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RD NOTES 1980

NOTES ABOUT THE SHERBORNE MORRIS

Should go in front of other 196

The major source of information about the Sherborne Morris was George Simpson, aged 60 about 1908, and living then in the village of Upton, near Didcot in Berkshire. George died about the first World War from cancer. George's younger brother James was visited by the Travelling Morrice on 26 June 1938 when living in retirement at Battledown, Cheltenham. He and his brother had both danced in the village but both left and joined the police force in Cheltenham. Fred Hamer said they changed their name for this for some reason now forgotten. George had done land measuring and carpentering. George Simpson said that William Harper of Sherborne used to play whittle and dub (pipe and tabor). Someone else told Cecil Sharp that "Jim the Laddy" (J. Hopkins) was pipe and taborer. Richard Pitts (not a morris dancer) told Clive Carey about 1913 that he remembered a Simpson as whistle and dub player. As Pitts, then aged 89, also talked of "young" Simpson the player was probably of an older generation. Pitts talked of dancers named Hedres, Hawker, Lambert and two brothers Kent, one called John as well as Simpson the player.

Before Sharp met Simpson, Mrs Hobbs, who did a lot of exploratory work in the Cotswolds, went to see Mrs James, widow of the man who taught Simpson. Mrs James regarded Fieldtown as Sherborne's greatest rivals. Sharp also saw Taylor, a pupil of Simpsons but they all agreed in Sherborne that Simpson was the best and that he could whistle the tunes. The Travelling Morrice in June 1924 met Albert Townsend and collected the tune and some words for a dance for 4 men to Highland Mary. Mr Charles Taylor of the Oddington side danced some of this to the Travelling Morrice using the Sherborne step and both he and Townsend said that it was danced very much as I'll Go and Enlist for a Sailor. Russell Wortley and H. Albino met Thomas Pitts, an old Sherborne dancer, then aged about 80, at Eastleach before the last war and obtained some tunes. His photo is on the cover of Old Cotswold Photographs by Viner of the Cirencester museum. Sharp was told that the morris was given up about 1853 - this is a little early for George Simpson's age and the dancers that were met between the wars. Richard Pitt told Carey it was given up about 1883 which for the same reason appears a little late. A date like 1873 would be consistent with George Simpson having a pupil.

The Sherborne side danced on and off for 5 weeks at Whitsuntide, going out all day for miles around. Places like Shipton under Wyckwood and Milton were mentioned. That was the regular outing for the year except for special fetes. They were always in Sherborne on Whit Tuesday

Dress: Billy Cock hat trimmed all over with ribbons (square high hat)
White pleated shirts - pleated all over. As said to be "slashed with coloured ribbons" ribbons must have been inserted into the pleats so that the colours showed when the pleats opened during dancing.
Diagonal sash said Simpson, but Mrs James spoke of baldrick ribbons.
White knee breeches, which were later discarded for white trousers. They attached the bells to one of the knee buckles.
Bell pads had 25 bells on each leg - in 5 straps with 5 bells on each strap. The large bells were put at the corners (even then 3d each) and smaller ones in between of different sizes and mixed together. Straps of red braid crossed at the back of the leg. Mrs Hobbs borrowed a set for Sharp to copy.
Originally blue stockings and later white.
Handkerchiefs were tied with a reeving knot to the little fingers to leave hands free to clap. Some attached them to their shirt cuff.

Foot: he wore a round jacket with tassels. He had the letters "T.F." on his back standing for Tom Fool. He wore a brewers cap with long tassel hanging down his arm.

William Hathaway told Sharp at Cheltenham at Easter 1908 that Sherborne was a desperate morris place!

George Simpson said that they always had a cake and sword borne in front.

Sticks: 18 in long, rather less than 1 in diameter and painted red, white and blue in spiral bands $\frac{1}{2}$ in wide like a barber's pole.

They danced onto ground in single file, then round the enclosure, finally forming up for dance. In going off they did the same but in a serpentine fashion. In both coming and going they made their obedience "by pulling the forelock". Made rather slowly and ceremonially by a wide circular movement forwards of the arm - when the hand reaches the forehead, the head is ducked down upon it.