falling into giggles and the consequent capturing of the attention of the audience with the associated message it gives them. In some cases one must be prepared to stop - or to call "rounds" or take some other instantly recognisable to the dancers recovery action. The difficulty is that one quite properly likes the set to be led by a variety of people, some of whom may not be so quick thinking. Also as teams normally run through a set sequence of figures they can not rely on people listening to any change of the call. A lesser problem is ending particular dances on either a hey or a chorus inconsistently. An audible call of **all-up** or something would warn the band to stop.

Fitness - A degree of fitness is desirable for the dancer's personal comfort. One work out a week is not enough. But a second session of up to half an hour does not have to be morris - cycling, swimming, or a brisk walk will do.

The Show

Public performances bring questions of where to put the baggage, where should the musicians stand, and where should the inactive dancers be. Standing in front of the audience usually antagonises it, as dancers are neither trasparent or invisible. Someone being visibly there on time is also good for public relations. These are faults that arise because the club is treating a public show as just another practice and behave accordingly.

Clubs ought to practice just as they intend to behave outside. All of it! It is essential, as in moments of stress/crisis/confusion people revert to what they have normally got away with doing.

The foreman's comments are essential during practice, but have to be seen as an interjection not something the side automatically stands in the middle to hear. One should prefer coming off and standing round the foreman.

Which dances ought to be slower or faster than the average? Is it a meaningful question?

Being forewarned - A show could be organised at least one dance in advance so that everyone knows what is to come next, thus the team is told as they prepare for one dance what is to be the next one following, this includes telling the band, and anyone who is organising any change of

implements. However one used to find that deciding even as as late as when walking off was not too bad. After some experience, the next choice of dance always seemed to be "obvious".

Once-to-self - The Once-to-Yourself of each dance, could start once somone speaks its title. This gives the dancers some control. There is a need to agree the length of music played, it is suggested that it should be at least eight bars, and there is a need for hand signals about speed, see later, but these probably are more for later in the dance as one gets the feel for how it is going. Playing the once-to-yourself three times is over long, it takes thirty seconds plus, and the musicians should stop at that point if nothing has been called.

Between dances - Shows need to keep the audience's attention, as so often a dance or walk off looks like the end of the performance. Even an announcement that there is to be more would help, and that could even replace at times the telling of the one-in-advance suggested above, or allow of changes of ideas about the progress of the show. Coming off must be a **call** unless a dance off is part of the particular dance. It will help make it all a bit tidier. The band can provide a standard length filler between dances when a team is are out on its own. Twenty four bars takes thrity seconds and that should be time enough together with the morris off and walking on. How long should there be between the end of the dance and the start of the going-off? It could well be a gap between the dances of over a minute in total when dances themselves only take two to two and a half minutes each. Perhaps some timings at practices and during shows would give the direct evidence of the length of these down times.

It is not a matter of controlling behaviour but of minimising the time lost.

Preparation - Can someone collect together the sticks for the next dance? It may be difficult if everyone has their own individual one, but teams do tend to hand them to someone when coming off. Do they always need to come off? They could walk round giving or collecting a stick - new dancers can join the walk round and those not in the next dance could then walk off. Is the problem one of getting people in the "right" order? But one should practice so that most people are able to dance anywhere in the set.

Other teams - When out with other teams, one of the host side should tell them how it is planned to organise the stand, so that an arrangement can be made on how the teams swap places for continuity, and they can tell their band if they are expected to play. Also they may have their own regular arrangement. Unfortunately too often guests do not seem to organise themselves until all of the home side are well off the pitch and the musicians have stopped playing. It could look like bad manners to line up before the end of another team's dance, so one ought to be quick. What about doing something about having post mortems when the side meets again about lessons from on being with other teams to see what can be got from the meeting - otherwise why do them - is it just to generate a small crowd? Is the side primarily a solo stand or a mixing club?

Dance walk - Ons and Offs can look either relaxed or purposeful. Should the steps be a quiet walk, bouncy, springy, be properly on the balls of the feet and not on the heels? A dance walk reaches forward. Is there a case for a dance-on for the large set dances?

Repertoire - Most clubs have a potentially large repertoire, but some dances are similar in character and do not get seen often. However are there any gaps to be filled?

Jigs - These are rest points for the other dancers, they focus attention on the detail of the dances for the audience, and they allow dancers to practice on their own and to gain self confidence. For the team it helps if individuals have their own jig, it's like having a party piece.

Characters - The supernumaries should be experienced dancers. The various possibilities have distinct roles which can be discussed, clown, animal, collector, giving out handouts, cake bearer or ragman, covering different aspects of the possible interactions with an audience. This is part of a policy of involvement, which includes sharing around within the club all the other jobs.

The traditions - It is important to decide what are the key points to each "tradition" as the club dance it. These must not be very many, but they should be distinctive. Therefore the rest are common elements - the club's house style. The most difficult to vary is the basic stepping - how can there be a noticable difference in the way in which the body goes up and down between the traditions, as the timing and the height have to match?

Music

The music should fit the dance, not the other way round. Usually the dancers are more experienced that the musicians and they should be followed not led.

Singing - It would be effective if a club had a few traditional songs in common other than carols. Traditional sides exploited any skills possessed by dancers.

Overall effect - The band cannot hear what it sounds like as a group, and this can be different indoors and outdoors. It is desirable to find out what it sounds like when other people join in. Each player should have their own subtlety for fitting the notes and their inner rhythm to the dance movements, and therefore a group will inevitably clash and blurr playing for the dance unless they can arrange it otherwise. Who does the feed back? I dispair of many inexperienced musicians learning by listening. They seldom seem to listen constructively to any music to obtain clues as to the principles of group performance. Drummers are often particularly unskilled.

Vary mix - It is suggested that it would often be better to vary the mix of musicians throughout a show, the instruments other than boxes do have different characters. I personally do not know how musicians are to progress, most never learn and just play the tune rather than the dance, and so dancers adjust to them. This can lead to a drop in dancing standard because it just forces dancers to a less than optimum performance.

Speed -It has been established that most sides actually do the stick dances faster than handkerchief ones. This I suggest is because they put less size of gesture movement into them and therefore feel more comfortable with it when faster. The answer is surely to fill up the slower time with bigger gestures to everyone's benefit. I believe in the slight holds in the music which allow dancers to decelerate or accelerate naturally when changing direction or moving off from being stationary. This is particularly important when moving off from having been stationary

whilst stick tapping, as otherwise the dancers are rushed. Dancers should rise up onto their toes to end choruses or even to jump.

Foot tapping speeds, as usually played in private practice or music sessions, are too fast for the morris for which the dancers have to make much larger movements. The excitement comes from the dance not the music!

Hand signals - These are :

	Cut	One hand wiped across throat, it does not just mean cut the noise of the band. This means instantly and not at the end of the phrase being played.
	Slow Down	One hand, horizontal, moved up and down, with the emphasis on the down.
	Don't Rush	Both hands, when the dancers are being pushed into movements by the musicians not giving them time.
	More "Air"	Very similar when the timing for jumps, capers and slow capers are being rushed. Two hands separating horizontally.
	Speed Up	One hand, turning a handle, "winding up".
Calls -	"***Stop"***	For the dancers at the end of the phrase being danced.
	"***Whoa"***	For the music at the end of the phrase being played.

Needed Documents?

Any member of the team can be approached by the public and it is not good for the image if they have to refer to someone else who may well be busy at the time for the simplest of answers. Of course some questions may be too detailed to expect a straightforward reply and so some referral is then unavoidable. A club could consider preparing a one page history of the club which all can stick to for answers - perhaps also with something short about Cotswold Morris and traditions. The club can ask its dancers what they think they ought or want to know

Watching other sides - particular for the bad points, which will predominate - is a good strategy for achieving a better understanding.

Version 2.1

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