

MORRIS BASICS WORKSHOP & BEGINNERS

WHY

The origin of this material was a workshop for morris beginners at Sidmouth. The time available was naturally insufficient to produce good dancing, but it did allow of explaining what they were trying to achieve. This note is intended as the basis of a group workshop or a solo workout in which dancers try the movements as they are discussed, in order to appreciate the points being examined. The vision is of a lively and energetic dance.

To the “Experienced” Leader - If you do not work explicitly on “dance” technique yourself or perhaps are not even sure what this means, then you may not be as well equipped to teach others as you think, and you may be passing on bad practices and even creating confusion. It is a potential handicap for a foreman not to be aware of the objectives, emphases, stresses and timings in movement, and to be entirely dependent on just “showing”.

The normal club environment approach to beginners takes two or three years to develop into a proficient Cotswold dancer, but more effective training methods based on a greater understanding of what to do could speed this up. But in parallel to the training, as in many sports, some degree of fitness has also to be developed.

Remember that the ultimate objective for the dancers is to participate in the morris being performed in public.

Beginners - Other dance specialities explain the whys and wherefores of their technique to participants, but this is seldom so in the English folk dance world. The “traditional process” is claimed, but it supposes that locally there exist enough 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.

The first problem for a teacher is 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, even though the final objective is a seamless flow through a musical phrase.

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, and after a while they do not remember what they have been shown without some reinforcement, for example 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”.

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

We can only learn “what-we-almost-know”, therefore we must build on 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 reinforce memories by acting as a continual reminder.

Stresses & Strains - Any workshop should start by recognising that there will be potential anatomical problems, leading to aches and pains, that can arise from the dancers’ faults in physique, for example, because of small differences between the dimensions of each leg, as well as from faults in technique.

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. There are a number of contributory sources that need

individual diagnosis. 'Orthics', a form of shoe insert, are now available commercially for the correction of some faults, eg to straighten joints.

The Turn Out of the feet is a relic of the old style of movement, which remained fashionable for 300 years, till the codification of Modern Ballroom Dancing by Victor Sylvester's committee of the 1920's. 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 the turn out of his foot whilst running. Also in this 17th century style there was the swaggering outward swing of the leg when moving either forward or back, which action incidentally allowed room for the wearing of fancy boots with lace tops etc. The movement style is still inherent in the morris backstep of several of the Cotswold village traditions.

UPS & DOWNS

Vertical Jump - You may think that it is all to do with feet and ankles but just try making one without using the major thigh muscles. The attempt demonstrates the need for a 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 height comes from this roll-up distance plus the velocity that has been achieved when finally leaving contact with the ground. What can be achieved is limited by the length of the foot! The further height gained in the air is 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 limited, by shoe heel height or deliberately by the dancer, 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, as has happened to many of the old traditional dancers. The number of "g"s experienced in this can be as high as three. One can practice avoiding slapping the ground by trying to land quietly.

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.

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 warm down at the end of a dance period to avoid subsequent stiffness, dissipating the waste products in one's system. Sources for ideas are booklets such as that published by the Morris Federation and magazine articles or by talking to sports coaches for something appropriate to the actions used.

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 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.

It is important to present visual images to learners, reinforced with words. I think that part of the general learning problem of translating words heard into movement is due to having to communicate internally between the two halves of the brain, with their different skills. The mind also forms separate "intelligences" for different activities which then have to be trained to work together. 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" and in "long-shot".

One perceives one's own movements on a different basis from how the apparently same movements look when done by others and this can be misleading. Actors on the stage exaggerate every day gestures to make them appear normal when under the undivided scrutiny of an audience at a distance. One's own gestures are often much smaller and jerky than one imagines. Actors are trained to observe accurately and

to replicate what they are shown when closely observed, as on TV or films, but ordinary people unfortunately copy with a significantly smaller movement. A typical and common personal experience occurs when teaching the Longborough hand waves, actually a wrist movement, but often dancers move their hands to follow the motion appropriate to the handkerchiefs, because 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 privately or in a group in front of a big mirror, ideally in a dance studio, but deep office or school windows can be adequate substitutes.

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. The world best is over 3 meters!

What is role of the arms? After all, all control is ultimately only by contact with the ground. How does this small mass effect the amount and quality of movement? It is a dynamic effect, understandable from Newton's Laws of Motion. 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, ie are not lifted smoothly, 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. Raising up the feet or bending the legs while in the air reduce the height reached by the head. Remember that half the time off the ground is spent in the upper quarter of the trajectory (near apogee, if one is a space scientist!).

For achieving the maximum height, as measured by the head's rise in the jump, one must decelerate and bring down 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' and not bringing the arms down till touching the ground and 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! There will be subtle differences in the relative movements as the acceleration profile required depends on the foot length. A useful practice technique is to form a circle facing inwards, with each dancers arms extended sideways so that their hands are on their neighbours' shoulders. They can then be sensitive to relative height and timing differences as they dance together.

There is a nomenclature problem that can confuse beginners because "jump" is used variously in the morris to mean the take-off, the movement from take-off to landing and 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 simultaneously with them side-by-side ("first position" to the dance teacher_.

Turns - To examine the significance of 'roll inertia', start with some non-travelling jumps, and try simple jumps beginning with a 180° turn, to end facing the opposite way. Try to 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 arms actually do have a role. Then finally draw them in whilst turning, and after the earlier jumps, one usually find one overshoots, because the progressive drop in roll inertia keeps the angular velocity up! Normally the arms are used quite naturally, ie without conscious effort, to control the landing. Such arm control to compensate for ground friction in a turn while in continual ground contact is a part of the morris man's technique for 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 do not stick the stomach out or arch the back. Such body movement is ugly, and, 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 circus tumbling, but not with the morris! To turn in a jump a twist has to be given to the body by the feet and perhaps helped by an initial turn of the legs and upper body in the opposite direction to gain from unwinding as is done by ballet dancers and the Basques for complete turns in the air.

The head, although small, is also a mass that significantly affects the dynamics of one's body movements. One thing to carefully avoid is drooping it during a jump. Get someone to watch what you do. Consciously stretching the neck up would be much better.

'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, by doing this one is less likely to sway in the turn. It must have 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 rotations are the galleys and hooks.

Posture is important. It is visible all the time to the audience, not just while dancing. They see the implied 'body language' and it should say "eager" and "interested" in what is going on. At rest one should be upright and balanced on the balls of the feet. Do not forget such old fashioned practice tricks as balancing a book on the head. Bringing the body weight back onto the heels for a "rest" introduces the problem of achieving snappy acceleration into the next move, as well as giving the body language message of non-participation. The overall impression looks slack and suggests sloppy morris. When all of a side does it, it tells the audience that it is an interval during which their attention can wander. Dancers can be trained in posture and other body language messages.

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

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

A well designed shoe would have shock absorbing material under the ball of the foot, but those worn never do. It is common to have a stiff sole to cope with the wide variety of dance surfaces. "Trainers" seem to lead to the appearance of dancing "pigeon-toed" due to both the different cut of the shoe and the way support is provided.

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 oxygen to ensure recovery!

Let us go back to the jump to bring more of the elements together and try it with the "up-&-out" Longborough type arm movements. Start with the elbows bent at right angles and the upper arm horizontal with the hands out by the sides of the head above 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 palms upwards.

Where does the beat of the music come in a jump? Certainly to just touch down on landing on 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 effort is on the beat, but the full movement is across the beat, hence its physical and psychological appeal 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 (and most significantly never catches up again!).

Jumps (and turns) on the move require consideration of additional technical points about the appropriate body tilts. 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 social but not for ritual or ceremonial dancing. Incidentally social dancing was often used to consolidate new surfaces.

Unfortunately “Step” is used colloquially in the folk dance world both for a single movement and for a sequence.

Step - Classically 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 as was the medieval outdoor ‘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 with the toes 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 required. A little thought will show that real movement sequences involving stepping usually start from jumps or otherwise having the feet together, but this introduces a complication at a first teaching of the steps which is well 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. Remember the insult meant by 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.

6/8 Jig Time - Try two “steps” per bar (almost capers, which are the same action as a ‘step’ but with a greater lift and usually a more exaggerated arm movement) - also start from standing on one foot. To help 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 particularly to stress the lift on the first beats. Modern tunes do not lend themselves to matching this movement characteristic.

Traditions surviving into the 20th century have acquired an off-beat emphasis, with a strong movement on the weak beats (this was first a rhythm 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 like the jumps.

Look out of a window and watch the relative motion of the horizontal frame or bars against the outdoor 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. 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 repeating this simple stepping with appropriately different arm movements.

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

Note the feeling of a “help” on the **UP** part of the arm movement. A natural consequence is that vigorous arm down swings do not contribute to height but a feeling of lightness and that a gentle drop is preferred to snatches when seeking lift. Thus the character of the movement as perceived by the new dancer will depend on the tradition being taught.

Any Arming Sequence - Do it first without the associated 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 artistic opinion that good dancers would not move their hands in front of the their face to 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. The left foot lead, as with the military march, is natural because it is actually a thrust off of the nominally stronger right foot to get moving off smartly. To go with the sun was lucky, to start to windershins, as supposedly did witches, was not.

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 appears to be 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, and all facing “up” towards the music. The numbering is as for the then familiar teams of horses, with No 1 being “foremost” and No 6 “hindmost”.

Perhaps a word is needed about the morris compass. “Up” is towards the musician who conventionally stands at the “top” end of the set 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 towards that direction are “inward”. The contrary is “out” and turning that way “outward”.

Try dancing a very simple but illustrative set dance, derived 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 jump and turn 90° in the air to face left, odds facing up, and evens facing down in the last bar. The whole set dance a complete ‘whole rounds’ clockwise in 8 bars, ending as at the once to yourself by facing across the set, and continuing by approaching one’s opposite in 4 bars to be within an arm’s reach, ending the move with a jump to stand with one’s feet together side by side, and facing one’s opposite. 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 a small loop by oneself 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 opening ‘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” distance 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 besides the reels, called variously hornpipes, schottisches, polkas, rants, 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 implied is not precise because Morris musicians typically stretch the melody’s rhythm to better fit the morris movements. The previous exercise with various arm movements should be repeated. The alternate arm swinging is difficult to fit to double steps!

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.

One of our difficulties today 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 the free foot straight upwards, then kick it forward and somewhat 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 - this can be called “pedalling”.
- Campden** : ditto but with a longer forward thrust of the free leg and aiming at only one ring of the bells, giving a very irregular or “broken” rhythm.
- Bidford** : the first move is a low kick forward, then a lift as the foot is brought back - this can be called “back-pedalling”.
- Headington** : the leg is kept fairly straight throughout, the 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.

There is a problem in persuading most people of the degree of effort that is 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 particularly 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 general concern for the state 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 shin area (eases shin splints) and the thigh area (eases knee pain).

‘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 over-striding, 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 are possibilities. Alternatively, or additionally, so are 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).

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 but rather rare condition needs an operation within hours for complete recovery.

Actions on Injury - The best advice is, if it hurts, it is telling you something! Be aware of the serious risk of “dancing through” a pain.

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 during the running and jumping, and hence there is a similarity of rotational stress on joints and muscles which is not so common in other sports. More examination of 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 the following simple **“Princess Royal”**, a very basic version of the 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. Some movements are discussed in more detail later.

- Foot-Up** = 6 double steps, 2 single steps used as backsteps and a jump, landing feet together.
- Jig** or chorus = 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”, “out”, “up-and-over” to “out” again.

As a guide the angle between the feet, when the heels are close together and the toes apart, has to be sufficient to allow a twisting of the individual feet on their 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 “tidy” when one is standing still and is a stable starting point for movement off in any direction.

Backstep - A similar body movement to that in the ordinary stepping but with different emphases. The body rise is much less and there is a stronger sink down. At most traditional places except Badby the backstep were singles. Often the free foot is not lifted off the ground but slid or scuffed backwards. This downward emphasis applies even to the accompanying waves of the arms. One should now attempt the Fieldtown basic stepping and arming sequence with the small figure of eight path wave and rotation of the hands during the backsteps going “out&down - in&over - out&down”.

Capers - The next energetic step to be met is the “caper” from one foot to the other. The Cotswold tradition is distinguished from the 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 (perhaps they occurred in Oddington slows).

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 emphasis. For example to put in the travel, one must accelerate, move, decelerate, stop, reverse, etc. finally stopping again. Watch another dancer move. The body rotates and leans forward and backwards as a function of the acceleration and deceleration, particularly during the backstep and jump. Using gravity again to move one’s centre of gravity forward, the body slopes to move, then one moves the feet to stop falling over, the same principle as satellites use 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. 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 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 sequence starts with stepping onto the “outside foot”, usually the left first, and the right in the second halves.

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

Whole Gip - as the back-to-back, but done as a face-to-face, so that 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 still turning the same way. 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, without changing sides, 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 particular “step” sequence. The feet could be crossed or apart, the body turned a little or a lot, with one arm or both in use, and the handkerchief action could 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 (or even a hook into a hey).

V 3.4Cotswold Basics

A sidestep is strictly a movement only half a bar long whether “crossed” or “open”. A “short” sidestep is a bar long and is either a sidestep followed by a step and a hop with the feet side by side like a double step, or it is one repeated if to be followed by a full double step. A “long” sidestep takes two bars and is in effect the second short form followed by the first form.

As for most traditions at Longborough the relative angle between the feet, the “turn out”, is maintained throughout the sidestep, and the forward foot is not turned to be more parallel with the other. The feet are crossed over with the heel of the leading foot in the air but close to the toe of the rear one, and the body is turned no more than 30-45° following the direction of the crossing of the feet. The forward or “leading” arm only is raised, and this is usually carried 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 but the dip is ugly, lazy and untraditional.

In the **Half Hey** the opposite dancers work in pairs. The path pattern is described here in sequence but is 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 away from the centre line of the set and moving out to the final position. At the same time the middle pair follow the top pair round, 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, going no more up than the top pair’s starting place. The middles should leave just enough space between themselves and the tops to let the bottoms pass through. The bottoms move to face down and turn out to come up to the top, going behind the tops, but passing in front of the middles.

Diagonals lines appearing 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 the sidestep hand movements with the wrist, also of controlling the direction of the eyes which often affects one’s 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 on examples of the various side step arm gestures from Cotswold traditions. The similarities and differences must be pointed out. Here is list.

One handed	Waist high low circular wave at side	Adderbury, Ilmington
One handed	Chest high circular wave at side	Brackley, Badby
Two handed	Chest high circular waves	Abingdon
One handed	Vertical countertwist circles	Bledington
One handed	Waves forward towards opposite	Bidford
One handed	High twists	Ascott, Sherborne
Two handed	High twists	Headington Quarry
Two handed	Twists at different levels	Wheatley
One handed	Full arm swing across body	Ducklington
One handed	Full arm swing forward and down	Bampton (Woodley)
Two handed	Waist high wave & push forward	Bampton (Shergold)
One handed	Swing up from side to face	Oddington
One handed	Point, up in straight line	Bucknell, Fieldtown
Two handed	Both up on middle beat	Kirtlington

Mechanics of Movement - These are often not at all simple, for example consider what happens in high diving competition, in circus tumbling and in the landing of a falling cat. We have met the effect of arm inertia in jumps and of 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. School learnt applied mathematics is of some use after all! Of course different villages had different detail in their ways of performing this movement. At Longborough they kept the thigh up and horizontal, turning smoothly and making the first step bisect the total angle of turn. At Bledington they went for a low sweep and at Sherborne they made the first step without a turn at all.

Team Issues - There are issues that arise from being in a team. Morris is one of the few activities that require all the participants to work together for the result, like change ringing on church bells, and each has to compromise with their ability to achieve the “togetherness”. For an example of another issue there is the rhythm, speed and togetherness of 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 move off.

Technique with Sticks - No matter how good the technique one must start with a good stick. Willow makes the best sticks as it gives a good sound, is resilient and splinters safely. It should be cut over long, after the sap has stopped rising, and stored for six months or more horizontally on the flat to prevent bowing. Green wood is untrustworthy. It should be cut to the required length when needed. In the 19th century morris one usually provided one’s own stick, on pain of a fine. They were often painted and shorter than normal today.

The grip is mostly with the thumb and forefinger, the rest of the hand provides the control and rotation. The fingers should tighten their grip at the moment of impact with another stick. This allows a good sound, bounce and control, and is safer because of the lack of a follow through movement. Hits should normally be upward, not across or downward. Clashes can be preceded by a large arm movement and rotation of the stick for effect but exaggerated movement does not mean great force.

Adderbury sticks are somewhat longer than other village’s and are held and used differently. In “**singles**” the stick is held in the middle by the right hand and the stick is moved by a combination of rotation of the lower arm from the elbow and the fingers and the wrist. In “**doubles**”, held in both hands, the butt pivots in the left hand which only moves a little, while the right hand does the stick rotation. The right hand slides along the stick as is necessary for each movement.

The worst performed and ugliest movement in the morris is the turn to face away from one’s opposite and raising one’s stick in both hands overhead to receive a stick hit. Thought must be given to the associated foot movements for balance and appearance. The body posture should be upright and not bent over backwards. The stick should be held up in the air above the head and not behind it. This ensures that the hitting stick is not aimed at the head. A similar principle works for offering a stick up horizontally in front of the body. It should be high enough that the stick appears to cover the eyes of one’s opposite when looking across the set. It is not part of the morris to hide the stick tapping from the audience, so all tapping should be reasonably high, and impacts points should be at eye level or above.

Dancers should listen to the music and follow the phrasing in tapping. They can avoid speeding up by making larger movements between taps. Pushing the music shows inexperience and possibly a lack of constructive practice.

The sticks are carried in different ways for each tradition, vertically in front, vertically at the side with the arm down at the side with the tip either up or down, or horizontally, the choice usually depending on the stick length. Whether the stick is swung with the normal or a reduced arm movement in stepping and jumps is also dependent on the tradition. The choice should be dominated first by safety and then by appearance considerations.

Ons-&-Offs - Many sides let themselves down with their exits and entries, and even as they prepare for ‘Once-to-Yourself’ before the dance starts and also in the manner in which they behave immediately after ‘all-in’ or ‘all-up’ at the end of a dance.

Dance is Style - Remember the importance of body language and be aware of being on “stage” and visible all of 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. There is a similarity with the actions of professional craftsman, eg like a carpenter working with a plane who does not work just with his arms.

There is an old story that the audience can only recognise a few dances, the tunes and movements seeming so similar. It is so often true because no contrast is being provided between dances or even using the opportunities within a dance. Dances can be presented as ceremonial, athletic or funny. Showmanship suggests that contrasts within and between dances are exploited. The dances and the show can have a structure and a climax.

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

Men and/or Women - There are obvious physical differences, in average height and weight (fat) distribution and in physical strength, but the major effect in mixed sets is 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). There can be differences in fitness and muscle control which can be avoided by training. 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 action to overcome all such consequences which are mostly cultural not physical.

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. Such teams perhaps encouraged a spread in individual performance which covered the 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 amble.

Note : words enclosed in ‘-’ are specialist usages, those in “-” are slang or jargon.

RETROSPECT

Poor morris through ignorance is inexcusable. But there are many acceptable forms that deviate from the classical styles. There are several reasons why this may be desirable or necessary. If each is thought through then it is difficult to be critical. What has to be avoided is such poor morris that it gives the rest of morris a bad name. Unfortunately those who do it never seem to understand what is objectional in what they do.

MORRIS MANNERS

Once outside dancing to an audience it is desirable to observe the good manners of the morris. Do not stand in front of the audience when not dancing - the show is for them not you. Do recognise that people who read posters may not understand morris time. ©1992 R L Dommett