

## Morris Dancing

### THE SHROPSHIRE BEDLAMs

#### A Talk by John Kirkpatrick

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The Shropshire Bedlams and Martha Rhoden's Tuppenny Dish started in 1975. In 1979, I was asked to write an article for the EFDSS magazine *English Dance & Song* about how we started and what we were trying to do. That article was called "Bordering on the Insane," and it's since been reprinted in one of The Morris Ring's booklets about Border Morris. Much to my surprise, I still agree with everything I said then, and, mostly, with the way I said it. So if you're familiar with that article you may already know some of what I'm about to say now.

As this is a historic occasion, and I don't think I'm going to want to give this talk again, I'll go into more detail than you'll find in that article and I'll be more specific factually about our dances and our music.

Because so much of what we do in the Bedlams is based on my personal views and includes stuff I've made up, I can't avoid using "I" and "me" all the time. We all need reassurance, but I don't usually give it to myself in such large doses.

Apologies over - here we go.

My involvement with Border Morris began quite simply because I moved to Shropshire in 1973. My [then] wife, Sue - Sue Harris - and I moved to the village of Aston-on-Clun in the southwest of the county, and, as we were interested in these things, we started digging out what there was in the way of local folk music, songs, tunes, and dances, and found that there was this neglected local form of Morris dancing.

I had been dancing myself since The Hammersmith Morris Men started in 1959, when I was twelve. In fact I had become obsessed with it. I spent every spare moment in The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, trying to find out all there was to know about Cotswold Morris, which is what we did, like nearly everyone else at the time. Occasionally you saw a team doing northwest, sometimes we were let loose on Lichfield, otherwise it was all Cotswold. I had never seen any Border Morris. I knew there was a group of dancers from various local Morris teams who got together every Christmas to do the Border dances in their proper midwinter season, but I had never seen them, and never did see them subsequently.

I suppose actually I should say I had *almost* never seen any Border Morris. I was familiar with The Chingford Morris Men's version of *The Upton-on-Severn Stick Dance*, which was adapted by Geoff Hughes and was being copied by loads of other teams, using that fabulous tune that Maud Karpeles put with the dance instructions when she published them in the *EFDSS Journal*, although quite why she should have seen fit to suggest a Scottish-sounding jig from Vermont in North America to accompany this dance, when it was only ever done to hornpipes, is something which has always puzzled and disappointed me. In any case, it was done in a very Cotswoldy style, and I could never fully approve of anything Chingford did because they didn't wear hats.

[Incidentally, *Rattlebone & Ploughjack* - Ashley Hutching' LP - was made in 1973 when I was in a band with A.H., but I wasn't involved-big secret.]

My only other taste of Border Morris was a version of *The Brimfield Dance*, to the tune of *Cock of the North*, which Hugh Rippon had learned somewhere and taught us in the early years of Hammersmith. I don't think we ever did it much, and it was treated more as a novelty item than as anything to be taken seriously.

Apart from that one group which danced once a year, as far as I knew there was nobody taking any serious practical interest in Border Morris. [I didn't know about the 1972 meeting Roy Dommett mentioned in his talk, a meeting which had a specific Border Morris workshop. And I think as a result of that, a Border team started going out on Boxing Day. I think they formed from this workshop, but I wasn't aware of that when we started the Bedlams. I never saw that team. I think they still exist, actually. They still do it, even though there are now loads of Border teams.]

So, where do you start? What I *didn't* do was any collecting or original research. I slightly regret that now, but at the same time I can see that it would have been inhibiting, and I was determined not to let a small thing like lack of information stand in my way. In fact I was greatly in awe of people who *had* done collecting and research, and I didn't consider myself worthy enough to tread in their hallowed footsteps. So all I did was to follow up as many as I could of the sources listed by E. C. Cawte in his article in the 1963 *Journal*. I already had Roy Dommett's Morris notes (I'm not sure if I should have had them, but I did), particularly the one called *Other Morris*, which included the notation for several Border dances, and Lionel Bacon's *Handbook* had also just come out.

Another important source of inspiration was Cecil Sharp's tune collection. He found some cracking tunes in this area, especially in the repertory of John Locke, a gypsy fiddler whom he heard in Leominster. John Locke's tunes were a considerable help in establishing the style which we adopted, as I'll try and explain as we go along.

[Historical background - love all that stuff - but I think it's vital that what we do speaks to today and isn't only historically accurate.]

All this information made it possible to reconstruct several dances, and gave clues about a few more, but there were massive variations in figures, steps, and the size and shape of the set. *Upton-on-Severn* had a double step, most of the rest had a single step, and there are references to running and shuffling as well as capering. So the first thing I decided to do was to create a style, and impose that style on the notations, rather than try and do each dance "correctly", or to work towards some synthesis of styles from doing each dance in its own separate way and reaching a compromise.

Long before I'd left Hammersmith I'd decided the only truthful way to approach Morris dancing was to dance everything you did in the same style. I believe that the less you have to *think* about what you do, the better you can do it, so that if you always dance in the same way, the constant repetition and practice allows you to leave behind the part of your brain taken up with how you dance and *how* you move your body, and all you need to worry about is *where* you are and *what* comes next. This idea is quite common now, and in fact it seems glaringly obvious, that traditional dancers that dance in lots of different styles, they just danced.

With Border Morris, I was very keen to establish a way of dancing that wasn't like just another Cotswold style. It was a golden opportunity to introduce something new into Morris dancing. I knew what I liked, I knew what I didn't like, I wanted to do something revolutionary, and I felt lucky.

Fundamentally The Shropshire Bedlams dance the way I like to dance. But although that's true, it doesn't tell you very much, so I'll try to trace how I arrived at what we do.

I have to start with Hugh Rippon, who founded the Hammersmith Morris Men and taught me my Morris dancing. I can't imagine a more inspiring and exciting initiation than the one Hugh gave us in Hammersmith. He was in his twenties, full of vigour and enthusiasm, a lovely strong dancer, he knew his stuff academically, he was an intelligent and witty teacher, he was inclined to be disrespectful and irreverent, and wasn't afraid to bend the rules slightly to accentuate the effect of any given movement or gesture or step to bring out the drama in the dance. He cared passionately about the dancing, and about doing it as well as possible. Nobody could have prepared the ground better than Hugh Rippon.

Encouraged by his attitude, I got used to questioning accepted practices, and not necessarily believing everything we were told as gospel. I had a huge problem initially with country dancing. This was partly because I was consumed with embarrassment at anything to do with girls, but it was also from a great dissatisfaction with doing dances to a walking step. It seemed to me then, just as it does now, profoundly and utterly boring and pointless and stupid, in fact quite deadening. I want my dancing to be filled with life and enthusiasm and exuberance, and walking through dance figures does nothing to achieve that whatsoever.

So I tended to react by wanting to dance more slowly, so you could fit in stepping, and the more abandoned and flamboyant I became, the slower the speed needed to be. I still feel like that about country dancing, and I began to apply the same feelings to morris dancing. You can give each step and flourish its full worth if you give it time. Dancing fast closed too many doors for me. I wanted to dance slowly.

I'd always enjoyed the way Chipping Campden danced. Everything about them was open and spacious in a way that most Cotswold dances weren't. They danced slowly, to a lovely lollopy single step, they had the biggest sets I had ever seen in Cotswold morris and filled the space and time beautifully, and they tolerated the extraordinary eccentricity of one of their members, who I think they called Half-time Harris, or something very like it, who did his arm movements at half the speed of the others. I liked everything about them, the best thing being that you couldn't do it. It looked great, I'm sure it felt great, but the team made it very plain that these were *their* dances, and weren't available for general consumption. I've always admired that.

Bampton made a great impression too, not so much with their dancing, although most of them do have a delightful style, but with the rather chaotic air about the team. It was always a point of great amusement among morris men that Bampton didn't dance according to the book, "one never knew what Bampton would be doing *this* year." Bampton obviously weren't bothered, they just got on with it. There was nothing pretentious or precious or prissy about Bampton. They just hollered out the name of the dance and did it.

Morris dancing is non-verbal. I believe that the more words you use to set up what you're going to do, the less power and impact it has. We're constantly being bombarded with words, we're always being told what to think, everything has to be analysed in our society today, so I think that if there's a chance to present something in a way that has some magic and mystery about it, we should make the most of it. Morris dancing can provide an opportunity to stop people in their tracks. It's perfect street theatre. You can suddenly confront people with stuff they're not used to, maybe have never seen before. But the more you tell them about what you do, before you do it, the more you take away. It's like telling the story of a song before you sing it, it becomes pointless. The classic show biz maxim is

"leave them wanting more." I think we should make the audience want more, make them want to know what it is we're doing, where's it from, why we're doing it, but make them want to ask, don't tell them for nothing. If it's any good it can stand up on its own without having to be explained away, for example, "Ladies and Gentlemen, we are The West Malvern Morris Men performing the morris of Merry England. We are come amongst you on this bright and jolly day to bring you all the luck of the morris and drive away the evil spirits, to make your crops grow high and your women's bellies to swell up with children, so hold on to your ladies, fellers, for every one of them touched with the black of our kisses has a wonderful and glorious year ahead of her, and your marrows will be bursting through their sides. During the dancing we'll be passing amongst you with the lucky morris hat so you can guarantee your own personal piece of the luck of the morris. Our performance for the next half hour or so will consist of a programme of traditional dances from the Welsh Border area, done in our own inimitable style, of course, ladies and gentlemen. We would like to start with our version of The Upton-on-Severn Stick Dance, from Upton-on-Severn in Worcestershire, and in keeping with modern practice we shall use for our music a totally irrelevant tune from the United States of America. Take it away, maestro ... Once to yourself... this time, lads."

For which the instantaneous translation reads as follows. "I'm a pompous old windbag full of my own importance and in love with the sound of my own voice, unfortunately I have absolutely nothing original to say and in order to brush up my flagging ego I'll walk up and down in front of you for hours on end while I say it."

Just to suddenly be there, doing it, must have more impact than to have that sort of shallow, mindless presentation.

Which brings me onto fools. I suppose there must be some good fools, but I think it's an incredibly delicate job to do, and I can't remember the last time I was convinced by someone's fooling. There always seems to be too much self-consciousness to really pull it off. At one of the EFDSS festivals in the Royal Albert Hall there was once a team of Italian country dancers who performed very simple dances but in a completely compelling way - each couple was doing its own little variations in its own time, there was a lot of randomness, but it was obviously the same dance. There were loads of humorous touches, daft gestures and expressions, banging bums together, they were just fabulous fun, and it came over beautifully. Ron Smedley, who was the producer of the event, gave them an introduction which I've never forgotten -he said, "I can only introduce this team by giving them the highest compliment you can give a team of folk dancers, and that is by calling them a company of fools." That group offered the perfect solution to the problem as I saw it, of the fool: they were all the fool. Any one of them at any moment could do something outside the architecture of the dance, and that was fine. Perfect. That's something I've tried to incorporate into The Shropshire Bedlams.

Speaking of which, here is the stepping pattern I concocted as the basis of what we do: two single steps (one bar) followed by one double step (one bar). In other words: one hop, two hop, one two three hop.

We don't wear bell pads on our shins, so the Cotswold leg position, where you shake your free leg forward on the hop to sound those bells, isn't necessary, and in any case I was trying to do everything possible in a different way, so we have a single line of bells beneath the knee, tied in a knot on the outside of the leg, with two ends hanging down about six inches, each end with three bells on, and we keep our legs underneath us, flicking the free foot back on the hops. None of the original members of the team had done any Morris dancing previously so they all fell into this pattern and style of stepping without any problem. I had the hardest job because I'd been used to doing something else. Since then several blokes have joined with a lot of experience of Cotswold dancing, and it always takes them months to change over to our way of stepping.

There's no traditional basis for this pattern of stepping in Border Morris, or in anything else really, I just made it up. It's not difficult or tricky, but it brings with it its own time and space, there's a gentle rise and fall in the rhythm and flow of the movement, there's no sharp edges like you get in some Cotswold stuff.

I've already said that I like to dance at a slow speed. just before we started there had been the first wave of interest in English country music, that is to say traditional English tunes played in a traditional English way by traditional English musicians. The first records of this material were coming out then, and it gave wonderful pointers in how to sustain strong rhythmic music with very simple tunes at a very steady pace. Here were the rudiments of a style of playing that was nothing like what you heard in the EFDSS-type bands. If you took the lessons you could learn from hearing that kind of approach to music, and applied them to John Locke's fiddle tunes in Cecil Sharp's manuscripts, you couldn't have had a more perfect marriage of dance and music. It was made in heaven.

Costume: we wear black top hats with feathers in. I've always wanted to dance in a top hat - I think they make a man look magnificent, and add a lot of height. Everyone always seems to think we're a team of giants, which I take as a great compliment, but we don't tell people that we're not. The feathers are because there would be no flowers available for decoration in the winter time, but there are plenty of birds. We more or less have a rule only to allow feathers of native species. We don't allow wings, because one of our early members insisted on wearing a pair of goose wings in his hat. He was quite short, they were quite big, and it looked ridiculous. Unfortunately his hat fell off once when he was dancing and by the time he got to it the goose wings had mysteriously taken flight. We don't wear any badges or stickers. I don't understand why so many people do that; I think it's cheap and demystifies what we're doing. We don't have anything to show who we are when we're out of costume either, badges or sweatshirts or tee-shirts. I think it's important to keep that a secret, and again, not just give the information to people. Let them wonder who you are.

We wear tattered jackets, which again make you look bigger and respond to every slightest movement. We blacken our faces and necks, right down into the collar, and the back of our hands. I just think it looks more complete than seeing bits of pink peeping through. [I like to look frightening.] We have a rule never to take our hats off, even in church, not only because it looks silly, especially those of us with receding hair lines, but, again, it detracts from what we do and how we look when we're doing it. It breaks the spell.

We wear blue denim jeans and white pumps or trainers. The specific reason for this is that early on when we were getting ready for our first public appearance, one of the lads turned up with his freshly made jacket, his top hat, and put them on over what he happened to be wearing: jeans and trainers. It looked fabulous. A traditional top half on top of modern dress. I knew I didn't want to wear breeches or white trousers, like Cotswold teams did, and this combination hit the spot bang on: ancient mystery firmly rooted in the present, in modern times. Of all the things that have been said about us, I'm most surprised that the blue jeans haven't been mentioned more often, either positively or negatively. I'm really pleased and proud of the fact that we dance in jeans, and as far as I know, no other team has done that. The best comment we ever did have about jeans came a few years ago when one of our blokes was walking along the street on his own, on his way to meet the rest of us, and two young teenage girls came up and said: "Don't you feel daft walking around dressed like that?" You get impervious to remarks like this, especially if you're on your own, and it is rather a strange sight to see one of our kind walking down the street, so he manfully said: "No, it doesn't bother me at all." "What, with those flares?"

We never appear in public half dressed, or half undressed, between spots for example. We swoop in in full battle dress, do a lightning raid, and disappear. Leave them guessing.

This costume itself suggested certain ways of dancing.

As well as the leg bells we had bells down the outside of each arm, twenty on each side, and to make the most of them we wave our arms about at random, twirling them if possible, so that the tatters on our jackets amplify every slightest movement. If there's time we sometimes spin on the spot or even in motion, not only because it's exhilarating to do, but also to create as much movement and noise as possible. The Bedlams yell and scream quite a lot, partly whoops of enjoyment, which seems a very natural thing to want to do, and partly to whip ourselves and each other up into a frenzy. I like to do everything at full tilt, and you can't act that, you can only do it. We use big sticks and we hit them hard, as hard as we can. We don't have any of this polite Cotswold tapping, we really wallop into each other. Although the basic position for our sticks is resting on the shoulder, rather than held upright, again just to be different from normal practice, we've actually started more and more random twirling and flashy stuff with the sticks, which pleases me greatly. It adds to the general impression of chaos, out of which spring, with any luck, moments of surprising precision. I really enjoy the fact that in some of our dances, because of this slow and steady pace, you can see exactly what's coming, and take pleasure from seeing the obvious resolution of your expectations, and that in other dances there are some real surprises when a new shape or pattern suddenly appears from nowhere, and then is gone again.

I don't think I can put off talking about our actual dances much longer now, but just before I do I think I need to explain a little bit about the relationship of our two teams, The Shropshire Bedlams and Martha Rhoden's Tuppenny Dish. To begin with, I was asked to teach some sixth formers at the local school some morris dancing after they'd seen Gloucestershire Old Spot Morris Dancers at a local May Fair. They thought it was great, and wanted to try it. Without having given it much thought, we arranged a first practice and one girl turned up. Sue was there, principally to play for the dances, but we both realized at once that here was a chance to get a women's team going as well as a men's. After only a couple of practices there were equal numbers and Sue took the women off to be a separate unit. Apart from a couple of events in the first year or so, while we were finding our feet, the two teams have always danced together. Musicians from each team play for both, and although we practice separately most of the time we have regular joint practices so that the musicians can get used to the other team's tunes, and to sort out business.

This sort of close relationship was unheard of when we started. It was still fairly early days for women's morris in any case, and it was enormously pleasing to be able to establish this kind of joint team. The men are very masculine in their dancing, and Sue created this wonderfully feminine style for the women, which I must say I still find one of the most appropriate ways for women to dance. They don't try and dance like men, they don't look as though they're going to fade away with an attack of the vapours like some of the more fragile "ladies" teams, they are just very womanly. As well as providing a healthier atmosphere in having this mixed social group, and thereby avoiding some of the introvert excesses of a single sex group, there's also an element of healthy competition between the two teams. In fact it's a pity really that Sue wasn't asked to give a talk here today herself, because what Martha Rhoden's were doing when they established themselves was at least as much a departure from previous practice as The Bedlams, if not more so. I suppose The Bedlams were more spectacularly original in the beginning, but I think Sue's work with Martha Rhoden's Tuppenny Dish has done a great deal to move on not just Border morris but women's morris in general, and I hope one day she gets the chance to give her side of things because I think she's got a lot to say.

We both started from the same original source material, and as Sue and I were married, we liaised very closely about what each team was doing. We decided that the men would use sticks and not handkerchiefs, and the women vice versa. As you'll see, there are one or two dances from our early days where we each do our own adaptation of

the same original dance. To begin with we had a few dances in common, starting with our processional as that was the first thing I made up. It was very simple, going forward in pairs, with a figure spinning round the set one position at a time, like you get in some rapper dances. I think the figure was called "fixie" when I used to do it. Rather recklessly I put this to a tune from Regency Brighton called *The Prince of Wales at Brighton*. This was a country dance tune that I'd always liked, it seemed to fit, and when the title was shortened to just *The Prince of Wales* it made a good solid name for a morris dance. Both teams dance to the same step, the men with sticks, the women with handkerchiefs. Since we began, a huge amount of improvisation has crept into the dance, and many of us find it the most exhilarating dance we do.

One of our first set dances was based on the *Steeple Claydon Morris Reel* as described in Roy Dommett's *Other Morris* leaflet. This is described as being like the dance at Ludlow, and consisted of a hey for six in a line with a clapping chorus, repeated ad nauseam. We use the tune given for the dance, *Old Mother Oxford*, call it *Old Molly Oxford*, and it's the only dance we ever do simultaneously, with as many lines of each sex as we can get. We generally only do it as a final dance at the end of a long session.

This notation gave one of several clues about the two teams developing their own dances, because we're told sometimes they did the same thing with a sticking chorus. This gave us the idea that we could do the same dance, the men with a sticking chorus, the women with a stepping chorus, and produce a separate final entity. One of the first dances we tried this with was the Brimfield dance I'd learned at Hammersmith to the tune of *Cock of the North*. The men did it as I'd learned it, with single step, and capering in the napping chorus. The women used two different balance steps in the chorus but did the same figures. The steps they used were a heel and toe step, which I'd learned in a country dance called *Auretti's Dutch Skipper* and suggested to Sue, along with a few other steps I'd learned which she didn't think much of, which goes like this ... and which Sue changed to this ... and the other one was a balance and kick step with a turn in it of ninety degrees, so that after four, you're back where you started. Sue made that movement up, and those two stepping patterns come in several of the women's dances in 6/8 time. I cobbled together all the unusual phrases I could find for the *Cock of the North*, to give a slightly different version of the tune from normal, and as the dance had some similarities with the one from Bromsberrow Heath, where it was done for six and called the *Three Handed Reel*, we decided to call it that, just to be mischievous.

Another early dance we both do is the one we call *Three Jolly Black Sheepskins*, which is based on the local dance-game of the sheepskin hey, which seems to have been widespread in the Border morris area. You get the figure in the country dance called *Picking Up Sticks*. We took the hey as chorus, and took three figures from the Leominster dance, loosely interpreted, to fill it out. We took the idea of doing the hey around three other people from the country dance, as all the references to it are as being done on its own around sheepskins, hats, chairs, or whatever. We took John Locke's tune, which is variously titled *Sheepskins*, *Three Jolly Sheepskins*, or *Three Jolly Black Sheepskins*, as it's obviously meant to go with that figure. The way the two teams do this dance is almost the same, except that the men have got slower and the women faster, and in fact the men take 24 bars to complete the hey when the women only take 16. It's the only dance the Bedlams do with sticks without banging them together.

The two dances from Upton-On-Severn gave further clues about how the two teams could develop. The men do the stick dance, the women do the handkerchief dance, but they are different. I cobbled together a version of *Brighton Camp* for the stick dance, and we sing a verse near the end which is based on a fairly well known nonsense rhyme - "Oh me father he died a month ago, etc." It finished with the words "...half a farthing candle," which is what we call the dance. It's supposed to be for six, but sometimes we do it for ten, as the figures work out just as well for that number, with a prevailing wind. One of the team wrote a second verse about his mother dying the following day, so we sing that too. The women do the handkerchief dance to a tune Sue had already made up, called *All a-siden*. This comes from a saying from Clun about the local potter who sold off her seconds cheap: "All a-siden like Martha Rhoden's Tuppenny Dish."

There's a figure in these dances that opened up a whole new avenue, "Three Top," where there's a hey for three across the ends, rather than the more predictable way up and down the sides. This turning the set round at right angles gave me a clue for what became quite a common feature in our dances. There is mention of a reel for three from Upton Snodsbury, where the middle man stepped or napped with each of the other two in turn. Taking a clue from this figure in the dance I've just described, I turned the set round at right angles for each new hey, rather than keep it in the same straight line all the time. We did this to John Locke's version of *Speed the Plough*, which is what we call the dance.

I thought the dance from Bromsberrow Heath was rather dull, so I used the idea of a line of six with a really exaggerated version of the napping at Brimfield using this position ... [For the chorus of this dance, every other man leans far back, legs straddled, holding his stick in a very phallic position, while his partner strikes it. -ed.] I was very keen to get things as pagan and primitive as possible, and this seemed a good idea at the time. We alternate a couple of simple figures with napping in this position, leaving the men standing there while their partners go off round the set. We use a version of *Rickett's Hornpipe*, which was used at Wenlock. One of our team christened this *The Maiden's Prayer*, which remains our official title. It's one of our shortest dances but also one of the most taxing. It's not effective unless you give it all you've got, and the leg position is quite a strain. In fact I can't do it any more, much to my distress, because my knees are no longer up to the job.

I think the reason morris dancing is often given some ancient origin is not because of any evidence of antiquity, but because it addresses the primitive and pagan side of human nature, which some people are very reluctant to admit even exists. There's an uncivilized part in all of us that doesn't often get dealt with these days, and I genuinely believe that the reason these traditional customs survive and flourish is because they provide one of the few opportunities to express this side of ourselves in a way which is socially acceptable. You might not want to express it yourself, but it's good that your morris team is there to express it for you. So by standing like this, I think we're able to offer a kind of public service, and most people seem to understand the point.

The women started doing a dance inspired by the *Headington Morris Reel*, to another of John Locke's tunes, *Mad Moll of the Cheshire Hunts*. They just call it *Mad Moll*.

We started doing *Brimfield* to a 4/4 tune, *The Big Ship*, which was one of the tunes at White Ladies Aston, still with a single step but without the capers, and called it *The Big Ship*.

We do a version of *White Ladies Aston* to John Locke's *Blue Eyed Stranger*, which is what we call it, and a version of the Leominster dance to the tune *Not For Joe*, which seems to have been the commonest tune, as given by E C Cawte in the *Journal*. We used to sing the words, "There was a little nigger but he grew no bigger ... " but we've changed them to avoid offending black people. I don't think there's any cause for offence in blacking up, but singing about niggers is rather different. I must say we have rarely come across blacks where we live, obviously by travelling around we see more, but they usually either seem to understand the point of the disguise or they don't make any connection at all. The first time we ever danced out, we were all driving up to the pub in our blacking for the first time, nobody could recognise anybody else, and this carload of Africans turned up in full flowing robes. This had been set up by one of our members and he hadn't told the rest of us, so we were shitting ourselves even more than we were already. But they loved it.

With the Evesham stick dance I took up an idea for napping which occurs in a Cotswold style dance called *The Black Joker*, which I think was devised by one of the Westminster Morris Men. That is, instead of always napping with your partner you nap with the people either side of your partner as well. I've used that quite a bit in our dances, and this was the first one we did it in. I also made up a verse for the *Fanny Frail* chorus, and we call it *Fanny Frail*.

We did a version of the Pershore dance to John Locke's *Staffordshire Hornpipe*, and called it *Todley Tom*, who is a character described in the book *Shropshire Folklore*, as a magician who could fly through the air. The women did a version of the same dance called *Bonnets so Blue*, using a version of the tune loosely based on that from Evesham.

The women were doing some dances that were being "rediscovered" as being suitable for their sex - so they did the *Abram Circle Dance*, the *Hindley Circle Dance*, the *Great Wishford Faggot Dance*, a dance from Bidford called *Bluff King Hal* and a dance from Ilmington called the *Lively Jig*. The men did a dance based on an idea from Ilmington - *The Buffoon* - in a line of six. I expanded this to include some fighting stuff - we slap each other round the face and knee each other up the bum as in the *Wyresdale Dance*.

After our first appearance at Sidmouth Folk Festival in 1977, Roy Dommett was kind enough to send me a letter with some information about stuff I'd missed. He included the notation for the dance from Peopleton to the tune of *Pop Goes the Weasel*, some information about the dance from Headle, and the hey from Oldbury near Bridgnorth. We made no use of the snippet from Headle but we started doing the Peopleton dance and called it *Tuppenny Rice*, to a single step with occasional capers, and I used the Oldbury hey in a dance I made up which alternated that with the hey in pairs from *White Ladies Aston* and with two different napping patterns, to the tune of *The Morning Star* from another fiddler Locke, James Locke in Newport in the north of Salop.

After a short while I decided the single step and capers in 6/8 time were not really "us", so I dropped the Three Hand Reel that I described earlier and changed the Peopleton dance to 4/4. I made up a hornpipe version of *Pop Goes the Weasel* and adapted the dance accordingly and we call this *Threepenny Ha'penny Treacle*.

Encouraged by the success of the dance for three we'd done fairly early on, I made up a dance for nine in a square, with a simple figure 8 and napping pattern. Not really that simple, because the top of the set rotates 90 degrees every time and that makes each figure 8 a different pattern for each dancer. That was called *The Triumph* and used a 3/2 tune I'd already made up called *Shreds and Patches*. I also made up a dance for seven in a line to John Locke's *Hunting the Squirrel* and for five in a cross to his *Getting Upstairs I never Did See*.

Sue made up a dance for nine for the women with three lines of three radiating out from a central point like the Isle of Man legs. This she called *Churning Butter*, and made up the tune for it too. She'd also adapted the *Handkerchief Dance* described in the Folklore of Herefordshire to the tune of *Greensleeves*, called the *Green and Yellow Handkerchief Dance* and a Welsh country dance called *Dick the Welshman*. She made up a dance to John Locke's tune *Boyne Water* called *Last Night with Archie*; to the tune *Old Towler* called *Old Towler's Eightsome Reel* both for eight in a set; and to her own tunes a square dance for eight called *Over the Moon and Under the Stars*; eight in a set for *Turn again Martha*; and twelve in a circle for *Martha's Comet*. This is a stepped version of *Hindley*.

I made up dances and tunes for *Waterddy Lane* in a line of eight, the *Tun Dish* in a triangle of six, the *Raddled Tup* in a set of ten with a 5/4 napping chorus, *Four Lane End* in a square of four, *Cocking the Chafer* for a set of twelve, *Rats up the Trousers* for a set of eight and the *One-Armed Bandit*, another for nine in a square. I made up one for six

in a set called *Garfield's Glory* to a traditional tune played by Denis Crowther from Clee Hill, which is almost the same as one played by Emily Bishop from Bromsberrow Heath.

But not everything came from me. In fact I'd say not one person has been through the team without making some contribution of ideas towards the way a dance turned out. The team has always been very tolerant of trying out an idea to see if it works and trying to work together to make it work. Two of the men have made up dances, one called *Beating the Oak* which didn't really work out so we dropped it, and another for ten in a circle called *There's No Doubt About It* to a tune made up by one of the women.

Sadly, Sue has lost interest in Martha Rhoden's Tuppenny Dish and hasn't danced regularly for two or three years, but two of the other women have made up a couple of dances each, one of which had a tune composed by the same lady as our dance in a circle for ten.

I'd just like to stress that all these developments took place in a vacuum. Nobody else was doing anything like this when we started. Nobody else was doing anything with Border morris. The Ironmen were still the second or third worst Cotswold team in the world (they didn't black up until 1980). The Silurians were still doing Cotswold - and it's very sad that Dave Jones is no longer with us as I would love to have heard what he said about our dancing - I'm sure he greatly disapproved of what we do.

We were very much out on a limb, artistically and geographically, and gradually we've seen our approach and some of our actual dance style being absorbed by other teams and taken to be a norm for Border morris. Initially it grieved me beyond words to see this happening. Now I can see it is a compliment and there is nothing we can do to stop it. It's nice to know we started it.

It still feels very organic - I don't see a problem about continuing to change and adapt and develop. just a few months ago the men's team had a practice with only six experienced dancers so they set about creating a new dance communally in the shape of a T. We're still struggling with that but I think it will work out.

I still get a real kick out of what we do. My two eldest sons are dancing in the team now and I burst with pride when I think about them dancing with me on equal terms. I've still got some ideas for new dances up my sleeve, although I'm in no hurry to bring them to fruition as we have quite a large repertoire now already. I consider myself very lucky to have had the opportunity to put into practice so many ideas I've held dear, in such a complete way. I can't get enough of it.