

## ON PLAYING FOR THE COTSWOLD MORRIS

### INTRODUCTION

Many years ago Michael Gorman, a well known Irish fiddler based in London, was asked about how to play the fiddle. He demonstrated the finger positions for the notes. The problem here is the same, where to start and what to assume is already known. Thoughtful players have many insights, some of which can be difficult to communicate, and others for lesser musicians to understand. Unfortunately it is a golden rule that one can only learn what one almost knows. Most morris musicians have little formal tutoring so I shall assume that we can start discussing some of the simple basics. The morris musician has to develop a sympathy for the movements to which they are playing. Fitting the music to the dance requires some analysis of what the morris movements are about.

### BASIC RHYTHMS

Let us accept that tunes are divided into bars, and have key signatures. Now let us consider what morris tunes are and separate them from what they are not.

Morris tunes are usually either in 4/4 or 6/8. Detailed tune classifications usually depend on the playing speed and the number of notes in a bar, leading to such titles as, Reels, Rants, Polkas, Hornpipes, Step Dances, Cake Walks, Schottiches, Measures, Marches, or to Single, Double and Triple Jigs. There is no universally agreed nomenclature system.

*(diagram)*

Probably the decline of the morris in the 19th century saved it from keeping up with social dance musical fashions. There are polkas used, that can be thought of as improved hornpipes, but very few waltzes outside of Adderbury where singing was a significant factor in defining the repertoire, thus there are no dance equivalents to the Mediterranean Jota or the Northern European Ländler or Oompah type. The morris has never lent itself to rhythmic complexities like some of the dances of the Basques or eastern european countries, and possibly the Midland Bedlam Morris. But it does have echoes of the distant past in particular dances, like the galliard (eg "God Save the Queen") and the 6/4 hornpipe in the various "Sherborne Jigs" or the "Shepherd's Heel and Toe" at Headington, and the 9/8 (slip jig in Ireland) tune for "Beaux (Rose) of London City".

*(tune)*

*(tune)*

There is little in common with other English folk dance traditions such as solo step and clog dancing, except in the use of elementary phrase endings or breaks, and the simplest of heel and toe stepping for a special version of one typical dance. It did not acquire complex choreography. However I feel that it is a pity that English folk dance never caught onto rhythm types that the Old Time world reaped like the slow saunters, or walking dances, which could be very useful for providing contrasts in modern shows.

Most morris tunes are in 4/4 or common time and use the hornpipe rhythm.

*(diagram)*

The bars are usually thought of as divided into 8's,

*(diagram)*

but they are played “broken”. Musical notation normally indicates this as

*(diagram)*

but it is not played as broken as that, except at Chipping Campden, the more accurate representation being a half way form in 12/16, ie without the dots.

*(diagram)*

This matches the good “jaunty” playing exhibited by Kimber and Wells.

Step dancers use hornpipes also but differently and they break the bars into sub-units based on the percussive rhythm of the steps. As the basis is a “tap” rather than a weight change step dancers need to recognise finer divisions of the bar. Thus a bar of 4 crochets can be danced as 8 quavers

(1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &) called a “duple time hornpipe”, or in triplets

(1 & a 2 & a 3 & a 4 & a) called a “triple time hornpipe”, or semi-quavers

(1 an & e 2 an & e 3 an & e 4 an & e) for complex steps.

Thus there is no allowance for body movement and a requirement for very even playing, not the morris idiom at all! But the concept of duplet and triplet division of bars is in fact the inherent difference between common and jig time tunes.

To preserve the feel of a “polka”, if following English country music principles, care must be taken to emphasise the proper phrasing when playing them as they were originally written and played in 2 bar phrases. But I think that this also is taking the music outside of the morris idiom.

It would be expected that military marches were familiar to countrymen when many of the local volunteers had bands and every settlement had to ballot to determine who served in the militia. “Brighton Camp” was very common, as in the form “Girl I Left Behind Me” it has become the traditional tune for a regiment leaving a posting, but few other regimental marches seem to have made it into the repertoires, other than “Warwickshire Lads” at Ilmington, the Cheshire Rgt “March Past” at Eynsham and “Jockey to the Fair” from the Yorkshire Rgts.

*(tune)*

*(tune)*

Marches are properly in 2/4 or 6/8 (Sousa). An example of the later is “Liberty Bell”, the Monty Python signature tune, which is not typical of jigs for morris, but excellent for clog, as the Cotswold morris does not have skipping or high knee lift stepping. Whitehall reorganised the Army regiments on a territorial basis in the late 19th century and from about 1880 required them to have a march with a local flavour, possibly too late to influence the tradition.

If a morris tune is not in common time it is a jig in 6/8! It has an underlying asymmetric pulse.

It does not mean that jigs are all played as single jigs, ie,

*(diagram)*

rather than *(diagram)*

although this is an acceptable simplification when desired.

*(diagram)*

A good musician allows one to dance comfortably, but energetically not slackly, to fit the natural rhythm of the movement rather than forcing it. Too rigid a four-square rhythm muzzles expression in the morris. Even the above discussion implies too great a regularity because the 4 beats in the bar are actually not evenly distributed, not only are the weak beats retarded towards a jiggy rhythm, but the amount depends on the strength of the dancer's preceding movement. Thus it is impractical to write it down exactly because it would be too complex to follow. It is better to find "rules" for massaging the rhythm from an examination of the dancer's body motion.

### **DANCERS BOUNCE**

The reality of natural movement is that it is not even and it has to be constrained to make it smooth.

Whether in 4/4 or 6/8, the dancer recognises 4 pulses in a bar regardless of the number of notes actually played. The morris step reflects that there are two stresses called "strong beats" or "on-beats" a bar and that the other two are "weak" or "off-beats". The following discussion assumes that dancers are skilled enough for the topics to matter.

First, there is the normal emphasis on the first beat of each bar. It is a strong beat for the dancer where the main effort or "drive" is made. But if the music over emphasises it, it can drive the dancer into the floor producing noise rather than lift. The effect is then similar to having "on-beat" drumming.

Second, the final beat of the bar and sometimes its step is deemphasised or even suppressed. The danger is that it might lose the body "lift" at that point. The 2nd and 4th beats in a bar are the "weak" or "off-beats", but they are significant because they are where important lift or elevation of the dancer occurs, particularly on the last beat of a morris double.

Body movement is not even across a note or a bar because there is the continual starting and stopping from the reversals of vertical motion at the contacts with the ground. It takes longer to rise up off the ground than to fall back, unless special care is taken, and the total time allowed depends on the emphasis being given to the particular step. Think of skip steps. This natural asymmetry partially explains why jigs are more exciting than reels for Country Dancing because of their better fit to a natural bouncy movement. The degree of brokenness is related to the effort being put into the dancing or to the effort being demanded by the playing.

To understand something of the realities of movement the musician should perform some basic exercises.

Start by considering the simplest basic movement, 2 springy, jaunty dance-walk steps per bar with the weight on the balls of the feet, and no heel touch. Judges of jig dancing competitions sometimes placed

their hands under competitors heels to be sure they were properly off the ground. Increasing the effort for height develops the movement into “capers”, producing “plain capers” at 2 a bar. Alternatively, accenting the off-beat with a body lift or inserting a hop produces the hop-step or “single” step.

(*diagram*)

Try dancing in a room in front of a window with cross pieces at eye level and observe the bar's apparent movement against a distant background as a measure of vertical movement of the head and hence one's body centre of gravity. It should be found difficult and unnatural to move so that the eyes remain steady. Comfortable dancing makes full use of flexing the instep.

Ordinary walk(*diagram*)level of c of g

Dance walk(*diagram*)body lifts by flexing foot  
still touching ground

Hop(*diagram*)

Sink to get full lift      not a full drop  
from foot and ankle

Morris Double Step(*diagram*)

really(*diagram*)

Movement is determined by contacts with the ground, and Newton's laws of motion apply. The higher one goes the longer it takes. The converse should be that the slower one plays the higher one should go, not the longer one stays in contact with the floor. Normally dancers “cheat” by sinking, bending their knees, to extend the range of movement without necessarily increasing the time out of touch with the ground. The stopping of the downward motion, the reversal of direction and the acceleration up off the ground is done primarily by the spring in the foot and ankle. The energy absorbing motion at stopping can be done faster than the acceleration, where one has to produce a force and do work. The thigh and knee contribute more to the larger, longer capers, when dancers bend at the knees.

There is a natural egocentric view which has movement spreading from the body. Although helpful for forming good images, the realities of the mechanics of movement have to be taken first.

A larger than normal movement requires either more time or more effort to keep it within the normal time bounds. Either way the note is accented as a memory jogger. As a general rule there should be a note for every step in the dance, and probably for each hand movement. It is not true conversely that every note has a step. Carried to the extreme was the Abingdon “Maid of the Mill”, properly a jig with 6 notes to a bar, it was played for a while at half speed in 3/4 so that the “1 hop 2 3” went across the normal bars thus,

(*tune*)

The 20th century fashions in social dance have emphasised the off beat, in the morris this occurs at the kick of the free foot on the hop. There is an strong element of this in the single stepping traditions that have lasted into this century. Their dances can be done to ragtime and later popular rhythms.

One has to try and get an underlaying pulse going in the playing.

## BASIC PLAYING

Jig, 6/8 time, is normally written, *(diagram)*

The “weak” beat as defined above is the last of the triplet.

To produce a “pulse” it is played with the middle of the triplet unstressed, *(diagram)* ie. played “in passing”.

Poor morris dance music often comes from over emphasising this extra note. Of course the opposite is true for other dance idioms such as step or Irish dancing, where the feet not the body movement dominates the requirement.

To fit natural body lift it should be nearer to, *(diagram)*

However one does not play phrases endlessly without variation. A typical change is to shift emphasis during a phrase, for example to show the switch in stress between a double step and a back step by playing one,

*(diagram)* and the other *(diagram)*

Because public performance is rehearsed not spontaneous interpretation of the music, the musician establishes manners of playing that act as mnemonics for the dancers.

There are tricks to develop drive and excitement in the music. For example Ravel's “Bolero”, used by the ice-dance champions Torvill and Dean, builds up tension without accelerating. The adjustment is in how it is being played. It uses more broken rhythm, more staccato or “snap” and more volume (but not just as noise). One can wallow in the sound from a 40 piece brass band but be shattered by a rock group at the same decibel level.

Some village traditions has their own characteristic basic step, each needing its own rhythmic subtlety. The essential differences found in just the single steps (“1 h 2 h”) are,

- Brackley, Hinton, Headington - a stiffish leg,
- Bidford - on hop foot drawn back and lifted - giving “back-peddalling”,
- Bampton, Chipping Campden - raise free foot up on the step and kick it forward on hop - giving “bicycling”.

All differ on the degree of hesitation on the weak beat and thus the brokenness needed in playing the tunes. It is difficult to comment on double steps as there is less traditional evidence. Cecil Sharp considered that there was a classical older version which he described, but, from the little surviving knowledge of the manner of performance, there must have been small differences. The imposing of a standard interpretation of how to play morris tunes is a major cause of clubs failing to make the differences between traditions appear in their dancing.

6/8s in 4/4 - Occasionally collected tunes such as “Constant Billy” (Minster Lovell), “Gallant Hussar” (Bledington) and “Old Woman Tossed Up” (Sherborne) are supporting evidence of how tunes were played in a very broken rhythm elsewhere when the informant gives it thus,

*(tune)*

*(tune)**(tune)***PHRASING THE DANCE**

The dances are usually constructed of 4 bar phrases of movement which shape the dance, and this basic unit of music has to be reflected in the playing. There is not the regularity in the playing of the tunes that might be expected. The music must “stretch” at jumps, changes of direction and driving off.

A few traditions consist of long sequences of a basic step, perhaps ending with a break of 3 or 4 strong beats. The finishing action of a figure, here called a “break” after the term in step dancing, may be in the same speed and rhythm as the basic step, as at Brackley or Eynsham. If it is a simple jump or a very emphatic pause and jump, as in some Abingdon and Chipping Campden dances, the movement takes longer and the musician has to allow the dancer “air”. The stretching out of particular notes to fit the movements ensures that it is not useful to practice following a metronome, because the musician should fall behind in discrete bits.

But nearly all figures consist of strings of different movements. The most common dance phrase is 2 double steps (1 bar each), 2 backsteps (a step and a hop each, ½ bar each), a step and a jump to land with the feet together, ie

l. r. l. hl/r. l. r. hr/l. hl. r. hr/l. \_ . ft tog. -//

The rhythm of the double is not quite that of the single steps. The single is in this case a back step, which normally contrasts in style, energy, and hand movements to the normal basic step. Along with the jump in the 4th bar there must be small variations in pace throughout the phrase. A more complex set is,

l. r. l. hl/ft tog. \_ . j. (r)/l. - . hl. hl/ft tog. \_ . j. -//

The springs, \_ , in bars 2 and 4 and the rhythm of the galley in bar 3 depend on the tradition. At Longborough and Fieldtown the movement of the galley goes through smoothly and the beats are very regular, even if the tune is written in 6/8. At Sherborne the galley is a step forward and then a turn on the hops so that there is a spring through the weak beat and the hops are emphatic. Note that there may be a deemphasised step or hop on the final weak beat of a bar preparatory to the next movement, especially if it is a particularly strong one. As it is small, it needs to be delayed, ie be late. This shows in a series of “spring capers”. These are single capers, one to a bar, thus,

/l. \_ . r. - /l. \_ . r. -/

In practice they often include a preparatory hop (“half capers”) or a change step (“furies”),

hr/l. \_ . r. hr/l. \_ . r. -/ or /l. \_ . r. l/r. \_ . l. r/l. \_ . r. l/r. \_ . l. -/

noting that the last of a series only has the preparatory hop or change step if there is something immediately following. The height and rhythm of the half caper depends on the tradition and its quality is related to the associated arm movements.

Spring capers can be timed as *(diagram)* or *(diagram)* depending on the tradition or the club.

A tradition like Fieldtown makes a great deal of these preparatory movements throughout the dances. Others liked to be “clean” and unfussy.

Extra bounces can be used keeping the vertical motion going rather than limiting them.

*(diagram)*

It is essential that the musician finds out the club preferences.

A caper is a high spring onto a foot, while the free foot does something. “r. \_.” can be written as “R. \_.” to emphasise the effort. A subtlety with 4 plain capers at the end of a movement is whether they really are 4,

/l. r. l. \_/R. \_ L. \_/R. \_ L. -//, or 3, l. r. l. hl/r. \_ L. \_/R. \_ L. -//  
and play it accordingly.

About the one thing that is certain is that the morris is never, never played quite as written!

A problem of the professional dance is that it aims for continuous variety and this encourages dancers to move gracefully from one pose to another, and there is little that the conductor can do working with an orchestra to follow the dancer. The contrast with the morris idiom needs more exploration. The revived Greek dance is worse in that the poses are derived from classical but static illustrations.

### **SPEED**

The normal speed for a Morris used to be 96 “strong” beats a minute, 48 bars or a 4 bar phrase in 5 seconds, which is easy to follow on a clock or watch with a second hand. This speed has been found all round the Cotswolds by the older collectors. Slightly higher speeds have been observed, eg at Bampton, “Brighton Camp” seemed to be played faster. Some dances have been collected somewhat slower, down to 80 beats a minute or 4 bars in 6 seconds. This is more in line with modern practice where all the team have dance skills. The tradition thought itself lucky when it had 3 good dancers so its performance was conditioned by the numbers of inexperienced men. It is possible to dance as slow as 72 beats a minute given a “large”, energetic step, usually a single step, as done for example by the “Shropshire Bedlams”. To dance slower requires control and it is desirable to practice so as to produce large emphatic movements and to develop a style, but the product is not necessarily the best for appealing to the public during its performance. While control is being developed, the optimum effect may be produced at higher speeds where the appearance of faults are minimised and the speed of the music is itself exciting.

Music is a physical thing. It has immediate effects on blood pressure and pulse rates, pumps up the adrenalin levels and makes breathing quicker and more irregular, without having to do anything. Tempo itself can be used to excite or tranquilise. For most people a tempo of 75-80 beats a minute is neutral. If faster than 80 it becomes stimulating, if slower than 75 it is saddening. This “neutral” tempo is obviously connected with a whole group of body clocks, all normally at about 75-80 beats a minute, that control such activities as heartbeat. The body clocks of young people tick faster than those of adults and they will remember things as having been “slower” when they were younger when actually they were not! An exciting speed is when the heartbeat and so on from the exertion match the speed of the music. Experience gives dancers both better control and less over all exertion, however beginners over exert, and hence react better to higher speeds. Excitement is a balance between effort and speed and rhythmic playing.

We all know that music is used in ordinary life to promote effects on us and to provide Pavlovian triggers to elicit right movements and right attitudes. We also know that there are tricks with melodies to induce emotions. Thought should be given to why some tunes are so satisfying to dance to and also why there are not that many Morris tunes. A good tune has to fit the morris step with a rhythm that provides both the stress and lift when it is needed, the antithesis of the modern off beat rhythms, and it also needs good phrasing, the opposite of the rumbling along of most country dance tunes. It is a common experience that recalling the tune is an easy way to remember a lost dance's movements, although the opposite is more

difficult. It must be conditioning because over various villages quite different movements are fitted to nominally similar tunes.

Where a dance uses what is basically a Country Dance dance-walk, the music is naturally played faster to achieve the same overall level of excitement. Country Dance music, jigs and reels as used by the various national folk dance societies, aim at 100-120 beats per minutes. Rapper is faster and the long sword at Loftus is faster still, but these are only 2 walking movements to a bar not the 4 of Cotswold Morris. There are two Rapper styles of different speeds recognised, the “steady” and the “crash-bang-wallop”, but the basic stationary stepping or “shuffles” can be performed at a great pace if desired. From experience, at about as fast as I can play!

## STICK DANCES

There are two problems generated by the dancers which ought to be removed at practices but often are not. First, Speeding up during the tapping.

The dancers need to develop larger arm movements to fill up the music. If the musician follows the dancers they will gallop away with the dance. Sometimes the dancers can not hear the music because of the clatter of the sticks, their concentration on the movements, or because they are having fun. The musician must be prepared to say something, especially at the club practices but also to the foreman when out, if it is very bad, and to play to hold them back by emphasising key beats and hesitating. For example a typical “Shepherd's Hey” should be played as,

*(tune)*

Second, Moving Off

As the tapping sequence is usually done when either stationary or stepping on the spot, the dancers need time to accelerate into the next movement. Dancers should be encouraged to rise onto their toes in preparation for the move off and not to stay fixed with weight on their heels. It is necessary to hold off the music a little, and it is best done off of a last emphatic stick tap. To achieve this it requires consistency in playing to keep the team together. The time needed depends on the height of the jump and the distance that has to be reached, ie on the set spacing.

I think that the Bedlam Morris, whose territory overlapped with the northern extent of the Cotswold Morris, was a fantastically dressed tradition which relied on sticks and stepping to compensate for an absence of music other than drums.

## TUNES

The persons who were the sources for the traditional tunes are very few and not many of these were actually musicians. The recordings available today are of a handful of players only.

Kimber (Headington, concertina), Wells (Bampton, fiddle and melodian), Clarke (Bampton, fiddle) but recording not very accessible, Bennett (Ilmington, fiddle) and Robins (Bidford, fiddle) in US Library of Congress collection.

The morris idiom is different from any other dance form, and strictly one can not read across from other English country players' styles without hard evidence that it should. The older recordings show very straightforward playing, quite unlike what we have come to think of recently as English country music. Elements of English country playing styles may date back to the Bach's time when players were expected

to improvise. There is a suspicion in my mind that this style for the morris is a creation of the 20th cent with a flowering since WW2.

The collected “traditional” tunes did not necessarily come from musical people, or from a good memory, nor were recorded simultaneously with any dancing. This explains poor variants of the tunes, rather than the unusual ones, which experience suggests are likely to be authentic. Better variants can be used to improve the presentation of the morris, but unusual versions can only be used with caution because of the false impression that can be given, especially if the tune is well known to the public, like “Brighton Camp”. There is little evidence of multiple collection from the same source or from different sources in the same place. What there is suggests that individuals were usually consistent, but that different people from the same village could have significant variants.

*(tune)*

*(tune)*

The collected names of tunes are not consistent from village to village. Some teams used the same tune for more than one dance, and others, eg Fieldtown, has two different tunes with the same name.

*(tune)*

*(tune)*

Tunes are phrased to fit the dance movements, hence most have 4 bar units. Where the tune is intrinsically 8 bars long then, as at Fieldtown, the dance could be constructed using extended dance phrases to match. A similar problem was met by the City of Winchester morris when working with brass bands for music.

The collectors noticed the deviant tunes, the unusual lengths, eg “Black Joke” with its extra 2 bars on both the A and B parts. It was so popular that it spawned a whole set of Jokes of different colours of which the “White Joke” was used at Fieldtown for a heel and toe dance. Mason's “Highland Mary” at Stow had a 7 bar B, “Old Hog or None” (Brill) a 10 bar B, “Warwickshire Lads” (Ilmington) a 10 bar B, and “Saturday Night” (Badby) a 14 bar B. The oddest tune collected was the “Princess Royal” from Withington.

*(tune)*

*(tune)*

*(tune)*

Most tunes have 2 parts of 4 or 8 bars length, and a few, “Trunkles” and “Step and Fetch Her”, have 3. Only with Bidford “We Wont Go Home Till Morning”, Eynsham “Jockey to the Fair” and Withington “Princess Royal”, is there a third part that is recognisably taken from another tune. Another mixed tune is “Nuts of May” from Lichfield. Changing tunes during a dance was not a normal practice, and used only as a joke.

*(tune)*

*(tune)*

*(tune)*

## LEARNING

The first step is getting to know the melody. One should avoid playing from written music for dancing except perhaps in the very early days of a side practicing a new dance and even then poor playing can kill the side's enthusiasm for the particular dance by making it uninteresting or even difficult to perform. Knowing the melody means being able to whistle it or sing it without being committed to a final rhythmic interpretation and not being wedded to a bit of paper. Chose a key that is easy for the instrument. Most people play boxes in G, especially if it has limited basses. Most collected tunes are written in the mss in G (#) regardless of how they were actually found. A few are commonly played in D (##) where it is necessary to keep within a restricted instrument range. Fiddlers find it easier to play in A (###) and brass instruments in other keys.

Have separate music practices to learn the tunes. At team practices one should be observant and following the dancers, not struggling to reproduce a melody. However it is a common experience that once a few tunes have been learnt in the idiom, then others come quite quickly.

Reg Hall once commented on my playing that all the tunes of one class sounded the same and suggested that I aim to make each have an individual character. John Kirkpatrick and Alan Whear have taken several different ways in music workshops to show the need to and value of getting under the skin of a tune and make it your own.

What does this mean in real terms? First avoiding the music sounding as if it was provided “by the yard”. One finds which notes have flexibility in pitch, where grace notes and other musical embellishments can fit, what notes that might be dropped on occasion and when accents can be used that are not essential for the dance.

Chosing new tunes is difficult. It has to be satisfying to play over and over (and over) again at practices as well as outside, and still come over as interesting. Somebody else's weird tune may not work for you! Tunes are normally played as first heard and they are not often massaged to fit the morris, although Shrewsbury Lasses have a “folk” version of “Radetzky March”. There are a few tunes in minor keys,

“Princess Royal”, “Cuckoo's Nest” and “London Pride” but even these exist in major versions which seemed preferred today.

### STANDARD VERSIONS

A study of extant lists of tunes and dances from traditional sides showed a very limited tune repertoire. There are less than 20 tunes that can be considered common throughout the Cotswolds, 7 almost universal and 10 probably used by more than half. By studying list of dances from the old teams it seems that an average repertoire was about 17 dances of which 7 could be jigs, a proportion very unlike that of modern dance troupes.

So some tunes are very common and standard versions can be deduced.

*(tune)*

*(tune)*

*(tune)*

A few of these standards allow of more working out. An example is “Shepherd's Hey”. There are composed variants - eg Percy Grainger's arrangements - and strange versions - eg Fieldtown “Signposts”.

*(tune)*

When playing melody instruments together it is often worth thinking of second parts. The chord sequences of most tunes are very simple so that classic tunes like “Shepherd's Hey” can fit. If you like to be more adventurous, try “Good King Wenceslas”!

### INSTRUMENTS

There was a very fine article on the history of boxes in ETHNIC, a long time ago magazine which ought to be reprinted!

Pipe and tabors were mentioned in history long before the morris appeared by that name. In the 19th century they were commonly called “whittle and dub”. The “three hole” pipe is capable of a full scale when played with one hand. It seemed that the art of making pipes was largely lost in the western Cotswold morris area in the 19th cent and this was responsible for the disappearance of active players.

Bob Potter of Stanton Harcourt was a famous player who “could almost make un speak”. Potter played for the morrises for many miles around. Robert Brooks had made a whittle and dub at Bampton before 1820 while living at the Dragon Inn. When he left, they remained in some drawers in the possession of Barber Brooks who sold them to Potter. Potter lost his dub at Stanton and it was believed that it went back to Bampton along with a pipe and another broken black one which had been Potter's. When he became too

old to play he lived in Oxford and died about 1895 and was buried in Stanton. The broken black pipe, thought to be of early 17th century make, came to Jinky Wells who gave it to Mrs Helen Kennedy, the wife of Douglas. She had the mouthpiece repaired by Arnold Dolmetsch and it was used a model by Loius & Co, instrument makers of Chelsea. Helen gave one to Joe Powell of Bucknell. He could not get on with it, "that damned woman from London", and Francis Fryer borrowed it to try and change the tuning. The Basques have a similar instrument, but with a different tuning, which became commercially available as "galoubets" at the end of the 19th cent and Joe Powell of Bucknell had had one like these. Its basic scale was CDEF# rather than a natural F. For some years, 1923-36, Powell made tabors for the EFDS from cheese boxes.

Nelson of Steeple Aston was considered a magnificent player of the pipe and tabor at Bucknell. He had one failing, he was sometimes so drunk that he could not play at all. At Stoke Lyne they showed collectors the tree where they tied him up when he was too drunk to stand. Jim Timms of Bicester and Ned his brother at Kirtlington had also played. Ned was buried with his drum and fife. Powell obtained Jim's instruments and began to play because of Nelson' failings. He claimed to have learnt from old Tom Hall of Islip and old Joseph Woods of Deddington about 1860, but picked up tunes from Nelson. The collectors found his tunes too uncertain to write down, and "when up a tree" he always drifted into "Maid of the Mill".

Fiddles were an ancient instrument also, but more difficult to play and expensive to own and not really readily available till cheap machine made examples became available in the 19th cent. The free metal reed instruments followed their invention by Wheatstone but the concertina, melodian, accordion and mouth organ arrived too late to have had a significant influence on the 19th cent morris although the melodian in particular has become THE instrument in the last 20-30 years.

Important in considering variants is the instrument originally used, such as a fiddle, as at Bampton or Fieldtown, a pipe and tabor, as at Adderbury, Brackley or Bucknell, or a melodian, as at Abingdon. The succession at Abingdon was Thomas, Fryer, Bardwell, White and each insisted on the melodies being passed on correctly note for note, but they each played rhythmically quite differently. The instrument puts a character onto the tune which reflect its strengths and weaknesses. It affects the intervals and range within the melody rather than the rhythm, as that is dictated by the dance. Harry Thomas of Abingdon during the 1930's was an example of adaption of tunes to suit a one row melodian, from the singing of older Abingdon dancers who remembered their tunes as played on a fiddle by Gypsy Lewis. The old villages sides were often short of musicians and good players did the rounds of local sides and anyone who could play a few tunes was pressed into service. In a period when people prized individuality the old players expected to have and to play their own versions of the common tunes where ever they were and they sometimes, as at Stow, gave collectors the way other musicians "turned" the tunes.

One has to consider whether some dances are really wedded to their tunes, or if it was just easy to dance to them. As the known village dance styles are all different, obviously the tunes are adjusted to suit and this is the only justification for calling the collected tune for a dance the "correct" version. The aim however is to know why the tune is played that way as good playing needs an understanding of the particular dance. Each Cotswold side has a few, and only a few, tunes unique to itself. These often turn up as alternative tunes for the common dances. The character of a dance is somewhat dependent on the tune. The most extreme example of variation is the Heel-and-Toe dance around Stow-on-the-Wold which was danced to "General Monk's March", a hornpipe, "Oh Sussanah", a polka, and "We Wont Go Home Till Morning", a jig. More common is the multiple tune for the "Handkerchief" or sidestep-and-half-hey-repeated dance as at Bampton, where variation in speed was used as well as in rhythm to provide contrast. Consciously dancing to the tune makes each a different experience. Old sides may well have had to make do with what ever the musician could play. In some villages, Bidford and possibly Sam Bennett's Ilmington, there was

no direct relationship between the stick tapping and the tune, the foreman varying it at whim to suit the rhythm offered, and also to catch the side out!

Melody is not really the important factor - instruments are played for the rhythm. I find it difficult to extract the tune from a pipe and tabor sound. Traditionally the pipe provides the rhythm and the tabor or dub is “rolled” or “tattooed” to generate the excitement - compare this with the excitement of the drumming at Combe Martin and Padstow. To do this players would use a short two headed stick.

Attack or the sharp edgedness of notes is most easily provided with a fiddle by the nature of the action of the bow, although some classical techniques may have to unlearned for the morris. A banjo can produce a similar effect. A box is played with the bellows. Accordionists like to play “interesting” runs on the basses, probably because they are otherwise embarrassed by the proliferation of buttons. It usually distracts. The melodian with its very restricted basses is effective for morris and accordionists should be encouraged to emulate.

### TRADITIONS

One has to recognise that the Cotswold morris was divided into two, that in and around Wychwood Forest (fiddle dominated at the end) and that North East of Oxford on the stone (always pipe and tabor). The purist avoids mixing elements from the two areas. To be able to “handle” the various traditions we have to stylise them, without regard to how the old dancers saw them. Each tradition has its own interpretations and therefore an influence on how the music for it should be played.

Some traditions allowed a sink down on the first strong beat of a bar till the heel almost touches the ground. The knee also bends a little, but rotation of the knee or thigh joint by its nature does not produce much up and down movement. The drop allows a “stronger” lift. Fieldtown and Sherborne are often danced this way. The shape of the movement being different, the playing must be slightly different as well. Beginners used to be taught the fundamental morris step using an aid or support, which could be a pair of chair backs or hanging from a barn beam or standing between the rails of a sheep dip, to get the weight off the feet while learning the quick change. The technique used to teach at Ilmington and Longborough and the style expected aimed at making the first steps of a double very similar and the drive on the first strong beat was indicated by concentrating the forward movement of the travel on this beat.

Single stepping essentially allows more lift than double stepping and the music tends to be slower and the halves of the bars played similarly.

*(diagram)*

Old dancers around Stow were asked about the apparent differences between the old sides. They said that Bledington liked to dance low and Longborough high. This implies quite different playing styles because of the difference in lift (speed) and the phrasing (hesitations).

A characteristic of the revived Ducklington is a “snatch” arm movement between the double stepping and the spring capers, this movement needs a note in the playing of the melody to help the dancers at the right moment.

*(diagram)*

Small differences in the playing for different steps, which help the dancer through, are not reflected in musical notations. For example in the corner crossings in the various “Trunkles”, the playing depends

upon whether it is a morris step, sidestep, or half capers. Even if the fine differences escape the musician, the music can be played like,

for the morris step(*diagram*)  
for the sidestep(*diagram*)  
and for the half capers(*diagram*)

One stretches the tune at the jumps to allow time for the movement and for the body control.

## TEAM PRACTICES

Does the team dance to the music or does it just happen at the same time?

A club, dancers and musicians, should practice as they intend to perform when dancing out. Musicians should be encouraged to play during exits and entrances, the “ons and offs”. If these are undisciplined it makes it difficult for the musician to contribute and it breaks down the continuity of a show. The volume should stop or drown conversation during the dances and hide the post mortems in the middle which seem to occur too often when outside.

A suggestion to help rhythmic movement is to sing or whistle, rather than play, in a very jaunty style while the team is walking through movements, so as not to obscure anything the foreman wants to say.

Getting people to dance “together” can be frustrated by having dancers of wildly different heights.

Ask the foreman to give warning of a tune that is not frequently used. Beware of having demands for odd tunes sprung on the musicians in public.

Novice players should be encouraged to pay alone, perhaps for particular dances aimed at helping them play for the movement better rather than as a team practice of a dance.

Practices should give everyone, especially the musicians, a lift to make it worth while coming. That involves some committment and interest rather than just providing a service!

## CAPERS

It is the jumps and capers that distinguish the Cotswold tradition from all others.

Each sequence of movements takes 2 bars worth of tune. The music is usually the normal tune played at roughly half speed. How much slowing down depends on the tradition and the steps of the caper. Each “caper” has a preparatory movement(s) and a single high spring. As this spring is higher than others in the morris it needs longer. It is necessary to follow the individual dancers in this. It is not a problem as normally only one or two dancers are doing this together. When a side does a dance like “The Rose” from Fieldtown where they all do them together, it must be expected that they rehearse to actually be together to a standardised timing.

The “beats” played should fit to the peak efforts, so the rhythmic structure of each caper will vary and depend on the overall style of the tradition, which includes the arm movements which determine where the stress actually occurs.

## JIGS

It was common for particular jigs to be associated with individuals and no one would dream of dancing someone's party piece when they were around. Odd length tunes had an appeal and were easy to remember for collectors, "Princess Royal" 12 bar B, "Nutting Girl" 16 bar B and "Jockey to the Fair", typically 10 to 14 bars, but as few as 8 and as many as 16 bars have been collected for the B music.

*(tune)*

*(tune)*

*(tune)*

Jigs can be composed to interesting tunes eg "Come to the Fair" a composed song tune, "Rondo" the last movement of Mozart's 4th Horn Concerto, and "Monks Gate" collected by Vaughan Williams near Horsham and published as a Sussex Mummers Carol.

*(tune)*

*(tune)*

*(tune)*

Although these are essentially a display of the dancer's skill, the musician has a key role. There needs to be an understanding before the jig starts on who is leading who, because the musician and the dancer can not both follow - this is an unstable situation! Normally the musician should expect the dancer to follow, except on the slow capers. Some people learn dances by rote, responding to the specific tune. They can have trouble following an unfamiliar musician. Many dancers like to cover a fair bit of ground in a jig and the music needs to be slower to allow this, otherwise it will degenerate into a run around.

### **BANDS**

Tempo is not the only way of controlling excitement. Volume and quality of the sound is also effective. Playing for the morris is traditionally a solo activity in the Cotswolds, but not in the Border Counties or the North West. With a percussion or a brass band the instruments provide different interlocking musical parts or rhythms and as long as the volumes are balanced there are few problems. Care is needed when more than one melody instrument is played together. First, perceived volume is logarithmic in effect so doubling the sound or energy increases the effect only by 40%. Balance is still important. A good player can be allowed to dominate but a poor one just annoys the dancers and irritates the audience. Second, the major problem that is often not recognised is the blurring effect of melody instruments playing together. Some players try to exert their presence by extending the notes and even running them together. This is a

negation of playing to the dancing. Even with care, different musicians do not play exactly the same and, to produce the same overall effect, each must play more staccato. As this normally allows one more punch on each note the volume level benefits as well.

Clarity is needed for the dancing, the music being an adjunct to the dance. In a group, the tunes will normally be played in simpler versions and the rhythmic subtleties already described will be submerged. Is it worth it? With “boxes” basses should be simpler as well.

Great care is needed in playing with someone from another side, especially when it is not your side dancing, as the nuances will be different, being those of a another group of dancers, and one musician has to lead. Do not assume that another musician plays either the collected tune or your version for the dance. Always ask to join or wait to be asked to play together. Do not expect to play at a dance instructional as the arranged musician is probably fully occupied making the effort to provide exactly what the instructor is doing or demanding and is providing for the ease of the dancers all the fine detail of rhythm and emphasis which the person learning the tune has not started to be aware exists. An inexperienced or differently experienced musician just clogs up the air.

#### **COMMENT**

I have played an accordion for many years, but I only claim insights not definitive messages. From the above it should be obvious why we should think of club house styles rather than traditions. Can a team really support 2 or more distinct styles of dance? Or is it that any set of 6 dancers plus musician is unique and that this individuality is the objective of the performance of the morris?

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