

THE SOCIOLOGY OF MORRIS CLUBS & OTHER THINGS

1. WHO SHOULD DANCE THE MORRIS?

In the quiet moments the philosophers of the morris talk about things old and new, right and wrong, about what they are doing and the happenings elsewhere. Sometimes there is an unease about differences from the perceived 19th century morris, even though that itself was the end product of substantial, unknowable evolution and despite the vast social changes since, because there is no real continuity with the past. The revival of interest in the performance of the morris passed for a period through a section of our society not normally associated with preserving these traditions. Alternative justification to what is done today has been sought in aesthetics, street theatre, democracy or imagined history. Nothing is as clear cut in history as we would like, and there is always the difference between what actually happened and the perception that influences our actions. It is worth considering some of these uncertainties.

Who Did Dance the Morris?

Work continues to identify traditional performers, their occupations and kin groups. Eventually we will have a clear idea of the status of morris dancers in the community and whether there was a decline during the 19th century. Received wisdom suggests that there was a decline from the times when a farmer's son might join, till it was done by farm labourers, but with the impression of never sinking to the lower strata as the morris was more respectable than the mummers, just as beer drinkers were considered above cider. One expects the leader to aim for respectability to increase the "box". What is noticeable is that the same people today are active in charitable work in their communities and the same leaders often become local councillors. Village society changed when so many died in the WWI trenches, and it is difficult now to grasp that impact. The evidence from other dance traditions will be far less detailed than the Cotswold Morris for some time. At the moment it suggests that work or trade was a common element, miners in the NE, mill and workshop workers in the NW, craftsmen frozen out of work in the West Midlands. It is natural that a gang to dance was formed from people who were likely to know each other socially through work or drinking. Thus a team would be drawn from a small area because of limitations at the time on cost, time and distance of travel. Horizons are different today. Members of traditional groups this century have been drawn from increasingly wider territories as mobility has increased. Studying the tradition is only going to tell us that society has changed in 100 years.

Who Did Not Dance the Morris?

a. People from Closed Villages

One expects that morris would only happen in a community that tolerates it, and when a village was dominated by one or two landlords their attitudes prevailed. There are cases where the big house tolerated or encouraged the morris. The opposite is difficult to demonstrate. There has been no systematic study of the character of the places with and without morris. Cotswold dancers could be drawn from a wide area, so active discouragement would not stop keen dancers, although their employment opportunities might be restricted. This is the level of speculation at which the answers are unknowable because we have too few biographies at the required detail for any generalisations. Thus we are left with arguments based on common sense, which will miss out the attitudes of the time because they are no longer familiar.

b. Children

The strength to sustain a day's dancing was not supposed to develop until after childhood, and starting ages of 18 plus have been mentioned by old sides. However there are cases of dancers starting at 8 years and even now youngsters have been expected to do the long all day hike at Abbots Bromley. Each group may well have its own rules. A young dancer is an attraction if dancing well and it is easier to train and control someone still living at home. Young men can be a risky investment because of moving jobs and the distractions of courting, one reason why Bacup looked for married men. Health and stamina must be important but generalisations can not be drawn as it is very individual, and may have been dependent on adequacy of diet. How common essentially teenage teams might have been has still to be established. The revival at Bidford was one such gang. It would not be surprising if other teams were based on unmarried men. Was it common for most of a team to be drawn from one small age group? There have been children's sides in the Cotswolds from Keith Chandler's discovery at Sherborne to the occasional odd sides from the turn of the century trained by traditional dancers from Abingdon, Bampton and Sherborne. The Cotswold morris was in decline and there were alternative attractions by the time that universal education was having an impact and the gathering of children into Church Sunday schools, Orphanages, and ordinary schools became common so that they could be an obvious source of dancers. Maypole dancing was promulgated through such channels since the turn of the century, as were the later processional dances, such as those at Lichfield and on the Cheshire Plain. As dances went with leaders rather than communities, it was possible for particular individuals to be responsible for teams of all ages or sexes, as is emerging from NW researches. Drawing examples from all the dance traditions implies the assumption that social forces dominate and were universal. This should be debated when more data is available.

It is noticeable with community based traditions that there is a narrow age band for most of the performers, expecting to come in at about 18, when able to drink in pubs, and leaving by 23, when engaged or married.

c. Women

During the 19th century and even into the 1920's, girls left home about the age of 12-14 and went into domestic service with perhaps no more than a half day off a week. They worked long hours and had no tradition of independent activity, so there was neither time, opportunity or encouragement. They began with minimum skills and were trained in the job. They bettered themselves only by moving on every six or twelve months. They expected to be married by about 21, so most household servants were teenagers! In 1980 the United Nations reported that while women and girls constitute one half the population and one third of the labour force, they actually perform two thirds of the work hours. Certain women were known to have been able to dance the Cotswold morris, but it was not a common feature. As a woman's property was either her father's or husband's by law, there was little financial incentive, which is one reason why there were so few women's Friendly Societies. Women did dance where there was either a trade or occupation that gave the opportunity, eg milkmaids in cities and perhaps mill workers at wake time, but there is no indication that this was widespread and it was confined to girls and unmarried women. Remember also that puberty could come late. 19th century culture still required women to have a chaperone to be respectable, so was never a purely women's affair. Normal clothing was not suitable for energetic dancing either.

Both sexes' dance opportunities were restricted and we need to know more of how the ones that did dance were able to find the time.

One result is that there are few specifically women's dances from the 19th century. That makes it difficult when, as now, women do have the opportunity and desire to dance using traditional material. Whether their position was always so needs further consideration for the 18th and 17th centuries, but the situation

might extend back to the times when society considered women to be chattels. We are witnessing a similar debate about women priests in the Church of England, appealing to emotional and historical truths which range from a “new” understanding of equality and the need for “justice” and the need to do “what is right”, to saying that the arguments are only a part of the whole picture and that the “past” should not be set aside because the male role contains a truth about human nature that is permanently true and can not be ignored.

Public Schools and Separation of the Sexes

Once society escaped from cooperative farm work involving the whole family where everybody did everything, there grew different roles and expectations for the sexes and “men’s things and women’s things” were recognised. Public schools began separate education, boys first and then girls, even Sunday Schools started this way. Pubs, Trade Unions and leisure activities reinforced this division by being male centred, so there then existed a separate male culture - the rugby club or sports team, public bar drinking with darts, skittle or other games - which built up its own language, behaviour comradery, small groups with common interests - ie gangs - which became the natural basis for traditional dance teams. It is not that this is wrong, it is a fact that it is so, and it could be as old as single sex peer groups. Equal opportunity and sexual discrimination legislation has to exist now to mitigate the worst excesses of the separation. We are heirs to “old” ideas as well as to “new” and the relationship and separation of the sexes is ingrained. The insistence on “mixed” morris in some parts of the world loses an aspect of our culture to gain something else felt to be more important in their situation. The fact that a word has to be used for it shows that there is a difficulty. Are we not in the business of preservation as well as innovation? What is wrong with keeping the traditional roles and arrangements as long as they are recognised for what they are, and not God given rights? Morris or any other form of street entertainment should not become a battleground for sexual or any other politics, when the morris has to be socially acceptable to be tolerated at all by the people at large.

The Revival

By this I mean the Cecil Sharp inspired spread of the knowledge of the Cotswold dance outside of its native Cotswolds. The more dramatic sword dance did not have the same impact and even today they are at least two orders of magnitude less in number. Until well after WWII clubs were fewer and smaller. There was very little street performance of the morris and the world at large did not know what a morris dancer was, where they came from or why. The EFDSS spread a knowledge through school teachers and university dons but that did not lead to street performance by either children or women. Other dance traditions, clog, border, molly, garland, stave, have only appeared in strength since the mid 1970’s.

Some happenings in the same timescale were not revivals but new flourishing. For example the NW at the start of the 20th century and the girls on the Cheshire Plain between the wars. Changes in child employment patterns and the growth of youth organisations made young people’s teams practical. Whiteladies teaching college promulgated the Maypole and the May Queen, and Mary Neal the idea of morris and country dancing for schools, and this grew up with Empire Day, May 24th, and similar opportunities for public display by troupes with the 20th century emphasis on the cult of the child. Perhaps the oddest turn about is that the older children’s tradition in Cheshire is being collected and danced by adults.

Who Is Doing It Now?

The EFDS objectives recognised that the dance should go back to the ordinary people. It could not depend on the educated organisations, the vicars or the school teachers, yet there was no way for them of breaking the social barrier. The EFDS led classes in the Cotswolds taught morris, country dancing and sword and enthused a generation, but did not get them to dance in their communities or out on the streets. The key

step has been the 1944 free education act which brought people from the right background to meet the preservers. The first break out in numbers dancing came in the mid 1950's. Then there was the rediscovery of new Cotswold traditions and the other English dances which spawned its own waves of teams, and the process is still going on. Teams come while others go, it is the way of the world, and saturation is a long way off. The dancers now are still often professional people, financially middle class but socially still with roots below. There are now a large number of people who can teach the morris of such diverse backgrounds that someone suitable for any particular group can be found.

Are We There?

If the aim was to restore a situation of local dances in local communities, then it has not yet been achieved. Clubs exist that fit into today's society, but drawn from wide areas. There are no family, work or community ties to hold them together nor community expectations to cause them to get a team out each year. Only with the Combe Martin Hobby Horse has the community taken up and taken over a revival. Elsewhere, like the Whittlesea Straw Bear, the community is taking its own group to its heart, but the norm is of dance troupes doing their own thing as an occasional entertainment. If the morris arose from seasonal good luck visiting (ritual) why is it so obviously absent? Dancing at Fetes, shopping centres and outside distant pubs is not being a part of the community, but going for ready made audiences and keeping them at a distance. What there is is a response to current social conditions but it has much more in common with medieval travelling players than the likes of Helston or Padstow. Ah! you should say, was the morris ever part of the community? I can not produce hard evidence one way or the other, but I would not be surprised if morris team conditions today are close to the way things always were, with much of the morris self centred. However community involvement remains my ideal, because where it does exist it is so much more satisfying. It remains to be seen if the existence of women's morris has slowed or speeded the transition from dance troupes to community involvement. The truth is that if people want to dance they will, and if you do not like what is offered, you have to help, not hinder!

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2. STYLE AND SELF EXPRESSION

It has been conventional to talk of the “Cotswold” dances done outside of the confines of the Cotswolds as “the revival”, even though the stage it has reached now can be far from the Cotswold form. There is a difference between today’s sides and traditional survivals and the 19th century performances, but this may be just the time gap rather than local culture. I have found it difficult to understand my parents and grandparents times because so much of the experience of ordinary living then is not sharable.

A typical major difference between today’s clubs and yesterday’s tradition is that then dancers lived in the community with other dancers. We could cultivate links with other contemporary dancers but we can never know what it is like to spend our ordinary life alongside other dancers both active and retired. It was once thought that before the best had left the countryside, a higher percentage of talented people danced the morris, if only because there were far fewer competing activities. However surviving comments and biographical studies suggest that they were always a pretty mixed lot, possibly because dancers were not chosen just for dance skill. Should this matter to us? It might be so if we are using the “past” to justify present day actions. As a question it does beg the issue of what standard is actually needed today.

Often general comments on standards of dancing, performance or presentation fail to separate the different issues involving skills, group activity and showmanship. Should one comment at all, as it is frequently said that the tradition did not have to worry about these points, because they were maintaining a standard, not creating it. It is not true of course, even if the recorded evidence is very limited. The absence of what the tradition thought and did in the collector’s mss is the collector’s fault not the tradition’s. In the era of the major collections, those involved could not be aware of such matters because of their lack of experience of participating in the morris in all its aspects.

A strong motivation exists, in the absence of a living local tradition, to recreate something lost, either as a museum like replication or to restore and develop a “tradition”. The preservation of the roots of this ephemeral activity has to be done by someone, both as a reference and as a jumping off point for the innovation. But restoration needs an outside standard and an accumulated understanding of the why as well as the what. “Revivals” usually lack all this and so become a new thing in their own right.

Even if the question of why to recreate can easily be answered, there is the problem of what. Is it to be Cecil Sharp’s EFDSS teaching, the pre-WWII Ring or the postwar Ring practice, a personal “relook” or an interpretation based on mss? The last two choices should be quite acceptable, if the honest aim is to be a little different from other sides. No one suggests that we deliberately recreate the atmosphere of those early stages of the morris revival. The original is unknowable, even Sharp’s teaching is now unreachable. Surprisingly, at first realisation, the only authentic sources are today’s active dancers and what we can know of the traditions from their dancing and understandings. How many of today’s dancers have this sense of responsibility? The written word, or even professional dance notations that are available so far, is inadequate. The morris is the occasion as well as the steps and stylistics.

There is a visible tradition with an element of continuity. It probably would not be there at all without “the revival”, although the existence of the rest of us has changed it considerably. To be of use to the rest of us, it needs to be seen and analysed, so we must feed on and, I suppose, both modify and erode what sustains us.

There are also the village based sides with continuity of place for inspiration. They tend to be less inhibited with their chosen, or bequeathed, tradition than we might be outside, allowing themselves an evolution from what was done, but seldom being influenced by why it was done. They are often examples of what can be done by expert dancers using secondary sources, as witnessed by the revival of several “new” traditions in the last 20 years and of the creations of Historical Dance groups. The “dance” bit of

the tradition, which is essentially the basics underlying the reconstruction, does not come from mass but is injected. In other performing fields this is just that element of interpretation and expression brought into it by the great artist dancer. It would not be "folk" to credit modern choreographers, but the debt should be recognised.

One is led to the question of whether some sides are more "authentic" than others? It depends on what is being looked for, but in general it must be a "yes", if the method of transmission of style and detail of the dance is considered important. Good dancing is not the same as the slavish following of perceived tradition, so copying good "morris" does not necessarily mean getting close to the original. The fine detail that really makes a dance has seldom been recorded, or even remembered by observers, it lies in the expressive part that Cecil Sharp found so difficult to pin down. It is possible that this aspect, as done in the mid 19th century, has not been transmitted to us at all!

Any group is unique and therefore its group expression in the dance will be unique. Just think of the year to year and team to team variety at Bampton where everyone is as immersed in the tradition as it is possible to be today. Ordinary teams recognise better and poorer turn outs and strong and weak performances depending on who is involved.

We should accept that "style" covers both standard movements and the quirks, really the elements of self expression. The Cotswold morris allows individual interpretation within certain limits of pattern and rhythm, even if your squire does not see it that way! In general, movement can be classed as positive, that is "dancing", or negative, which I shall call "slacking". Dance lies in the spring in the step, the expressive movement of arms and body, in the flow of movement and the emphasis on lifting not downward actions. The degree of effort needed requires fitness and some element of physical training. Slackness comes with a weak step, slow acceleration off the mark, very little body rise and with limb waggling. Unfortunately it is easy to practice slackness, and most of us are experts in its self justification.

In my opinion it all comes down to having good basics. If these are right the rest looks good and no one is going to argue over it. Height in stepping comes from ankle flexure and in jumps from bending the knees. Jumps should be done so as to "drive" into the next movement to give excitement to the dance. Big arm movements come from big handkerchiefs, not from flailing the arms. The contrast between different basic steps should be remembered and practiced.

In conclusion we have lost our absolute reference, if we ever really had one, so that judgements today must be as much on artistic grounds as on any other. Uniqueness in the individual and in the team seems inevitable, even most attempted copies are different. But good basic training, often revisited, will ensure that all is accepted and perhaps someone will want to try and copy you. Remember that "sloppy" dance produces a "sloppy" audience, but then you are caring about those watching and would not let it happen. Or would you?

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3. STYLES FOR CLUBS

The newcomer to the morris is hardly likely to question their club's set up or its way of doing business and will seldom think about other ways until they are in at the start of a new side. There are a number of possibilities around which new groups might find worth thinking about.

THE TRADITIONAL

In the 50's and 60's the "traditional" sides were still markedly different from the rest. There was usually a family involvement and the oldest members and even the female side had a say in achieving the consensus over arrangements for the major events. At the same time there was a recognised leader of the dancers who combined the jobs of president, events secretary and teacher and who was probably free to invite dancers to join "his" team. The leader was not necessarily considered the final authority on the dances, there always being long serving and ex dancers around. The "best" dancers would deviate most from the norm and this be accepted. Sometimes most of a side would adjust to match an odd dancer and then switch back once they had moved on. Usually great tolerance was shown over most things, yet great divisions could occur and quite often two groups would appear reflecting irreconcilable attitudes. The team's cohesive point was their "day" of community involvement, quite different from a modern "day of dance" during which a large group of dancers can insulate themselves from the rest of the world. It should be seen as a different emphasis in the priorities in the team's motivation.

THE CAMBRIDGE MM

The Cambridge Morris Men recognised very early on the separate tasks of foreman, squire and bagman and took the traditional terms for a team's number one, fool and baggageman and applied them to the teacher, leader and treasurer/secretary. Their leadership in the morris world between the world wars, their influence on the Morris Ring because of the many derivative teams formed by ex-CMM dancers, and through their annual feast, ensured the general adoption of these terms within the revival and eventually in the tradition! It also brought with it concepts of election and regular replacement. It is essentially a club format, and, although common because of its strengths, it also has limitations when applied outside of middle class leisure groups.

THE USUAL FORMS

1. Single Point of Leadership

This was very common in the early days when only one member had the knowledge and the drive to form and hold a team together. The Ring's requirement for admission emphasised that this is not a basis for a long term viable club because of the inherent weakness arising from the dependance. But then the Ring was intended only for long lasting, democratic clubs and it was believed that jobs should be shared and responsibility moved around. This is not to say that other forms are not appropriate in particular circumstances.

2. Sharing the Leadership

This form brings a number of concepts,

a. Training for Tasks

The club has no reason to let someone ignorant practice on their club, but people do not learn the skills for nothing, so they must expect to be designated the next incumbent and serve an assistantship or apprenticeship.

b. A Constitution

By forming a club whose workings are regulated, it is possible to preserve the objective of the morris in being a hobby and the principle of it involving a small group of friends.

c. Identification of the Tasks

The jobs that need to be done to support a team that performs in public can be identified and split amongst the members. These include monitoring the address list, collating the agreed dance notations, organising the beginners practices, being the characters during performances, acting as a conductor of the shows, producing the drinks or coffee during the practices, supervising costume manufacture or upkeep, handling the correspondance for events, providing and storing the implements, supplying handkerchiefs of the right size, finding bells, editing the newsletter, printing it or distributing it, doing the posters and sticking them up, public relations with newspapers, councils and police, being photographer, keeping the scrapbook, at least.

e. Elections

Jobs need people with experience. It is difficult to find enough in the early days of a club, so some have to learn on the job. A procedure is needed to cycle the jobs. All the time it is necessary to be looking for the replacements and considering how they are to gain some experience without mucking things up for the club, yet still keeping in mind that it is a leisure activity. Sympathy exists for all officials when others have tried the jobs. Apathy exists when no one has a chance to share in the tasks.

3. Other Structures for Clubs

a. No Leader - or King for the Day

At the club's AGM it is possible to agree the dates for going out in the summer. It is normal for paid engagements to be agreed very early if a side is to be guaranteed. It is then possible to share out the organisation of each occasion amongst the members, especially if there is a recognised pattern for a weekend's morris. Thus each person is responsible for all the jobs just once. It works best when club outings are limited in number but long in time, perhaps including the Friday evening as well as all day Saturday. Fetes would then fall naturally into the pattern, providing both somewhere to go and a free tea, as well as leaving time to be able to wander around and enjoy it, and thus spending about as much as had been asked for as a fee. It does need within the club several persons who can conduct a day, but it is easy to train the others as each can be done in pairs. It produces an element of competition to see whom can produce the best or most interesting weekend.

b. Background Figure

Sometimes the expertise is with the musician, or perhaps a woman teaching or organising a men's side, as was much more common 30 years ago. Maybe the dance teacher does not go out with the side, for example a man helping an all women's team. The jobs have still to be done, but it can be all emotionally easier as the background figure is there as a referee.

It is worth noting that there is a role in any organisation for a reference on standards, who is prepared to be critical when necessary, and be an “elder” without interfering with the others gaining their experience. Sometimes such people are called ex-foreman!

A job always needed, especially with younger dancers, but seldom recognised, is that of “mother”, someone who is otherwise not very active but can be talked to about all their non morris problems.

HOUSE STYLES

The manner of doing is the style of a club. Decisions have to be made about such matters early in a club’s existence and probably rethought every few years.

1. How Much Practice?

How much practice and to what purpose follows from the club’s objectives. These may be in terms of social activity, type of dancing or type of event to be adopted. Is the club night to be a social event as well as a practice night for the participants? Does it include drinking as a part of the socialising or should there be a separate social get together? How much time should be given to business and how much to dancing? Does the team need to meet before Christmas, and should part of the practice season be completely devoted to the beginners? Is the team always learning new dances or is everyone trying to raise their personal standard of dancing? Can the club survive each year with a long period of inactivity? How can the club survive when the members have no leisure time for anything but the morris?

2. One or More Traditions

After a few years with ONE tradition most dancers do not need regular winter practices but only a refresher in the spring before dancing out, and this can be bound up with teaching that winter’s beginners to dance in a set, they having spent the earlier part of the winter learning the steps and jigs. Having just one tradition must lead to a concentration on the other aspects of the morris as a performance or as street theatre.

With more than one tradition, the team becomes a dance troupe with the dancing aspect uppermost, having to be concerned with contrasts between traditions reflecting just those points that led to the particular choice of traditions in the first place. It is usually found desirable to have learnt a number of dances from each tradition for it to be worth the working up of the distinctive characteristics without boredom from constant repetition. The tradition and revival experience is that 12 to 14 dances in full practice is enough for any Cotswold side plus any jigs or stunts. The simple rule seems to be to have enough material for three performances or shows without repeating.

A balanced repertoire seems to be,

- a. one tradition enhanced with adaptations from other traditions plus some inventions,
- b. two or more traditions that are complementary.

There is another option growing up of doing dances in their traditional season, a Cotswold tradition in the summer and a selection of Border dances in the mid-winter.

3. Image

The team’s involvements determine its image. These can range between,

a. Local Involvements

Looking towards their near communities and becoming part of the available entertainment scene and the public life around. The team will be readily recognised locally and often requested to be part of what is going on the communities.

b. Dance Troupe

A dance troupe that is inward looking, probably thinking that aloofness and mystery are part of the ritual they are preserving, who perceive themselves to have a wide territory, often having a club name of no particular local association and going out for money, festivals or personal jinks. Usually no one outside of the team has heard of them in their area, and when they do, no one thinks of inviting them to anything outside of the folk world.

4. The Season

Some clubs have a regular practice night all the winter and then in summer dance out on the same night, having given up practice for the summer, and at weekends as well, sometimes from April till October. This is the overdancing that should be objected to, not the too many teams appearing at the same spot week after week. Dealing with the first cures the second. Too many outings force reliance on a hard core of dancers if the club is to survive. In the USA and Australia they are forced by the climate to a shorter season or perhaps two short seasons, and they find it retains the magic and gives them something to look forward to in each practice season. A long season is the antithesis of the tradition as it was. The public presentation of tired or lack lustre morris can indicate a lack of caring both for the audience and for the general impression of morris against which the rest of us have to perform. A return to a season from Whitsun till Sidmouth would do a lot of sides a lot of good!

5. Relations with Other Sides

Local sides actually have little contact with the other morris sides in their area and even less with local other types of dancing or entertainment. Morris sides are not really gregarious and when they meet they are naturally competitive, whether it is at an Ale, a day of dance or a pub stop.

COMMENT

Thank goodness there will be as many forms of clubs and styles of behaviour as there are teams. It is the variety which results that makes it so interesting to the old hands or to the new audience. Problems are solved by caring about the participants and the audience as real individuals, not as abstractions. And as a Polynesian said on TV, **(the morris) “is a living form which does not preserve the past but borrows from it.”**

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4. SOME CRISIS POINTS IN MORRIS CLUBS

Sides are often suprised that they can have people problems which potentially could wreck their club. Three of these centre on the leadership, the level of performance or “four year syndrome”, and the beginners. Members do not realise that they do not receive any formal training during their life for participating in a small peer group. How would you advertise a course for being in a “gang”? Belonging to a large or extended family is not very relevant either because the usual objective is to have a separate life and outside interests. Most available youth and adult organisations tend to be authoritarian, and like at work, everyone knows their place in the pyramid of responsibilities, or, like Young Wives, they are essentially social. The morris belongs to a very small set of activities which require the collaboration of everyone to produce the group product, like bell-ringing or perhaps dramatics, and which is essentially not competitive, so that individual talent is not so significant as in popular sports.

LEADERSHIP

Any group has the social problems arising from the inevitable “dynamics” or interactions within a small group, and every group will be a little different. Leadership is a job that needs more than just enthusiasm and it is precautionary to consider some advice and perhaps to read a little about the potential issues which exist for any small group working together. What the leader can achieve depends on what the group will tolerate. The style of club and the type of leadership warranted depends on the mix available and can change with the turn over in members. Leadership is most effective when caring about everyone and remembering why the others have become involved.

Stress can build up over a long period. Tension exists because things are not static, circumstances change, skills improve, experience grows and new faces appear.

There are a number of ways of defusing such tensions,

- a. The AGM need not be self congratulatory but encourage constructive comment of all sorts from the floor. Anyone with the courage to speak out at all has something to say that should be listened to and reacted to, even if it is only to get at the real problem behind the expressed emotion towards which the speaker is groping.
- b. Just a regular change in leadership helps defuse tensions, as does separation of the authoritarian roles of squire and foreman.
- c. A circulating grouse book can sometimes help members to express themselves and over a period of time understand how the others see it as well.

The choice of the title Squire may not help. The squire had the senior role in a village community. By a typical act of perversity it was used as a traditional name for the morris fool, an aspect of the upsidedown attitude of English humour, perhaps because both wandered around making comments about everything! Another fool’s title was Rodney, after the great Naval Admiral. The older name was more often Captain or other familiar respectful title which might suggest authority earned.

There are two sides to being a squire, the technical aspects of performance and presentation, and the leadership of the group. The first requires some innovative ideas, and fresh approaches to occasions and shows so that they are stimulating and not repetitive. A leader should not expect to be able to keep up a high standard in this year after year. The second important work as a group leader is to get every member involved. The greatest resources in the group are the different experiences, feelings and ideas of the group’s members. Although a leader may start things off, the main objective should be to enable every memeber to contribute. The greater the contributions, the richer the experience to which each member is exposed and which justifies the individual’s involvement.

HINTS TO LEADERS

Like all generalised inter-personal issue descriptions it is important to relate them to one's own actual specific experiences in the club. The advice suggests techniques that have to be worked on.

1. Be absolutely clear about the things you want the group to work on and make the goals explicit to the dancers. Because the morris is not competitive the urgency of goals are more difficult to establish and agree. The problem is usually when the task is not a new dance, but technique or "togetherness" or showmanship or "ons-&-offs".
2. Be aware that a group works at two levels. While working explicitly on the declared objective, they will also be active at a feeling level, based on who they like or dislike, on who is the leader, on who is perceived to be most powerful, on who is angry etc. Both levels go on at the same time and either may be dominant at any particular time.
3. There are five easily recognised non constructive situations that arise in a group.

a. FIGHT : Certain members tend to get angry and attack, usually verbally, other members or the perceived leader, who is not necessarily the squire.

Leaders role : Acknowledge the anger/frustration/strong feeling without putting the person down or getting angry in return and identify and respond to the valuable content of what is being said.

b. FLIGHT : Certain members and sometimes the whole group go completely off the agreed goals, effectively ignoring them, perhaps chatting cosily about other things.

Leaders role : Being careful not to belittle anyone, get the group's attention back to the goal here and now, perhaps by picking up from something done or said earlier.

c. PAIRING : You will notice some making alliances with other group members as distinct from friendships, as a step towards some positive action.

Leaders role : Bring out what is linking them so that all share, or relate it to the other members so that no one is left out.

d. SCAPEGOATING : Often one member or pair will be out on a limb and consistently maintain a point of view at odds with the majority. The group may be reacting by pushing them out further.

Leaders role : Publicly recognise that an opposite point of view is valuable and when held with strong feeling it is usually expressing something unpopular that every member may feel to a greater or lesser extent. The leader should try to enable members to admit to sharing some of the scapegoats feelings or values. A scapegoat risks having all the group's bad feelings dumped on them and the leader should head it off.

e. INACTIVE OR OVERACTIVE MEMBERS : Both types detract from effective group work, a non contributor can put a group off as much as one who will not stop contributing.

Leaders role : Dancing - avoid drop outs or squeeze outs. Watch for avoidance of particular dances, at the least you may be let down in a critical show. Do not allow hogging of

particular places or of parts of dances. Remind all that the strength of a chain is its weakest link, and that experiences should be spread around, and so on.

: Talking - encourage silent ones by verbalising what you judge by non-verbal signs that they want to say and ask them to contribute. Be firm with the voluable, but be sure that their point of view is put adequately and then ask them to give others a chance.

A group works best when contributions are valued by being responded to with empathy. The squire should set the example and encourage the rest to follow the pattern. Sometimes a group focusses its needs in an alternate leader chosen because of the strength of their personality, skills or knowledge or the official leader's lack. This is only a challenge to the leader's position if the leader lets it be, by ignoring the underlying problem.

The ideal leader has a reservoir of experience of the morris and of people in general. Probably about 10 years is the optimum amount, when they would know something of all the facets that matter. Unfortunately this is a council of perfection and in the real world leaders of new sides are inevitably drawn from those with too little of the wider experiences. Hence the need for thought, care and the value of advice. It is a sad fact that very few experienced sides ever help their newer neighbours, which suggests that most are playing it by ear and do not really know what advice is necessary!

STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AND THE FOUR YEAR SYNDROME

Sides are supported by the initial enthusiasm of the leaders. There may come a time of crisis because of a failure to reach the leader's expectations. In a team's first year, when all are learning, it is easy to be forgiving. It will be found that regular practice of everything is essential otherwise dances and shows fall apart in public. In the second and third years the team settles down and establishes its own character. The dances are known and the performers feel satisfied with their average performance out. They feel good and often the greatest. Then they start to wonder what more is there to it. New dances, new functions to attend, new contacts and friendships and local community status all eventually lose their novelty. Where comes this boredom and lack of challenge?

the mix of dance ability is changing with time. It is convenient to recognise three stages.

Beginner	:	the dance is in control of the dancer.
Advanced	:	the dancer is in control of the dance.
Experienced	:	the dancer is able to express themselves without worrying about the dance.

These definitions do not say anything about the quality of the dancing. Unfortunately what is learnt first is often learnt only to the best of the dancer's ability at the time. Standards set then are accepted as THE standard by the better but less comitted dancers.

The solution I recommend is to relearn with the greater skills that have been developed both in control of movement and expression but also in effort quality. Professional dancers do this all through their career. It must be a common experience that the newer dances or traditions are learnt and danced better than those first attempted. There is no supportable arguement for starting with simple throw away dances because in moments of crisis in a dance the dancers revert in standard and movement to what they first learnt. It is obvious at workshops of unfamiliar material.

It should also be a common experience that dancing standards do not improve steadily but reach plateaus and that it needs a conscious effort to raise thelevel further. In their first few years, dancers achieve about

80% of their potential, whereas one would like something higher. It will seem irksome to many of the contented dancers, but the advantage of reaching a stage or two higher will be that it ensures the team's survival, and, with there being enough good dancing and understanding around in the club, it becomes possible to train new dancers to the same standard without strain.

POLICY

There are a number of policy matters that can lead to crises.

a. Links with the Community

It can seem a long slog with less apparent response than your effort appears to deserve to establish links with your local community. It is all too easy after a couple of tries to turn one's attention elsewhere. Absorption into the closed folk world is all too easy. Local links are essential and in the end the most satisfying. One must take a long view, it needs 4 to 6 years for a community to notice. As the community is full of people like yourself, how many of the other organisations can you remember? It needs a fair number of years before any place can remember that the morris comes every year. One aim could be to have people able to come to some spot annually knowing the team will be there without having to stick up a poster, for example at Kirtlington on Trinity Sunday, at Bidford on Trinity Monday and at Ilmington on open gardens day.

The problem found by clubs with community led functions is that the outside is in charge and the morris has to fit in. Unfortunately with morris led functions, although they can be similar in effect, they stop when the morris stops.

b. Choice of Tradition(s)

There is probably a form of morris and a set of dances within it that suit your team. It might not be that which you start with, there may be no way you could judge the team's eventual personality. The group may emerge as akin to street theatre or may be a practice centred dance club. Whatever, it is necessary to do enough of any one tradition to be able to have a long practice without becoming too boring. It may be desirable to run several traditions for contrast in shows, but the more that is done, the greater is the load on the bulk of the dancers. There are other ways of meeting a need for novelty, Ales, workshops, going out with someone else, just having a go without the intention of dancing it out etc. The risk is that new dances are seen as the easy answer to avoiding dancing better.

c. One Tradition

The pros and cons of a one tradition side have been debated for many years and each club has to find its own answer. What is a common experience in trying to raise dance standards is that all the detail has to be reexamined. This is often not properly defined, so it has to be decided within the club. Then all the dances within the particular tradition are not satisfying, so some are dropped, then some are invented, there is agonising about fidelity to the tradition, then the team does not want to go through all that again with something new and so sticks to what it has. This makes a mature side, with something to offer to other teams.

BEGINNERS

A club must have a policy on beginners. A steady flow of recruits for replacement is necessary at all levels, without which the team will eventually collapse. New dancers seldom volunteer or respond to publicity, it has to be done by personal contact, perhaps by letting them share an outing with the team. The

more experienced must remember what it was like at their start, to see things from the beginners point of view, and to let the newcomers experience what they felt when they first did it.

Beginners must have roles in the club. The Farnborough Morris men insisted that beginners were the only men with a right to dance, it lets the seniors off for a while. But the corollary was of course individual, concentrated teaching of steps and jigs to give confidence in movement before meeting a full team. This one-on-one situation avoids much of the embarrassment that could inhibit a beginner at a full team meeting. Each team has to find a way of keeping the interest and support of the more experienced dancers while ensuring that the newcomers progress quickly. There is a natural desire to get beginners moving in a set, it is supposed to build confidence and help acquire style by mimicry as well as showing the joy to be found in movement. However it allows the seniors to carry on dancing while leaving the beginner to struggle and often to build up their own bad habits.

Beginners need some hours on the hoof before they become useful, so it crazy to restrict their opportunities to dance. A club must expect a commitment from each newcomer. Marlboro, Vermont, expected at least a two year commitment because of its high aims being tied to few numbers of dancers. Therefore the attitude to the beginner is crucial in determining whether they will be regular and hard working. Apprenticeships etc and rights of passage must be symbolic and not a real brake or hinderance to dancers enjoyment or involvement.

Beginners need an intensity of practice to establish fitness, coordination, and proper habits. Senior dancers tend not to see the need for it themselves and set a standard for th club which slows progress. Beginners must not be taught to hold back in terms of effort or expression. Practice night is not a lazy night for anyone. The risk of injury from not warming up, from not stretching, and from being tense, as well as the risk of developing a limited dance style need to be explained.

THE DIFFICULT ONES

A common question from dancers at workshops during discussions about team politics is what to do about the difficult dancer, especially those that are poor and not improving dancers or disruptive in some other way. I do not think there is any way of dropping people, once the idea gets around you might be the next victim! Such action has a long term traumatic effect on a club from the examples I have known. Nor are hints like sending them to a different spot to that arranged for the rest acceptable. The dancer themselves have to be brought to realise that they do not reach the minimum standard by the team working harder or dancing better itself. It is surely more desirable if they can pull themselves up.

SUMMARY AND ADVICE

Do remember that a club must always be recruiting, and that the objective of a club is morris not studying each other, but all the wisdom that has been gathered elsewhere should not be ignored or reinvented.

Do not stint on the movement basics, it can cause endless problems later. Good groundwork, both technically and socially, will produce long term support, and short cuts can lead to long term problems for a club.

Do not hesitate to introduce movements just because something is thought to be technically difficult - some such is expected as the beginner thinks that it is all difficult. The longer the meeting of difficult movements is delayed the less well will they be taught, learnt or danced.

Do remember that things like the practice space and floor will affect fundamentally how you dance out. We have seen long narrow teams who have not recognised this. Allow for such effects.

Do practice as you intend to perform in public. Any sloppiness or uncertainty inside will show up outside.

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5. FROM FOLK DANCE TO FESTIVALS AN ISSUE OF CONTEXT

This essay was inspired by an academic paper seen in the offices of Tony Barrand at Boston University, USA. The concern here is the morris in the wider world. Today the morris is egocentric. Festivals in this context are the secular celebrations in general, not just Folk Festivals.

One has to start with discussing what is Folk Dance. Curt Sachs suggested a spectrum of dances from “Primitive”, seen as communal and sex segregated, through “Folk”, restricted to couples of opposite sexes, to “Civilised”, meaning both court and modern. He must have had a restricted experience as this does not fit our English experience. Perhaps he read too much into the form of the dances and ignored contexts, but it shows the dangers of attempting global inferences without a full data base. We would concede that “popular” folk dance, at least from Thomas Hardy’s youth, is non-ritual, non-professional, unselfconscious, anonymously choreographed and normally sexual. It has been known variously as country, community, social, barn or ceilidh dancing and nowadays attuned to the one-night-stand. But the professional dance companies in other countries do adapt or paraphrase folk dances and provide a continuation of folk style on the stage, and ordinary people accept such performances as folk. The UK media of course only provides parodies! However there is also the form of dance which does not fit into these categories, which because of this difficulty is often in England called “ritual”, as it once had a seasonal relationship, even though the ritual content is to all intents and purposes non-existent, and the general public does not distinguish between them, seeing primarily the common element of dressing up and performing in public.

Each form of dance could have two existences, the first as an internal part of the community, and the second when it is no longer such but the property of a few interested people. Within any first existence, folk dance depends on a one-to-one relationship of transmitter and receiver, and thus basically upon oral transmission, even when the detail is obtained by emulation and trial and error. In its second existence it is more fixed and less dynamic, it is extracted from the dramatic context that gave it its original justification and is not part of the larger complex that remains in oral transmission. Often it is a recreative process with specialist teachers, manuals, aids and a notation system. Even if there has been local continuity, it will be equivalent to a revival at this stage. We commonly assume that there was a proper first existence for English ritual dance but this could be challenged as it must have been a very long time ago.

A useful definition of folk dance has to recognise all such insights. The definition can be expressed as “a vernacular dance form performed in either its first or second existence as part of a little tradition within the great tradition of a given society. It is to be understood that such dance is an affective mode of expression which requires both space and time. It employs motor behaviour in redundant patterns which are closely linked to the structural features of the music.” Note that this definition does not include the concept of authenticity or of the passing through generations and it can be the product of change and innovation. Maud Karpeles said in her preface to the Sharp’s Sword Dance Books that it is well known that traditional art forms never remain static.

Today we are wedded to print and people are trained from an early age to work from the written word and this can dominate the aspects of a subject that we think about. It causes one to miss the fact that all folk dance has still some dependence on oral transmission. Seldom does formalised motor behaviour occur without it being part of some context, the understanding of which is passed orally. This is, folk talk about dance and its setting, which they do not do about everyday gestures that are learned by unconscious mimicry. To appreciate these other aspects fully, we need rigorous studies of the dance event and its social background, which we do not have, instead of just observing and recording “steps” and “stylistics”. Examining the total requires for example looking at what happens between dances and also within the audience.

Celebrations include all sorts of things, ancient and modern, such as village parades and carnival processions and these will be called generically “festivals”. A festival will include ceremonial acts, but not all behaviour is ceremonial. It might include prescribed behaviour. Traditional festivals can persist, maintaining essentially the same format long after their original meaning has been forgotten. The enduring significance of the festival is not in its apparent purpose but in the fact of the celebration itself. Mid-summer or quarterly bonfires were once the signal for the Saxon community in a hundred to assemble for a moot on the following day. The social side persisted long after the Normans had reorganised the legal structure of the country into manors. As the original purpose of the bonfire as forgotten, the people involved thought up other justifications, which served to confuse anthropologists. There may be other utilitarian justifications, for example bonfires are also an opportunity to burn accumulated rubbish, or even the unusable bits from the annual November animal slaughter and salting down.

Secular celebrations in recent centuries have been organised institutionally so that the occasion is a respite from work or a holiday and an opportunity for witnessing a spectacle such as a procession, games, dancing, speeches, band concert or fireworks. There has been a strong tendency for community festivals to be transformed. The UK has since the late 19th century had national public holidays, formerly called Bank Holidays. The USA does not have many national holidays, as each state sets its own, but as in England, not all are of equal popularity. It is noticeable that the government fiddling with the traditional dates has changed the character of the days, even in my own lifetime.

A Festival is defined as a large group celebration where one has a right to participate by virtue of being a member of the community, and often it is this participation that confirms that one is a member of that community. Local fairs were once like this. Such festivals are to be contrasted to limited participation celebrations involving sub-groups, such as are found at rites of passage, as a person moves from one stage of life to another.

A festival seems to provide an occasion for people to rejoice together, to interact in an ambience of acceptance and conviviality. Sometimes the general participation feast is the only time in a year when members of a community come together. It creates a bond between participants, they identify with each other so it is a feature which is a prime device for promoting social cohesion, for integration of an individual into society or a group, and maintaining them as members through shared, recurrent, positively reinforcing performances. Hence the emphasis by communities today on carnivals, fetes and other participating entertainments. As such festivals diminish, the individual lessens identification with society and replaces it with identification with a sub-group.

A traditional festival is not a place to learn something new. It is rewarding to the performer because it generates positive emotional resonances or expresses a positive emotional condition. The festival is a shared sequence of experience based on symbolic interaction. Participation, for example by the wearing of a traditional costume, implies both an allegiance and some subservience and devotion to the community.

The modern Folk Festival is a complex interpretation of its participants perceived needs, including involving the community in which it is run by publicity beforehand building anticipation, public displays in an arena, on the street and around the pubs. But it is a reaching out by those involved, not a natural growth from the local community. It is self indulgent, although it promotes much of the participating feeling of the older festivals. Folk Festivals usually provide workshops to pass on techniques and dances which are otherwise difficult to transmit. The existence and the format of the Folk Festival tells us much about what has been lost from contemporary life.

These are issues when we consider the morris in its outside the practice room context. It is the separation that generates the ill will that often appears in the communities around the Folk Festival towns, which then

leads to restrictions to performances in time, place and numbers and possibly to its end. Folk need a commitment over many years to the community and eventually must expect some loss of control to it.

In the early 1920's Rolf Gardineer campaigned to change the name of the EFDS to the English Festival Dance Society concentrating on performances using the best of English folk talent within or outside the tradition. He was 50 years too early, but his vision was prophetic. The modern morris is dependent on being able to travel distances, but this will become more difficult as the world has to adjust to shortages, conservation and the other problems beginning to appear. The morris can have role.

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