

Midsummer Weekend 1987

One of the most interesting traditions of the Morris I have witnessed in recent years was that which emanates from the North Oxfordshire village of Duns Tew. I was, therefore, gratified to receive an invitation to join the dancers on their very first Traditional Annual Reunion, which occurred this year, appropriately, around the mid-summer solstice.

The dancers met on the Friday evening at the George in the neighbouring village of Barford St. Michael. Like so many teams which dance out on one traditional day of the year only, Duns Tew practise their dances the day before their public celebration of the Morris.

The Saturday commenced in Duns Tew itself, with three performances at different places, in the village. The dancing was received with enthusiasm by their substantial audiences throughout the day, first in Duns Tew and then in neighbouring Steeple Aston. The evening saw a tour of Great Tew and Barford St. Michael. The dancers on this occasion were accompanied by their nearest neighbouring teams from Adderbury and Kirtlington.

I was able to note more of the traditions this fascinating team and, in the interests of a full historical record of this important team, I outline some aspects of their performance and some additional notation below.

The style of the dancing has changed a little. The surge on the first double step of every movement, which was such an important feature of the tradition, has become a little lazier: dancers I spoke to recorded this with regret as they felt it arose from their advancing age rather than deliberate decision. The speed of dancing had also increased slightly - again a matter for regret.

There had been changes of detail too, such as are inevitable (and indeed perhaps desirable) in any living tradition like the Duns Tew Morris. The back step was altered a little, with the swing being more pronounced. Hand movements were interesting: I had been led to believe that the 'hands over shoulders' position had declined in importance but was interested to note that it seemed more in evidence on this occasion. Hands were brought up to the shoulders, elbows bent and down, and handkerchiefs draped over the shoulders during the Once to Yourself (the set following number one on this for timing) and at all times of 'rest' position. The UC had developed into a smooth, flowing and most attractive movement with the hands describing a high circle as before, but then, if the next movement were another UC or a rest position, continuing beyond the horizontal balance position to sweep round and gather in front of the chest.

All dances this time ended on rounds, all in with hands high (i.e. the last DF of 'The Swan' and 'Old Gordon' were omitted.) An element of challenge seemed to pervade this ending, with dancers leaping in as vigorously as they could, to the danger of their neighbours' toes. All dances except 'Tew's the Dance' were danced by two sets at a time.

My activities on this occasion had a rival. I met Mr. Roy Dommett, who came equipped with an unusual camera. I was interested to see that the Duns Tew Morris are determined to avoid the fate of other traditional teams, of who only fragmentary evidence remains. I counted forty eight team photographs being taken. They also seem determined to avoid insolvency: the passing of their collecting hat was notable for its persistence and frequency. Indeed one of the dancers told me that it had been recorded that the collector's success was such that he had collected over £3 from the team itself by such persistence on an occasion when no public were present.

Notes follow on the changes in existing dances and dances observed for the first time on this weekend.

THE SWAN - no change (NB see above - finish on Rds)

OLD GORDON - at the end of the ss movement, the dancers do not turn right on the final ss but keep facing out until they turn the easy way into the HH.

SEASIDE SHUFFLE - B t F and F t B were now initiated by the same dancers (1 and 2 then 3 and 4). As the set was inverted for B t F, the effect was of a movement started from the top (F t B) followed by one started from the bottom (B t F).

One DF(iv): the turn to face after the second UC was done in the air, turning 180° on the jump of that second UC.

MRS CASEY - There is no augmented music in this dance; consequently DF(iii) is 2 DC per couple, rather than the 4 DC originally noted. DF(iv) is 1 UC rather than the 2 originally noted.

OLD NUMBER FIVE - This dance had changed considerably. DF (i) is new. Face across; all dance ssr and ssl. Clap own hands in front twice, then right once to partner's right. Clap own hands in front twice then left once to partner's left. All dance HH and repeat.

DF(ii) :as DF(i) but 1 and 2 face down, and execute movement with 3 and 4 who face up. In the second half 3 and 4 face down and 1 and 2 face up for ss and clapping sequence. 5 and 6 face across.

DF(iii):as DF(ii) but 5 and 6 face up to 3 and 4 in first half and down to 3 and 4 in the second half. 1 and 2 face across.

DF(iv) :as DF(i).

NEW DANCES OBSERVED

BUNGALOW BILL (tune Banbury Bill) Corner Dance

Sequence OY, FU, DF(i), FtF, DF(ii), FtB, DF(i), BtF DF(ii), Rds

DF(i) :Corners in turn (1+6, then 2+5 then 3+4) dance 4ss in a circle, clockwise, to pass in centre and back to place, facing opposite corner on fourth ss. (NB 3+4 may dance round each other in a circle, if they wish) 2DC approaching opposite slightly, then 3bs and ftj back to place.

DF(ii) :Each corner does 4ss, as above, followed by 1UC, approaching opposite so that the jump is a challenge to reach higher than her/him.

BANKS OF THE SWERE (tune Fieldtown Banks of the Dee)

Arm clashing dance

Sequence OY, FU, DF, FtF, DF, FtB, DF, BtF, DF, Rds

DF :Face across. Clash inside right forearms, at the same time stamping right foot on the ground. Repeat with left arm and foot. R and L once more, then HH and repeat.

TEW'S THE DANCE (tune Fieldtown Glorishears) Circle Dance.

Sequence OY, DF(i), FU, DF(ii), Rds, DF(iii), FD, DF(iv), Rds.

FD (Foot Down) :as FU but facing away from music.

DF(i) :in order 1-6, each dancer, facing music, salutes music, then all do 4PC, turning out and round on the spot.

DF(ii) :facing corners, no.1 dances 2ss, no.6 does the same then 2, 5, 3, 4 in sequence. All do 4PC round on spot turning out.

DF(iii) :facing corners, 2DC in sequence as in DF(ii) (NB augmented music). 4PC as before.

DF(iv) :leapfrog : each 'leaper' does two walking steps, arms in low twists (as in UC), before leaping. Sequence is 1 over 2, 5 over 3, 4 over 6, 2 over 1, 3 over 5, 6 over 4. (i.e. as dancer in front goes over, the following one bends down).

4PC as before.

CAR PARK AND GARDEN (Tune Bledington Gallant Hussar)

Circle and Half Hey Dance

NB Music is ABA*BA* - i.e. augmented music is A

Sequence Rds(i), HH, HH, Rds(ii), HH, HH, Rds(iii).

There are no whole heys in the tradition.

The second and third figures are both HH and these immediately follow each other.

Rds(i) :ordinary Rds.

Rds(ii):4DC in Rounds, turning 180° right on 4th, then 3bs + Ftj. (NB there is time to complete the hop on the 4th DC before bs starts)

Rds(iii):2UC in round, turning 180° right on jump of 2nd UC, then 3bs + ftj.

PROCESSIONAL

I was fortunate to observe this in its full form and to learn its name.

TEW BY TEW (tune La Morrisque, Playford)

As many as will, in two columns. Walk to first A+B. Hand movements as for ss and DC respectively.

2nd A+B : dance 8 ss and 8 DC

3rd A+B : as 1st

4th A+B : dance 8ss and 4UC (NB start UC alternatively on R+L foot - R first)

Repeat as necessary.

I also witnessed the traditional farewell dance of the Duns Tew Morris.

TEW OFF (tune as in TEW BY TEW)

As many as will, in two columns

Sequence OY, FU, FtF, DF

OY :this dance is unusual in having a set pattern for OY. This consists of 6 walking steps backwards in set, before ft and hands over shoulders (1/2 A music). The dancers then wait to begin FU as normal.

DF :as in 1st and 3rd sequences of TEW BY TEW. Dance off.

21st June, 1987