

## **BEGINNERS & MORRIS BASICS WORKSHOP**

The origin of this material was a workshop for Cotswold morris beginners at Sidmouth. The time available was insufficient directly to produce good dancing, but it did allow of explaining what they were trying to achieve.

**To the “Experienced” Leader** - If you do not work consciously on “dance” technique yourself or perhaps do not even know what this means, then you might not be well equipped to teach others who have difficulties, and you may be passing on bad practices and even creating confusion. It is therefore a potential handicap for a foreman not to have available analyses of the objectives, emphases, stresses and timings of movements, and to be entirely dependent on just “showing” what to do.

The normal club environment approach to beginners can take two or three years to develop a proficient Cotswold dancer, but better training methods based on a greater understanding could speed this up. However like in many sports, some degree of fitness and experience should be developed as well.

## **WHILE STANDING**

**Beginners** - Other dance specialities expect to explain the whys and wherefores of their technique to participants, but this is not so currently in the folk dance world. The “traditional process” is claimed, but it supposes that locally there exist the good dancers on which to model. Although it can and has worked as a club policy, it is risky and it is often used as an easy option or as a cloak for inexperience or, at worst, ignorance.

Cotswold Morris is not disciplined in the same manner as the North West Morris. Its characteristic allows greater personal expression through the dance movements. The beginner needs to be helped to develop a mix of body control (motor skills), and expression through action, and to learn the techniques of recognising and remembering movement sequences.

The first problem for a teacher is in seeing what is being taught from the beginners point of view. The training needs to have exercises that give the beginner a vocabulary of actions and words to which they can relate their attempts at the movements.

It is often forgotten by the more experienced dancer that beginners have a problem with the jargon, and with both the observation and perception of movements, so that they do not remember what they have been shown after a while without some reinforcement, say by extra description or explanation. In particular they are confused by the unspoken differences between nominally similar movements within dances, let alone those between ‘traditions’. But the teaching techniques used need to avoid the risk of being bored or lost by too much talk.

We can only learn ‘what-we-almost-know’, therefore we must build from existing experience, learning and adding one thing at a time, trying to build up relevant movement habits, not just by saying it once, but through using sequences that can act as a continual reminder.

It is important to present visual images to learners, reinforced with words. I think that part of the general learning problem of translating the words heard into movement is due to the two halves of the brain, with their different skills, having to communicate across their boundary. Another trick of focussing attention onto the key elements came from Douglas Kennedy who always spoke of the need to present new movements both in “close-up” (detail) and in “long-shot” (overall impression\_.

**Warning** - We perceive our own movements on a different basis from how the apparently same movements look when done by others. One's own gestures are often much smaller and jerkier than we imagine. Actors on the stage theatrically exaggerate every day gestures to make them appear normal when under the undivided scrutiny of an audience. It is noticeable that people can appear physically "larger than life" when being closely followed, one is often surprised to find how small performers are "in real life". Actors are also trained to observe accurately and to replicate what they are shown when in "close-up", as on the TV or the films, but ordinary people unfortunately copy with a significantly smaller movement. A common personal experience that has occurred when teaching the Longborough high hand waves, actually a wrist movement, but often dancers move their hands to follow the motion appropriate to the handkerchiefs, showing that there is a mental image or movement analysis problem. Over a number of generations of foremen the quality of movements within a club can degrade very noticeably. It is good to work sometimes in front of a big mirror, ideally in a dance studio, but deep office or school windows can be adequate substitutes.

This note is written in the form of a workshop in which dancers try the movements as they are discussed, in order to appreciate the points being examined. Such a workshop should start by recognising that there will be potential anatomical problems, leading to aches, pains and stiffnesses, that can or may have already arisen, eg from the dancers' slight faults in physique, say because of small dimensional differences between each leg.

**Feet** - Walk around to get the feel of normal 'pronation', the natural inward rocking motion, as the foot rotates from heel to toe. One can tell if the movement is abnormal by examining the worn edges of heels or soles for evidence of any over-compensating action. 'Orthics', a form of shoe insert, are available commercially for the correction of anatomical faults, eg to straighten joints.

**The Turn Out** of the feet when standing is a part of the old style of movement, which remained fashionable for 300 years. In this sense the morris can be a museum! It can have significance - McCorquadales in the Wembley Olympics in London 1948, missed a medal in the 100 yds by less than a yard, experts said because of the distance lost by his foot turn out whilst running. Also in this 17th century style there was the swaggering swing of the leg when moving either forward or back, which action allowed room for the wearing of fancy boots with lace tops etc. The movement is still inherent in the morris backstep of several of the village traditions.

**Stretching and Warm-Up** - For both achieving the freedom of movement and the avoidance of injury, it is very desirable to start with a stretching and warm up activity. Not a vigorous warm up, one should still be able to talk naturally to a neighbour whilst doing it. One should also include a short warm down at the end of a dance period to avoid subsequent stiffness, to remain feeling invigorated and not exhausted.

Beginners tend to tense all their muscles, so they exhaust easily. Their new movements are achieved by counterbalancing muscular forces, and this is not the same as a normal control of movement. We should work to avoid this tightness by "loosening up" the actions and relaxing the inessential muscles, but this requires building confidence. Such an approach produces a visible difference in the movements, which is the 'body language' by which we can recognise "experience" in a dancer.

## **UPS & DOWNS**

**Vertical Jump** - Just try making one without using the major thigh muscles. The attempt demonstrates the need for an initial bend of the knees, the "plié", an action once considered so basic that it was simply called "the movement". Most of the effort and hence the velocity into a jump comes from using the big muscles in the thighs. The maximum height reached is helped by a rolling up on the toes with a full extension of the foot, as the rise comes from this roll-up plus the body's velocity that has been achieved when finally

leaving contact with the ground. That part of the height gained in the air is severely limited by gravity, which pulls one down rather rapidly, so that the actual time out of contact with the ground is rather short. If the use of foot extension on the rise is deliberately limited, then it may not be being used by the dancer at the landing. The risk on landing is then that of jarring the leg joints, leading in the long term to the damage of cartilage and ligaments. The number of “g”s experienced in this can be as high as three. One can practice avoiding slapping the ground by practicing landing quietly in a short series of jumps.

The apparent achieved height is partly an illusion. An audience sees the total body/head rise and fall, including the drop while in contact with the ground before and after the jump, which will be to below the normal standing upright starting posture position. The clearance off the ground is exaggerated by the bending and lifting of the legs.

**Jump** - To explore the use of the arms, first swing them up together while jumping, from having the hands just behind the hips, till they are well up in front of the body and higher than the head. The opposite, of a swing down during the jump, feels quite different and less height is managed - more appropriate to a standing long jump! Incidentally this used to be a Much Wenlock Olympic (the heir to Dover’s Cotswold Olympic Games at Dover’s Hill, Chipping Campden) as well an early Modern Olympiad event.

What is role of the arms? After all, all control is ultimately only through contact with the ground. How does this small mass effect the amount and quality of movement? It is a dynamic effect. One major interaction comes with the swing up of the arms, the total force (reaction) onto (from) the ground is increased while the arms accelerate, and the body leaves the ground with more total momentum, ie velocity.

Once off the ground the path of the body’s centre of gravity is determined. All that can be varied is the relative position of the body’s parts to it. Remember also for later that half the time off the ground is spent in the upper quarter of the trajectory (near apogee, if one is a space freak!). For achieving the maximum height, as measured by the head’s rise in the jump, one must bring down (decelerate) the arms before reaching the top of the leap. The additional ‘apparent’ height comes from the downward shift of the overall centre of gravity relative to the head.

For the appearance of a higher jump, it can be made to appear to last longer by holding the ‘pose’ instead of wriggling the body and arms till the toes are touching the ground again and one is starting into the plié, a trick that can be seen to be used in the ballet. Gravity does not allow one to actually float!

There is a team problem which arises from aiming to get people of different sizes to appear to bob up and down together. It is easy for shorter people just to rise less, whereas all should rise the same. Therefore a consensus has to be found on the height to be reached while extending the foot. Shorter footed people have to work harder! A useful practice technique is to form a circle facing inwards, with each dancers arms extended sideways so that their hands are resting on their neighbours’ shoulders. They can then be sensitive to relative height and timing differences as they dance together. For the convenience of making progress in a workshop the leader should mix the experience in a set but aim for groups of similar heights. They have to be told of the problem with a greater mix. The togetherness is what makes kolos and other ethnic and historical chain dances so exciting even when very simple in content.

There is a naming problem that can confuse beginners because “jump” is used variously to mean the take-off, the movement from take-off to landing and the just the landing. Often morris dance notations will refer to a “step-&-jump” meaning a jumping off of a step and then landing. If it ends “feet-together” it means landing on both feet, placed side-by-side (1st position\_.

**Posture** is important and it is visible all the time to the audience, not just while dancing. They see the implied 'body language' and it should say "eager". At rest one should be upright with a stretched not slumped neck and be balanced on the balls of the feet. Bringing the weight back onto the heels for a 'rest' introduces the problem of achieving snappy acceleration or 'drive' into the next move, because one is no longer 'poised'. The overall impression then looks slack and suggests sloppy morris.

There is the issue of the best height for heels on shoes, as yet unresolved. The optimum position for the foot is with its heel just off the ground and this is reflected in shoe design. But shoe heels reduce the flexure available at the ankle joint. In England there is commonly a difference in the choice of shoe heels between the sexes. Heels reduce the height achievable. Most European folk dancers favour a very light weight dance shoe, equivalent to those used by the Scots, with little or no heel - but one must remember that the Bluebell Girls, Can-Can dancers and hoofers like Ginger Rogers could achieve quite a lot on high heels! It is important to practice in similar shoes to those used to dance out.

A rigid torso seems characteristic of the Cotswold morris. There are traditionally few flexible movements of the body other than a twist about the near vertical with some of the 'side steps'.

**Turns** - To examine the significance of 'roll inertia', start with some non-travelling jumps, and try simple jumps (start with a 180° turn, to end facing the opposite way). First keep the arms down at one's sides for a few jumps, then to keep them fully extended out to the side for some more, (both are hard work, showing that the arms actually do have a role), then finally draw them in while turning, usually one finds that one overshoots! Normally arms are used quite naturally, ie without conscious effort, to control the turn and landing, including an initial wrap of the arms in the opposite sense to the turn. Such arm control to compensate for ground friction in a turn while in continual ground contact should be part of the morris man's technique for performing galleys and hooks.

Keep the body straight in a jump. Of course one must thrust up through one's centre of gravity to avoid tumbling in the air, but this does not mean sticking the stomach out or arching the back. Such body movement is ugly, and, while having no ground contact, is difficult to control, as well as being a significant contributor to injuries. Aerial contortions go with gymnastics, high diving and tumbling to music, but not with the morris!

Although small the head is a mass that significantly affects the dynamics of one's body movements. One action to avoid carefully is the drooping of it during a jump. Get someone to watch what you do. Stretching the neck up and looking forward would look much better, and is a fundamental tenet of the Alexander techniques for better health.

**"Spotting"** is a technique for obtaining stability in a horizontal rotation. Fix the eyes on a distant point and let the head initially lag the turn, then snap the neck round, say to the final direction if doing a 180° turn. Surprisingly, one is less likely to sway in the turn. It must be something to do with the role of the inner ear in providing an attitude reference. Conventional dance pirouettes, ie turns with foot-to-ground contact, are not part of the Cotswold morris. The equivalent turns are the galleys and hooks.

**Breath** - This should be 'abdominal' with an outward stomach movement, not pulled in as one breathes in, as this leads to 'stitch', because then the diaphragm is working the wrong way. The pain is actually the muscle spasms. To avoid it, it helps to take some deep breaths before starting, these also assist both poise and readiness. Actors use this technique to control their nerves before stage entries. Once a woman at a workshop concentrated so hard that she did not breathe at all during a dance, she went blue and had to be taken to a hospital for some oxygen treatment to ensure recovery!

**Timing** - We go back to the jump to bring more of the elements together and illustrate by trying the 'up-&-out' Longborough type arm movements. Start with the elbows bent at right angles, the upper arms almost horizontal and out at the side of the body, and with the hands out by the sides of the head at ear level. Raise the hands up, straightening the arms and opening them out during the jump, to end, on the landing, with both the arms horizontal and out to the side of the body.

Where does the beat of the music come in a jump? Certainly to just touch down on landing on the beat - but when on the take off? Surely not as one loses contact with the ground? The note of the music is of necessity of finite length as it has to be heard, the "beat" is the maximum stress perceived at its leading edge. The maximum physical and musical effort is on the beat, but a full movement is across the beats, hence the physical and psychological appeal of dance as a form of self expression. To get the effort timed accurately there must be anticipatory preparatory effort. Jumps need preparation, they need time to accelerate the body, and, as a jump is usually longer in the air than a step, the musician often stretches the music to suit (and of course never catches up again!).

Jumps (and turns) on the move require consideration of additional technical points about the appropriate body tilts to be used. These are dynamic situations requiring a more subtle understanding of motion. A forward drive into a travelling movement comes from being off balance, thus one should land from a jump leaning into the direction in which one wants to move off.

The initial emphasis so far has been on jumping because it leads to a desired style for the 'morris stepping'.

### TRAVELLING

The movement possibilities are determined by the floor surface and the Cotswold Morris follows the style of stepping that was first developed at the Renaissance. James Burke's TV series and his book "Connections" discussed the change in building style following a worsening of the average weather in the early Middle Ages and the consequential appearance of flatter floors as social life moved indoors. Before the change, the most available flat surfaces were the barn threshing floors, realistic for community social dancing as the surface has to be consolidated, but not for ritual dancing.

Unfortunately there is another naming problem as "Step" is used colloquially both for a single movement and for a sequence of them.

**Step** - The basic movement is a quick change from the weight on one foot to onto the other. The style was described in the earliest dancing books and was not a knee lifting like the medieval 'clod-hopping'. The knee lift that is typical of the traditional English country dancing and other seasonal dance traditions presumably developed to avoid physical contact with partners and neighbours on small crowded dance floors. Start by standing on the ball of **one** foot with the other in the air, about the length of the foot in front of the supporting foot. The free foot is kept about horizontal and relaxed during the movement and neither curled up ('Turkish Harem') or pointed down ('Schoolgirl Ballet'). Really it is irrelevant to practice stepping on one spot as one is seldom dancing without travelling, and then only with some special emphasis. A little thought will show that real movement sequences involving stepping usually start from jumps or otherwise having the feet together, but this introduces complication at a first teaching of the steps which can be avoided. Although it is natural to start practicing with very little lift, the early development of a reasonable amount of spring in the step is essential. It puts the meaning into the phrase 'weak-kneed'!

In the Cotswold Morris it is customary to have the musician play a 4 or 8 bar phrase as a 'Once-to-Yourself' before starting to dance. It focuses the dancers attention, captures the audience and allows the team to check and absorb the speed and rhythm. I like it long for workshops but short for public performances. Practice in a club as you intend to perform out.

**6/8 Jig Time** - Begin with two “steps” per bar (almost capers, which are the same action as a ‘step’ but with a greater lift and a more exaggerated arm movement) - also start off from standing on one foot. To keep them ‘symmetrical’, ie with equal effort off each foot, start by accompanying them using circular waves of both arms, at one per step, with the stress or emphasis on the upward rise or “lift”. “Up” in a step or a spring takes longer than “Down” due to the directionality of the effect of gravity. The tune’s rhythm is important. Compare a jig in 6/8 with a hornpipe in 4/4. There is less life in dancing the latter as the more even rhythm constrains the body rise that is possible. True polkas, as distinct from polka tunes played as hornpipes, have an irregular rhythm (they fit the clog morris polka well) and are best avoided with beginners, because they induce bad dance habits. Marches in 2/4 or 6/8 have a different feel yet again.

What is a good morris tune? It needs to be able to be played to fit the effort profile of the movement sequence, in particular to stress the lift on the first beats, and not effort on the off-beat. Modern tunes do not lend themselves to matching this movement characteristic.

The traditions surviving into the 20th century have acquired an off-beat emphasis, with a strong movement on the weak beats (in practice this is a rhythm originally called a Schottische). Although no Ragtime or subsequent popular musical style has stuck with the morris (ignoring some individual and limited examples eg **Eclectic Morris**). It has led to the villages teaching a basic single step with a foot lift up and a kick forward style, which is not the classical stepping style recognised by Sharp that has been introduced here.

The jig rhythm encourages hops. Starting from the simple capers, put in the hops, still keeping the action symmetrical with each free foot travelling forward the same distance and the body rise being the same off of either foot. The drive is off the ball of the foot, just as for the jumps.

Look out of a window and watch the relative motion of the horizontal frame or bars against the scene as an indication of ones own body motion. There are 4 rises per bar, the first and third are larger than the second and fourth. Hence these main beats are called the “**Strong**” and those in between the “**Weak**” beats.

To get a feel of the meaning of differences between “traditions” and of the problems facing beginners, try this simple stepping with appropriately different arm movements.

- |                               |  |                    |
|-------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| 1. <b>Down &amp; Up</b>       | both arms in parallel,<br>in vertical plane                | (Hinton)           |
| 2. <b>Alternate Arms</b>      | as in exaggerated walking                                  | (Chipping Campden) |
| 3. <b>Forward Flick</b>       | of both hands together                                     | (Bampton)          |
| 4. <b>Low Circular Waves</b>  | forward facing, at side,<br>in vertical plane at hip level | (Brackley)         |
| 5. <b>High Circular Waves</b> | at mid chest level<br>in vertical plane                    | (Badby)            |

Note the feeling of a “help” on the **UP** part of the arm movement. Thus the character of the movement as perceived by the new dancer will depend on the tradition being taught.

**Arming Sequence** - Do it first without stepping but simulating the body bounce. Beginners can have a problem of coordinating arm, leg and body movements new to them so there is some value in a little practice of these separately. Because of the additional problem of stepping and arming coordination, practice arm sequences alone for a while to obtain the flow, but not for too long, as they are slightly modified by the body actions when actually stepping. Note that there is an opinion that good dancers would not move their hands in front of their face as this would cover an important informative part of the image being presented to the audience.

**A Left Foot Lead** is of medieval origin. Then they danced in a linked curved line and moved first to the left and then to the right. To go with the sun was lucky, to start to windershins, as supposedly did witches, was not. The left foot lead, as with the military march, is natural because it allows a thrust off of the nominally stronger right foot to get moving smartly.

Left handed people are at a little disadvantage in the morris. Some such dancers can be slower at picking up directional calls. The major problem of course is with using the right hand for holding and manipulating sticks.

Form a set of 6 dancers, in two files of 3, numbered 1, 3, 5 (the “odds”) in the left hand column, and 2, 4, 6 (the “evens”) in the right, as facing “up” towards the music.

Perhaps a word is needed about the morris compass. “Up” is towards the musician who conventionally stands at the “top” end of the set which has already been defined as by dancers numbers 1 and 2. “Down” is the other way, towards the “bottom” of the set. Confusingly “Up-and-Down” are also used for arm movements. Facing one’s opposite is “in” or “across the set”, and turns in that direction are “inward”. The contrary is “out” and the turning is “outward”.

Attempt dancing something very simple but illustrative, deriving here from Chipping Campden’s “Constant Billy”. The following is a condensed dance description. For a better understanding of the terminology, try consulting the Morris Federation’s published “Glossary of Terms”.

Face one’s opposite across the set for the playing of a “Once To Yourself”, then in th last bar jump and turn 90° in the air to face left, odds facing up, and evens facing down. The whole set dance a complete “whole rounds” clockwise in 8 bars, ending as at the start by facing across the set, and continuing by approaching one’s opposite in 4 more bars, ending the move with a jump to stand with one’s feet together side by side, and facing one’s opposite. Now clap hands with the opposite dance as described below, then dance past one’s opposite, passing by the left shoulder. Turn to the right in the opposite’s starting place to face back and approach again etc. Repeat the crossing and clapping a few times, then end the dance with the “whole rounds” figure again.

(The Clapping is,  
bar 1 both own hands together in front of one’s chest, partners clap r+r,  
bar 2 both own hands together again, partners clap l+l,  
bar 3 both own hands, clap both own hands together behind one’s back,  
bar 4 both own hands together, finally r+l & l+r simultaneously  
: in the obvious but brief notation used by Sharp and Bacon)

**6/8 Double Step** - This is 3 quick changes and a hop, “**1 2 3 hop**”, with the ‘lift’ on the hop. The broken rhythm ensures an unequal rise on the 4 movements. Lack of thought can lead to an uneven forward kick - it needs to be an equal distance with either foot. The ‘correct’ travel forward was once a bone of contention in the national press between rival collectors!

There are “Double” and “Single” steps, the terminology comes from Tudor times when they were called a double and a single (or simple).

For the Single step the lead (first strong beat of each bar) is always off the same foot through a musical phrase. For the Double there is a changing, ie alternating, lead.

The double step in 4/4 feels different to that in 6/8. There are several rhythms conventionally given a 4/4 (or 2/4) signature - often called schottisches, hornpipes, rants, polkas, measures or marches. Each produces a different feel to the dance movements, once the dancer is sensitive to them, because of the differing time constraints on the "lift" that is possible in the stepping. The simple rhythm is not precise because Morris musicians typically stretch the melody's rhythm to better fit the morris movements. The exercise above should be repeated with the same set of arm movements. The alternate arm swinging is difficult to fit to double steps!

One of our difficulties is that we assume that the morris is usually danced with a classic form of the double or single steps and for many traditions this has to do by default of better knowledge. Unfortunately where we know something of the manner of performance and of its local teaching there does appear significant variation.

For single stepping ("hops") :

- Bampton** : lift foot upwards, then kick forward and down off the top of the lift, and the bells ring twice on the off beat at the acceleration and deceleration of the lower leg - "pedalling".
- Campden** : ditto but a longer forward thrust of the free leg and aiming at only one ring of the bells giving a very "broken" rhythm.
- Bidford** : the first move is a kick forward, then a lift as the foot is brought back - "back-pedalling".
- Headington** : leg kept fairly straight throughout, movement made quickly and the posture held for the hop.

The contrast with other seasonal custom styles can be emphasised, eg the Flamborough Long Sword and some Border styles with their high knee lift and no kick forward, and the common current Border interpretation of drawing the free foot back so that the kick forward hardly passes the supporting leg.

The short time out of contact from the ground reflects the power of gravity, therefore one should fully exploit using the foot extension and the initial and final bend at the knee to control height and speed. The question of speed of the dance coupled with achievable stepping height is a matter of the physical effort level that can be maintained.

There is a problem in persuading most people of the degree of effort involved in performing the morris.

**Fitness** - This consists of three elements, stamina, flexibility and strength. Most of us are not physically fit! Something more than a once a week session is considered by experts to be necessary to achieve and maintain a modest level of general fitness (three 20 minutes sessions is often recommended). How many people have the time or the inclination to exercise vigorously three times a week? Only the committed few. But you can not store up fitness, if you stop exercising the benefits gradually disappear. The typical once weekly morris practice therefore is inadequate on its own. Other sessions of perhaps different physical activity (not exercise) should be added, such as brisk walks, swimming, cycling etc. It is important that you feel good afterwards so that it is kept up. You may of course have specific needs which may have to be met by an organised training schedule. Given our national lethargy, few people are at risk of doing too much!

There should be a concern for the state of balance of the muscles that resist gravity. The back and leg muscles develop with dancing, therefore the opposite muscles need strengthening - the abdominal (eases back pain), the thigh area (eases knee pain) and the shin area (eases shin splints).



“**Shin Splints**” is a common complaint and it arises from abnormal strain and stress on the muscles and tendons that lift the forefoot, control the toes, and absorb shock and stabilise the foot during foot plant on the floor. Often the condition comes from being unused to being on the balls of the feet, or from overstriding, from tension during the foot swing, leaning forward or not having well cushioned shoes, ie dancing on too hard a floor for the footwear. Even experienced dancers have this condition when they dramatically increase their activity or develop muscle imbalance.

There are several alleviating actions that might be taken. Wearing thicker soled shoes, not slapping the floor with the foot sole, having a more upright posture, and relaxing the free foot when it is out of contact with the ground. Alternatively, or additionally, using stretching exercises for the calf, hamstring and Achilles tendon, exercising by lifting objects with the toes, and checking that clothing is not too tight around the legs eg from elastic bands or bell pads (or practicing in unsuitable jeans or other tight clothing).

The pain could be an indication of a more major condition so it must be taken seriously. The major clue is the time it takes to subside. The worst condition needs an operation within hours for complete recovery!

**Actions on Injury** - The best advice is, if it hurts, its telling you!

Strains and sprains are best dealt with immediately by ice packs (even the commercial equivalent of frozen pea packets), and blisters by puncture and plasters, but not by removal of the skin.

At a guess, of all the sports, Cotswold Morris has an affinity with Basketball, because of the turns in the running and jumping and hence a similarity of rotational stress on joints and muscles not so usual in other sports. More examination of the relevant experience in other sports could be done to the advantage of understanding the physical problems associated with the morris eg footwear, types of injury, and fitness training. Athletic shoes are often designed with jogging movements in mind, with cushioning of the heel which takes the impact in gentle running, rather than any cushioning of the ball of the foot that takes the battering in the morris.

**A Sequence of Steps** should be seen and practiced as the basic unit of movement. It involves integrating the jump and usually significantly different forward and back steps.

Try a simple “Princess Royal”, a very basic jig but from no village in particular. It is best learnt by following someone demonstrating it.

The order is Foot-Up, Jig, Plain Capers, Jig, Slow Capers, and a final Jig, using the conventional terms for the steps and sections of the dance.

- Foot-Up** = 6 double steps, 2 single steps used as backsteps and a jump, landing feet together.
- Jig** = long open sidestep to the left (2 bars) and to the right (2 bars), 2 double steps on the spot, “cross stepping” for 2 bars, left foot crossed over right, both apart and crossed again, then pause for a beat. In reverse, right foot crossed over left, apart and cross again and pause. 2 double steps on the spot, 2 single steps as backsteps and a jump (12 bars in all).
- Plain Capers** =8 Plain Capers on the spot, 2 double steps, 2 single steps as backsteps and a jump.
- Slow Capers** =4 slows to the same tune but played somewhat slower for the first 4 bars. Cross the feet, first the left in front, then the right in front, bring the feet together and jump forward, landing with both feet together. This is done 4 times etc, with arm

movements corresponding to the feet : 'out to side', 'keep out', 'up-and-over' to 'out' again.

The angle between the feet, when the heels are close together and the toes apart, has to be sufficient to allow twisting of the individual feet on the balls, so that the heel of the foot being twisted inward can clear the other supporting foot. In the classical ballet the customary turn out is very large and it needs a training from an early age to achieve the joint mobility. In Old Tyme dancing it is 90° (originally perhaps to avoid treading on the hems of long dresses), and this was normal in social dancing till an English Modern Ballroom dance committee, led by Victor Silvester in the early 1920's, decided on a parallel stance. In the morris the turn out matters in some sidesteps and backsteps but not necessarily during the basic "stepping". The turn-out looks particularly 'tidy' when standing still.

**Backstep** - A similar body movement to that in the ordinary stepping but with different emphases. The rise is much less and there is a stronger sink down. This applies even to the accompanying waves of the arms. One should now attempt the Fieldtown basic stepping and arming sequence with the figure of eight path wave of the hands during the backsteps of "out-in-out".

**Capers** - The next energetic step to be met is the caper from one foot to the other. The Cotswold tradition is distinguished from others as having dances with 'jumps and capers'. From one point of view a simple caper can be thought of as arising out of the basic 'double-step' when one individual step is so strong that it is not followed by a step or hop on the next weak beat. A series of these energetic changes are called plain capers. If after landing on the other foot, the caper is followed by a hop on that same foot, then the sequence is called a **Half Caper**, or sometimes a Spring Caper, and during a sequence of them the lead is always off with the same foot. If it is followed by a change of step it is called a **Furrie or Furry** and during a sequence of them the lead off is off of alternate feet. Capers off and onto the same foot are seldom met in the Cotswold Morris.

The choice of the accompanying arm movements to be used with the plain or half capers, eg "up-and-down" or "down-and-up", affects the stress, feel, and appearance of the movement.

**Double Step Sequences** - In a finer analysis each individual step has a different subtle emphasis. For example to incorporate the travelling, one must accelerate, move, decelerate, stop, reverse, etc. finally stopping again. The body rotates and leans forward and backwards as a function of the needed acceleration and deceleration, particularly during the backstep and jump. The body slopes to move, using gravity again, to move one's centre of gravity forward, then one moves the feet to stop falling over, the same principle as satellites in the earth's gravity field. Some authorities say that one should lean forward during a backstep which is never a rushing movement and does not need the same degree of drive, but does need the preparation for the final jump.

One needs to note again the rotation of the body in the air to prepare for moving off from a jump, often a difficult point to appreciate. Be aware of landing a foot's length behind the stationary position. This allows a snappy move off. Practice by standing with the heels against a line on the floor and on the jump land with the toes against that same line (the feet now being entirely on the other side).

## THE REST

Let us end the exercises described by trying a Longborough style sidestep dance. The dance is constructed of 4 figures, each followed by the same chorus. For this workshop, the figures are danced with a 4 bar stepping sequence which is essentially the same, other than being a mirror image, for both halves of the figures. The sequence is a double step and a jump moving forwards, then backsteps (or single steps), and another jump moving back.

The figures are,

**Foot up** - all face “up”.  
After the Once to Yourself, dance the defined sequence, turning “outwards”, away from one’s opposite, to face “down” on the second jump. Repeat the sequence facing down, but turning “inwards”, the ‘easy way’, on the second jump, to face one’s opposite.

**Half Gip** - all face across set. Dance past each other, passing right shoulders and then retire backwards to place along the same path, then repeat to the other side of one’s opposite passing left shoulders.

**Back-to-Back** - as half-gip, but having passed one’s opposite, move behind them to be able to retire backwards passing the other shoulder. Repeat going past the other shoulder.

**Whole Gip** - as back-to-back, but on the first jump, turn to face back across the set, then single step forwards, passing by the same shoulder, to the jump to face across again. Repeat in the reverse direction.

Each chorus is a sidestep sequence followed by a half hey that inverts the order of the dancers in the set, which sequence is then repeated to bring all the dancers back to where they started the chorus.

**Sidestep** - It is probable that each village had its own interpretation of this “step” sequence. The feet could be crossed or apart, the body turned a little or a lot, with one arm or two in use, and the handkerchief action be at different levels and of the various types often based on wrist actions. The sidestep can be long (2 bars) or a mixture of sidesteps, double steps and jumps. For Longborough the turn out of feet is maintained throughout the sidestep. The feet are crossed over with the heel of the leading foot close to the toe of the rear one, and the body is turned about 30-45° following the direction of the crossing of the feet. The leading arm only is raised, and this fairly straight up past the ear. Like in all Cotswold traditions, the sidestep should be performed very energetically. For this practice cross the feet for one bar, dance a double step straight, cross the feet the other way, and dance another straight double.

The traditional Cotswold morris does not have movements that “drive” the body into the floor. However many sides teach sidesteps with a pronounced dip in the arm wave and with the body. People have to make up their own mind as to what is acceptable within their own team’s performance.

In the **Half Hey** the opposite dancers work in pairs. It is described in sequence but performed simultaneously. The top pair turn out and dance down the side of the set to the bottom place. They must turn and come down the set quickly such that the jump in the second bar can be made travelling sideways. The stepping in the third bar is a galley, not backsteps, with the dancers rotating and moving out to the final place. At the same time the middle pair follow the top pair, in the first half hey moving to the top of the set, but turning out quickly so that the jump can be back to where they started. The middles should leave just enough space between themselves and the tops to let the bottoms pass through. The bottoms face down and turn out to come up to the top, going behind the tops, but in passing front of the middles.

Diagonal lines in body actions are more interesting to watch than verticals. The recent drift to vertical arm/hand movements in developing new traditions can only be justified in terms of appearing different rather than in being artistically better. Be conscious of leading sidestep hand movements with the wrist, also control the direction of the eyes which often affects posture, particularly of the head. The smile is an important visual with many gradations of interpretation by the audience, so it must appear genuine and not forced.

Work now with an experienced dancer if possible on examples of the various side step arm gestures from Cotswold traditions. The similarities and differences must be pointed out.

**Mechanics of Movement** - These are often not at all simple, for example consider what happens in high diving competition, tumbling and the landing of a falling cat. We have met the effect of arms in jumps and roll inertia in a jump and turn. Drive in the galley or hook comes from reducing the roll inertia during the rotation. By starting with the arms extended, the body tilted into the turn, and the upper part of the free leg raised, the roll inertia can be 4 times that when the body is vertical and with the arms at the sides. As the dancer turns the arms are brought in, the body made more vertical and the free leg lowered. The lower part of the free leg is twisted once or twice in the turn and this motion can be used to help the dancer to turn. Of course different villages had different detail in their ways of performing this movement.

## ALL IN

**Long and Short People** - Traditionally teams were lucky if they had 6 good dancers, they were often pleased to have 3 to put on one side (nearest the audience). Such teams perhaps encouraged a spread in individual performance which covered the unavoidable lack of uniformity. Disparity is a problem. As dancers work primarily in pairs, matching within the pairs is an obvious possibility. The proper dimensions of a set reflect the average dancer's size with typical fingertip-to-fingertip separation in both directions. Consequently short people have to scamper around and long people can amble.

**Men and/or Women** - There are obvious physical differences, in average height and body weight distribution and physical strength, but the major effect in mixed sets is of the women's smaller feet, for the same overall height, making matching of the shape of the vertical movement difficult. There are also differences in postures and positioning between the sexes ('body language' again). Women can have a lower self-esteem, which shows up in behaviour during public performance and in weak stick handling. Awareness of the problems can lead to corrective action to overcome all such consequences which are mostly cultural and not physical.

**Team Issues** - There are concerns that arise from being in a team. For example there is the rhythm, speed and togetherness of the stick tapping. Sticking choruses seem to have the problem of achieving acceleration into the next movement, dancers often forget to be up on their toes and to make a preparatory lift into the "off". The musician needs to allow "space" in the tune for the dancers to pick up speed.

Many sides let themselves down with their exits and entries, and even as they prepare for 'Once-to-Yourself' before the dance starts, but also in the manner in which they behave immediately after 'all-in' or 'all-up' at the end of a dance. This is not a point that can be addressed casually. The problem starts with sloppy discipline in the practice room which is carried over to public performance because no one stops to think that it is inadequate. Remember to practice all that has to be done when out, all the time, so that good behaviour becomes the norm.

**Dance is Style** - Remember the importance of body language and be aware of being on 'stage' and visible all the time.

The details of style are "personal" as well as "club" and will need a direct one-to-one working out between the beginner and their teacher. Dancers have to learn to spread the physical effort over all the muscles, using the shoulders and back as well as the arms and legs. The similarity is with the professional craftsman, eg like a carpenter working with a plane.

There is no substitute for observing other morris dancers and sides critically both for the lessons on their good and their bad points. Much can be learnt from recognising what is wrong about other performances!

Many of the points made here in detail are incorporated in brief into other single tradition descriptions by the author.