WHERE WAS THE COTSWOLD MORRIS?

The first point is that the known "Cotswold" morris territory is the part of the South Midlands that lies between Cirencester in Gloucestershire and Towcester in Northamptonshire, and is mostly on the limestone belt that runs from the sea in Devon up to Yorkshire' which is followed by the Fosseway. It provides good building stone but which varies significantly in colour along it that is well used for the vernacular architecture. As a geographic region 'The Cotswolds' is normally taken as from Bath to Stow-on-the-Wold. As a social region it is the country of nucleated villages, with houses clustered around its church and pub.

The morris area is bordered by the clay basins of the Vale of the White Horse, the Buckinghamshire plain, the Bedfordshire brick-fields, the Nene Valley of Northamptonshire, the Vale of Evesham and the Vale of Gloucester, although there is some spill over onto the edge of the clay. The clay has been the home of larger estates and often closed villages dominated by major landowners. Another reason for the withdrawal of the morris from its possible former territories could have been the growth of local industries whose independence negated the need for extra economic inputs, the boot and shoe trade in Northamptonshire, bricks in Bedfordshire, and clothing in East Gloucestershire.

Looking at the morris from internal evidence suggested that the local styles can be divided into two groups, those around the forest and those on the stone. The former in the 19th century appear more elaborate in steps and choruses, the later rather simpler and making greater use of sticks. It seemed reasonable to deduce that the morris which revived after the Restoration could have started from around Wychwood Forest and Stow and spread north simplifying as it went and overlapping with the Bedlam Morris and its sticks drifting south from the Midlands. A possible indication of such a diffusion was that the distribution of the surviving teams has mostly been around the edges of the heartland.

However that was not so, David Underdown, in "Start of Play - Cricket and Culture in 18th Century England", Penguin Books, 2000, on page 77 says, ' The New Wells also saw commercial possibilities in more traditional entertainments, promoting the 'famous Bath morris-dancers' after they had come to the capital to perform at Batholemew Fair '. The date appears to be 1744. Darcy Ferris wrote to Cecil Sharp before WWI remembering the morris in Bath, so it may have existed there for a century. Underdown also mentions the morris at Bletchley (Stoney Stratford) about the same time, and Russell Wortley met its aged last foremen of a side, so it also could have lasted over 100 years. Alex Helm reported morris like dancing from North Somerset. Perhaps no one has looked thoroughly for mentions in the 18th century which might show that at one time it stretched further.

It is part of the folklore that the morris existed in the villages, however this identification owes much to the modern redefinition of places which were once considered to be small towns with markets. Even where they were not, they were close to one and it must be assumed that the morris was part of that place's social life.