



1997

**Morris Matters**

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### AN EXPERIENCE IN MORRIS INVENTION

I have been morris dancing seriously since 1970, having learnt a little earlier in my life as a nine-year-old at school. At that time I preferred country dancing because I could hold hands with the girls! In the early '70s the dancing repertoire generally available to dancers was limited to that collected and published by Cecil Sharp in his morris books or from EFDSS publications. Even these meagre written resources were like gold dust and nearly impossible to obtain, so in this climate any new dancers or teachers had to rely on the memories of established teachers unless they carried out additional research themselves on manuscripts unknown to even the majority of experienced dancers.

It was not until 1974, after Lionel Bacon was persuaded by the Morris Ring to expand, with Roy Dommatt's help, his own "Aide Memoire" that a full and more varied array of dances became accessible to the regular Morris Ring team dancer. In these times most of us danced with Ring teams, although there was a change in the air. I choose my words very carefully because it must be remembered that for a number of years Bacon's Black Book was "only" available via the Morris Ring. If your team was not a member, it was not that easy to obtain a copy. However, with this book's publication, coupled with Dommatt workshops, there was a flowering of dances hitherto not commonly performed. This in turn gave rise to a greater interest in and knowledge of the traditions, as it opened them up from a few dances in a style to a complete range. For instance, Adderbury was thought by most to be 5 dances at best, then suddenly there were 18 that could be performed.

In 1973, just before Bacon's book became available, I moved to Oxfordshire and came to live at the heart of the country from which the corpus came. During those early days in Oxfordshire I danced with Oxford City, a team with a long Ring-oriented history, and I learnt much. However as time went on I became increasingly dissatisfied with my dancing existence, particularly with the vast number of dance styles we were being required to perform. This fact, coupled with a journey of over 20 miles from Banbury (where I then lived) to Oxford on dark and sometimes foggy winter nights, started me thinking of being on a team closer to home. At that time, with the exception of Brackley (who were then a school-based team) there was no team between Oxford and Stratford upon Avon. Although I only lived three miles from Adderbury and would have loved to get a team going there, I did not have the nerve to try this, so I started to teach a class in Banbury, using my contacts in the local folk club as dancers. My vision to improve a team's dancing, and motivate me, included the idea of limiting the repertoire to only one village's dances, but I had not made up my mind which. For reasons of simplicity I decided to use Headington as a starting point. After only three weeks of this class, we were approached by Bryan Sheppard, who was then living in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire and dancing with Moulton Morris; he was keen to revive a team in Adderbury. For me, this was a godsend; here I was, being part of a single tradition morris team that had its own dances!

The history of this team over the last 22 years is detailed elsewhere, but for a period of six years I did nothing else but dance, teach and develop the Adderbury Morris. This defined my belief that the best morris is performed when all the dancers gain a sense of

identity from total involvement with their own dances and only have a limited knowledge of the rest of the morris world.

When I was given the opportunity, in 1979, to assist with the Kirtlington revival by teaching the basics and helping to interpret and develop the collected dances, I seized this with glee, hoping to instil in this new team their own feeling of identity through the Kirtlington dances. After a year of dedicated practice, the team performed at Kirtlington Lamb Ale and another revival was begun. This second involvement with a single tradition reinforced my already deeply defined beliefs in identity within the morris.

At about this time, most of the teams and dancers I associated with outside my immediate sphere were beginning to discover the same convictions about single tradition dancing as me. I refer to teams like Windsor, Holdens Goldens, Old Spot, Stroud and the new teams within the local villages at Bucknell, Eynsham, Ducklington, Wheatley, Ilmington and Sherborne. I was not yet actually dancing with Kirtlington (I went back in 1986) but continued dancing with Adderbury, which seemed to content itself with only a few performances a year and I was generally happy with this.

I had many friends in the morris and spent time talking and writing about the subject and involving myself in other morris, mainly at Sidmouth, by attending Roy Dommett's inspiring workshops. I always came away from Roy's workshops fired with new ideas and enthusiasm, but I could not see the same in many other dancers - and I started to question why this seemed to be the case. It was then that I hit on the idea of running a workshop at Sidmouth 1986 on "Creating a Morris Tradition" and I managed to persuade the festival to accept this.

The principal idea behind the series of workshops was to get the dancers to think more about their morris, to instil the feelings of identity so important to me, thus to inspire them and thereby improve their dancing. I did not intend to actually invent a new tradition, just provide a stylistic vehicle that the dancers felt part of and helped create. This would then stir different emotions within them because their personal involvement. As it turned out, most of the workshop attendees happened to be squires or teachers of their respective teams and they threw themselves wholeheartedly into the idea and the new tradition; "Duns Tew", based on the styles from Adderbury, Bucknell and Kirtlington, which I had taught in the first three sessions. I chose Duns Tew because it is situated geographically in the void between the three referenced villages.

The dancers became so involved and enthusiastic that the performance at the end of the week was not enough. In the following year, it was arranged that they would all come to Oxfordshire to dance in and around Duns Tew. This weekend continued for four years, with new dances being added as required, before cracks in the team began to appear. These cracks were not related to dissatisfaction with the idea or with the dances, but with new dancers who eagerly wished to join the team. So it was that Duns Tew Morris as a team briefly flowered and then just as suddenly ceased to exist; but the dances live on, with at least two teams dancing them regularly in England today - and one occasional team in America performing them at least once a year.

The year after the Sidmouth Duns Tew experiment, I ran another workshop there , aimed specifically at stick dances and exploring the unusual characteristics found in those dances from the fringe of the Cotswold morris area. There is information available, although it is not very detailed, to suggest that a form of stick dance called Bedlam Morris , which was performed in the winter months, existed in addition to the predominantly handkerchief springtime Cotswold Whitsun Ale morris. This bedlam should not be confused with Border and particularly the Shropshire Bedlams model, although it could be argued that border morris is a version of this form.

The workshop, although enjoyable, was not as immediately successful as the previous year. However, I had come into contact with a relatively new mixed Cotswold team from just north of Banbury called Long Itchington Morris. They only danced the Adderbury and Wheatley dances and were looking for something different to perform at another time of the year i.e. during the winter months. They became interested in the ideas I had about bedlam morris. so over a number of weeks in 1988, I went through with them the unusual stick dances I had taught at Sidmouth. I then challenged them to create a new dance form that followed certain defined patterns and rules. In an effort to increase the dancers' feeling of ownership, each member had to invent a figure that would be named after them.

Long Itchington Bedlam made their debut in January 1989 and now perform annually, only in Long Itchington, at Candlemas (in February). The team practices the dances for a number of weeks before the day and this is the only performance in the year. They are continuing to develop the dances, introducing changes as they see fit to keep it fresh and alive. This team is a very close knit social group, with workmates and families being very involved, and this closeness has helped create an extremely vital and worthwhile tradition that is danced very well.

My latest escapade into invention came when I decided to start up a local women's team for my daughter to dance with. After several unsuccessful attempts at teaching Duns Tew dances in local classes, we were finally successful, in 1992, in keeping together a group in Adderbury's neighbouring village of Bloxham. I started here by teaching basics i.e. steps and figures, based on the Ascot under Wychwood tradition and soon found that I was not totally satisfied with what it gave me as a style for women who had never danced before, I came to realise that I was creating a new "Bloxham" style as the team learnt and developed. This new style, although still based roughly on Ascot plus one invented figure, was more flowing and the steps were more related to North Oxfordshire. I will attempt to clarify what I mean by this.

In my opinion, many people who know of Cotswold morris and its individual traditions still think of it generally as a single entity, particularly as it only survived in such a relatively small area of England. However, when you live and dance here and become involved in the styles of dance that exist, you very quickly realise that there are very distinct regional stylistic similarities and differences. To me, it feels wrong to implant a figure or step from another area into your dance. For instance, I would never put a slow caper into Adderbury dances. I thought the cross-back step from Ascot too jerky and believed it would look out of place in North Oxfordshire, so I took it out and simplified the back-step, this made the style flow more. The galley is a beautiful

movement when performed well, but there is no foundation in North Oxfordshire for it, so that went as well.

Given the way the style was being developed, along with the teaching of the basics, it seemed foolish to teach any collected dances, so the musician and I hit on a tune we liked ( and he could play); I thought of ways it could be danced to and developed new choruses as necessary, even discarding some earlier ideas. This process is relatively easy; you create a side-step & halfhej dance, then a corner dance ,then a column dance and so on, until a group of new dances exists, not based on anything collected, but all rooted in your own area style and its general characteristics, Nothing outlandish needs to be included and the dancers need to know no more than is necessary to dance their own style well.

By now you may, I hope, be able to understand what motivates me to create new dances and even traditions. A kind of identity and ownership of the dances by the dancers is of paramount importance, where the dancers are in control of the dance rather than the dance controlling the dancers. Respect for the past and a close association to other traditions of your area are also key elements. The need for individuality and uniqueness is also important, but this only comes as a result of the process, and it is not the reason for the process. Being part of a single dance style and all that this entails, rather than being a multi-tradition team, also affects the way the team operates. It is the emphasis on a team's relationship with a particular place and with each other that enhances the team identity. With that fact comes recognition and a small modicum of fame, if only local, and this can only (in my view) improve the dancing.

Experience in the morris has, however, shown me some negative aspects with invention. It is not always clear to me why some teams invent. The most important factor on occasion seems to be the desire to be different and clever. There is often not enough respect for the past or a recognition of the basic characteristics and parameters of morris. Some dances are too complex and fussy; and they are too much a mixture of different dances and styles. Although I like humour, some dances are only created to enact a private joke, which in my view belittles the morris rather than celebrates it. Much of this is lost on the watching public.

In the UK today, there is an enormous growth in border morris and molly dancing. this can be attributed to the fact that the dance steps are easier and more suited to mixed teams and to the success of two particular teams, Shropshire Bedlams and Seven Champions. (note - for those who don't know them, these are both male dance teams, Ed). Both of these teams are wonderful examples of thoughtful and well-researched dance. This, coupled with a very judicious use of invention and humour, has made the teams many friends and they are deservedly popular at many morris weekends and folk festivals. Their dancing contains only a few collected dances, not all from the same place. I believe that in the case of border morris, the traditional list of dances is less than 12 and in molly dance the repertoire is smaller. Therefore, invention has played a major role in their dancing and in general this has created some very good ideas that are excellently performed.

However, many other less able dancers have seen these two teams and are copying some of what they are seeing. Unfortunately I only refer to the ragged costume, the anonymous painted faces, the riotous behaviour, the shrieking while dancing and particularly the studied arrogance; and not the careful researching of the dances, the lightness of the humour, the attention to detail, the quality of dance, the good posture, the excellent timing and the simplicity of the ideas!

Similarly, the “show dance” has become a common phenomenon. Every team seems to want to show its best new creations in these situations, but in my view this has produced a monster that is fast running out of control. I fear that dancers will lose all contact with the past in the new dances they create - and I see many parallels in the folksong world that are bad omens.

In the UK nowadays, the old folk club circuit, with its floor singers as well as booked guests given way to large concerts. The opportunities for floor singers only occur in pub sessions and it is almost impossible to sing a ballad or a more serious song. Some sessions are now the province of musicians, with unaccompanied singers only briefly tolerated. Unless you have something new, or funny, or extraordinary to perform, there is no platform for you. This to me is not folk music and I fear that some morris events are getting the same. Quality of performance no longer seems a priority; “fun” and “cleverness” replace all, and old dances are classed as ordinary.

My plea to you all is this; let’s rediscover our past and by all means bring it up to date, but believe in your morris and work hard at it. When you find it necessary to invent, please do not blindly copy someone else; be individual. It is imperative that you consider your audience and never assume they have a knowledge of morris or any aspect of what you perform. The work carried out by Keith Chandler in his two wonderful books on who danced where, show that in the five counties of the English South Midlands, hitherto called the Cotswolds, there were over 150 villages that had documented morris teams. Of these there is danceable information for only around 25; that leaves a lot of gaps that can be filled. There are still opportunities, by synthesis of the neighbouring traditions, to recreate a tradition now defunct.

Some people may say that it is not appropriate for dancers from North America to treat morris in such a way and invent to fill these gaps. I argue that no matter where you are, if you have decided to dance morris above anything else, in any of its forms, you have already made enough of a commitment to English dance to give you some rights. One only has to mention the two examples of Marlboro and Thames Valley to see that developing a tradition of one’s own, in North America, can be achieved, and that it can be done tastefully and respectfully.

I began by reminding you all, and myself, of how comparatively small the dancing repertoire was 25 years ago, and that many changes have occurred in the intervening time,. Much new “old” Morris has been rediscovered and much new “new” morris had been created. However, it is also true that plenty of the old “old” morris has been either forgotten or ignored. Please don’t neglect the collected dances for the sake of invention. The lists that Tony Barrand has of dances performed at the Marlboro Ale since 1975 make very interesting reading; many traditions do not seem to have been performed in North America for years! I know I paint an extreme picture, but please,

before you invent, examine your reasons and take care of your morris. The development of morris is an ongoing process that should not be taken lightly. Respect our forbears and your contemporaries at all times; they probably felt and feel as strongly about morris as you.

The future of morris is more important to me than the past, but the past should never be forgotten and it is considered by me every time I contemplate introducing change; it shaped my thoughts. However, we must build for the future, as it is there we must all operate. Thank you all for allowing me to vent my views and I wish you all the very best for your Morris... and for the Future,

Tim Radford

*Editor's Note:*

*This article was published with thanks for permission granted by the editors of American Morris Newsletter to reproduce it. Just after I read this article in AMN (Vol. 19, Number 2, July 1996) and asked Tim why no-one in the UK had got these gems out of him before (in print, at least) - he departed for America where he can now keep an eye on morris developments there. No doubt he and Jan will be over in the UK from time to time - but for those of you who hadn't realised they had left Adderbury, their address in the USA is :*

**Tim Radford and Jan Elliott  
PO Box 598  
Woods Hole  
MA02543  
USA  
Tel [US code] - 508 - 540- 0865**

Good Luck, both of you

**YOU CAN DANCE A FIELDTOWN JIG ON TOP OF A BEER BARREL - ALLEGEDLY**

The Foreman of Redbornstoke Morris, Brian Mander, often maintained that a Fieldtown jig could be danced on top of a beer barrel. For several years, the nearest that we saw him do was to dance Princess Royal in a telephone box (the traditional red sort) on a very wet Weekend of Dance. His point was essentially that the dance could be adapted to the environment and space available.

Since 1985, Redbornstoke Morris, together with Bedfordshire Lace and sometimes Black Annis and Ragged Rainbow (not to be confused with the Leicestershire team) danced-in the sunrise on Mayday morning in Ampthill Park. We dance in front of Katharine's Cross, an eighteenth century memorial to Katharine of Aragon, who was exiled to Ampthill Castle after the divorce that set the English monarchy on the road that continues to be the present one. After the dancing, we retire for breakfast and more dancing at The Old Sun. The pub was refurbished a few years ago and a new feature in the back bar was a free-standing wooden barrel. (actually a hogshead) The temptation was too great and Brian was persuaded to dance a jig on it outside. Despite the uneven ground and hence unstable surface, he did wonderfully well and was received enthusiastically. The rest of Redbornstoke quickly echoed this with a Bledington dance performed mainly on smaller, metal casks, after which we went down to Hastings, for Jack on the Green and emptied a few.

Next year, Brian was at his nephew's wedding, but the newly created tradition had to be maintained, and, gentle readers, your author was nominated. The preparations were made, the cask steadied and I was thrust aloft. The music started (Princess Royal, Fieldtown again), the audience hushed, a video camera was recording, the sky was blue, the morning warm and view from my position was splendid. All good things end and a years drying out in a pub causes wood to shrink. The audience gasped, the finger released the video recorder button and I descended into the abyss, well actually astride it, all in a trice.

Many were the hands that came to my rescue and discrete the questions after my health. For reasons that now elude me, the show, apparently had to go on. Kind Redbornstokers were quick to invert the cask and proclaim that the newly offered dancing surface was quite safe. The adoption of a low energy style enabled the dance to be completed without further damage to the cask.

Somehow I felt that the audience were disappointed!

Adrian Williams, Redbornstoke Morris

© November 1996

*Editor's Note - this article has been a long time in arriving but was worth the wait. The delay was caused partly by waiting for stills from the (not actually recorded!) video. But the pictures make up for it. Thanks Adrian.*

*Has anyone else got similar "dare"/ "oh why did I think of doing that" stories?*



**Elevation to the beerge**



**The first double step**



**Out of the abyss**



**The eventual conclusion**

## **WHO OWNS THE DANCE?**

Almost by definition folk dance performance is in the public domain. The legislative mistake in the past was in effect letting collectors have a copyright for the exploitation of material within the culture to which the dances belonged.

Morris dancing troupes imply or profess a folk origin for their material, even though we know that it is usually only the concept of a dance's choreography which is preserved, and that frequently today most of what is done is new. Unless a team does something positive, that legal fiction, "a reasonable person", would assume that what is danced has no associated intellectual rights and therefore is not protected. The copyright resides in the records not the performance. Having recorded your own dances on some media, it is still not enough to control its performance by others. Preventing persons gaining financially is another matter.

The sources which I met were pleased to pass on their dances, as long as they were to be promulgated without personal gain. None of them claimed that they were ever anyone's personal property. Survivors or heirs of old dance teams would have great difficulty in establishing rights allowing any control of performance.

Collectors who have reconstructed a dance from fragmentary evidence may have a claim for intellectual property, if it is clearly stated and understood at performance, as would the choreography of a new dance. The rights could reside with the team, if they were assigned. But the publication, teaching at workshops or of public performance without mention of such caveats is prime evidence of an intent that it should be in the public domain and that rough copies in performance or developments would not be challenged.

The courtesy of leaving alone a long established side's special dances, as for those of "traditional" clubs, is a mark of respect, which most such groups have earned. However imitation is only harmful if the original sees it as threatening their own tradition.

In an age when "tradition" is hard to grasp and to hold on to, the lack of experience of survivals and of modern expressions would be harmful to our collective future. Our only concern should be those clubs who seek dance fodder which is then poorly rehearsed and badly presented, but such standards are bad for the morris image anyhow.

Roy Dommett  
© 1995

**ON TEACHING AND RESPECT FOR TRADITION IN THE MORRIS**

The following letter was received from Chris White, who with Penny Brookman a few months ago wrote an article about teaching morris (published in the *Morris Federation Newsletter*) which sparked off some debate about the importance of tradition, development of a team style and how teams could find what suits them best.

“I was rather surprised that Deborah Kermode and Sally Wearing [*Morris Matters*, 15(2), 1996 pp19-20] acquired the impression that Penny Brookman and I were advocating a “traditional style” of dancing in our article [*Morris Federation Newsletter*, Winter 1995] as our article was about approaches to training and we deliberately left it completely open as to style since the points we were making apply to any style of dance (not just morris).

As to traditional styles of dance, the whole interplay of “authenticity” and innovation offers at least as much scope for inconclusive debate in Morris as it has in music but I can only find the word “tradition” twice in our article and both times it is used as a synonym for style and both times the context is that you have to tailor your training to your style of dance, among other things such as footwear, venues, kit and so on. In many respects, I would regard our article as being complementary to Sally’s in that a more considered approach to teaching and practising would do a great deal to raise the standards of performance by Morris teams, irrespective of style.

Without repeating our article, I would like to expand on one facet of training which significantly affects whether a team performs good or bad Morris. Perhaps the most consistent failure on the part of teachers (foremen, squires, captains or whatever) and the Morris world in general, is a failure to realise that it is necessary for dancers to learn and continually practise dance and movement skills as well as their dance repertoire. Talking to dancers and also from comments on the Morris discussion list on the Internet, I am unpleasantly surprised by how few teams even have separate periods of stepping practice, let alone any more basic forms of movement training, included in their own regular practice sessions.

In any other form of dance, as well as in athletic and sports activities, regular training in the basic skills is the norm. Consequently, it is not surprising, even if it is frustrating, that many Morris dancers, many whole teams even, simply cannot dance. Even though they may know their repertoire, they lack a fundamental awareness of their body, its movements, energy and posture while dancing. This sort of awareness is not a part of our culture, it has to be learned. It is the foundation on which to build the specifics of your dance and - while it can come with experience - that is the hard way and it is acquired much quicker with proper teaching. Without this awareness and basic movement skills, any amount of attention to figures and dance sequences is almost inevitably fruitless.

It should be clear that what we were talking about is a world away from the EFDSS approach which teaches rigid forms and gives no attention to the “internal” aspects. Although, to give the pre-war EFDSS system its due, it was apparently intended mostly for trained PE and dance teachers who should have known about those things already. This is not the case for most of the people who run practices for Morris teams

nowadays. From the point of view of foremen etc. what we are saying is that teaching Morris is a skill distinct from dancing - as teaching anything is a separate skill from doing it. The team, whatever its style or tradition, will be better dancers if they consider the basics of dance, how to teach them and then incorporate them with warm-ups, fitness training and dance repertoire into the team's regular practice sessions.

Chris White  
© October 1996

**1997 Library Lectures at Cecil Sharp House**

The usual season of Friday lectures approaches - the lectures for 1997 are planned as follows:

**24th January**

A harmony of words: looking at traditional and revival storytelling as now found in folk clubs and festivals

by Pat Ryan

**28th February**

Eels Foot to Aldermaston: routes of the urban folk revival before 1960

by Dave Gregory

**25th April**

Walter Pardon: craftsman singer

by Pat Mackenzie and Jim Carroll

(note there is no lecture in March)

Admission is free; each lecture starts at 7.30pm and there is a door collection

**THE INTERNET REVIEWER**

And now for those of you who knew that Simon Pipe had gone travelling the world with his family and wondered who would take over the role of Internet Browser for Morris Matters - Andy Anderson (Red Stags, Jackstraws) volunteered - or was co-opted, but it amounts to the same result - he has produced a very thorough romp through what is worth knowing - or not - about what is going on in the ether relating to morris - so here he is .....

Simon Pipe summarised the contents of the MDDL, the internet Morris Dance Discussion List, for the last issue. Foolishly, in Simon's absence, I agreed to provide a similar summary. Foolishly, because, although the traffic on this list varies, there's usually a lot of it. Which means that this can only give a flavour of what was discussed. Anyone can get more details, but for notations and suchlike you'll have to subscribe to the MDDL, or find someone who does and is prepared to do the asking: it's part of the ethos of a discussion list like this that e-mail addresses aren't published without explicit permission. The list-server for the MDDL is at listserv@listserv.iupui.edu, the list is called MORRIS, and sending a message 'subscribe MORRIS yourname (optional side name) should do the trick, or you can e-mail me at pd49@dial.pipex.com, or leave a message on my answering machine on 01703-790244. I said that there was a lot of traffic. So much so, that one discussion topic over the past few months has been whether it could be kept shorter. John Price (jOHN) of St Albans, wrote...

*"... my email screen readily accepts six lines - I have to create a separate document to write more. A useful discipline for me!"*

To which Brian Bending (bRiAn)replied

*"For disciplined mail, imitate Japanese haiku!"*

It became obvious that they were winding each other up: John finished his next posting with

*"Sorry for the long post. Hope you made it to the end. ;-)"*

*jOHN of St Albans*

*(who doesn't know what Japanese haiku is, but thinks all these fish taste the same anyway.)"*

...this is a good example of how the MDDL gets a bit like an after practice discussion in the pub. Individual discussion topics ('threads') weave in and out until no-one can quite remember where they started. I'll come back to that later. But, talking about pubs (a lot of that happens on the list as well), Paul Millennas, a regular on the list, entertained many of us with a description of his trip to the Silkeborg Morris Ring Meeting.

*"The afternoon was danced on rough turf. The Cotswold was predictable; dancing was very similar to that danced last year. Eventually, the teams filed back to the boats, stopping briefly in the bushes. During the return trip, Silurian threw Ilmington's hobby horse into the waters, "accidentally". Admittedly, we all thought it would have floated."*

I've picked one of the less controversial pieces, and you'll see why in a moment. Paul wasn't very impressed with the protocol at the feast either...

*"The speeches were most forgettable, although Silurian partly made amends by awarding Ilmington's Hobby Horse a swimming medal, posthumously."*

Paul's postings were, as always, entertaining, but they caused a few arguments... What caused the bad feelings were the descriptions of after hours behaviour on the part of some of the teams. Putting the other side of the case, John Maher, whose name had been taken in vain in Paul's diary, considered that...

*"This report was a travesty of what the Silkeborg Ring was really like. To say that Mr Millenias was 'economical with the truth' would be more accurate .... Thanks Silkeborg MM and your great 'Team', and to the local Mayors and their town councils for amazing hospitality. Its a pity that other local councils on this side of the Channel cannot put similar support into some of their local Folk events."*

(it's a shame nobody took him up on that last point) This led John Price to ask...

*"Could I clarify whether MDDL has an official anti-Ring policy, or is it the opinion of the few who have contributed recently, or am I just reading too much into the comments? :-)"*

jOHN suggested that the problem was

*"...due to the excesses of a few men (very much a minority, thank god) in all-male gatherings;"*

Pretty soon, the discussion had widened to 'acceptable behaviour' in general, 'blokish behaviour' in particular and whether the right 'image' of morris was being presented. Norman Stanfield, from Vancouver, and a regular with fairly definite views as to the type of morris he likes, commented that he was 'afraid' that Paul's diary rang true. Graham Baldwin responded:

*"But Norman, why are you "afraid" that Paul's diary "rings true"? Do I sense that you are critical (heaven forbid!) of behaviour at Ring meetings? Is not such behaviour similar to that reported in the historical records from the dim-and-distant past? Is this not what you purport to recreate? :)*

Norman replied...

*"Ouch. Thats gotta hurt ... I do indeed advocate re-creating morris misrule (and its occasional mayhem), but due to my senility, I also crave order and finesse. I can't stand older men being "bad boys" i.e. boors. Come to think of it, I can't even stand bad boys. So my "traditional" vision of morris is in danger of being sanitary. Or, to put it another way, my "frontier vision" is to re-create a rowdy morris and mummings for the public by using theatrical cues..."*

Doug Reiner commented that

*"As far as blokish behavior is concerned, the only truly unforgivable incident I've ever witnessed was this past year at Marlborough, seven o'clock in the morning, when some unbelievably cheerful, unhangover person at a nearby campsite loudly asked if everyone had enough maple syrup for their pancakes. Sheesh."*

and Alan Barber neatly summed the discussion up with...

*"...IMHO there is also an OPTIMUM level of alcohol and an OPTIMUM level of misrule involved. Of course one man's optimum is anothers excess - but I certainly have no desire to analyse it."*

enough said. Then there was a discussion about what people do in their spare time (when they're not Morris Dancing). This started out as a discussion of the Morris Dancing entry in Encarta, the CD-ROM encyclopaedia. Andrew Miller, from the US, then asked

*"I wonder if BILL is a Morris Dance Fan - there are enough of 'em working at Microsoft."*

.. "BILL" being Bill Gates. Tamara Thomas, mailing from a Microsoft address, said...

*"To the best of my knowledge, and despite our best efforts, Bill has never seen Morris dancing. Of course, it may be for the best, goodness knows what the career impact would be if he knew where we spend our off hours.... (Please don't tell Bill I actually don't live in my office)"*

In amongst discussions of whether a female musician playing for a men's side could be a morris man, and how to free up stuck fiddle pegs, Elaine Bradtke, an old stager, asked...

*"I've just been thinking about the shape of the typical Cotswold style morris set. Double column. Are there any dances out there, traditional or newly composed that use different shapes? Square? Circle? I'm interested in true set dances, not massed jigs. Would you say the double column formation is a defining factor of Cotswold Morris?"*

Rich Holmes, another regular from the US, commented

*"...Seems like practically every modern Cotswold team has done adaptations for sets of 4 (or occasionally 3 or 5!) at times when membership ebbed. But in the last century, if they couldn't get six men to dance, they'd either recruit a woman (as at Bampton) or stop dancing (as at practically everywhere). They must've felt the longways set of six was pretty important, more so than being all male or even existing as a side."*

The resulting discussion unearthed descriptions of a large number of dances (mostly American choreographies) for odd numbers and in odd formations. Anyone interested in, notations for odd numbers or shapes could do worse than follow up the topic with the people involved.

*Subject: sHoRt pOsTiNgS*

*bRiAn has asked that... / to keep our postings short we / imitate haiku*

*...And, for discussion / have we no more to say on / the MDDL?*

But just then there was an interesting discussion about 'Old Tom of Oxford': Peter Klosky wanted to know:

*"Who or what was "Old Tom?" I recall passing a pub by that name in Oxford City. The sign featured a bell-tower. (If the pub had been open, I would have inquired). Was he a tower? Was he a bell in the tower?"*

because...

*"... It's grist for a barker's mill."*

Tim Radford (need I say, of Adderbury Morris) replied with the information that...

*"Great Tom" is a 6 ton bell in the Tower of Christ Church College in Oxford that was cast in 1680. The chances that Old Tom is Great Tom seem to me to be pretty great, especially as there are 2 well know rounds known locally in Oxfordshire, particularly in the Thames valley (collected by Alfred Williams who collected in Bampton) about said Bell.*

...he then gave the words, concluding that...

*"I have just checked my Williams - Folk Songs of the Upper Thames, and it says that he heard part of the song in Aston, which is next Bampton."*

Norman Stanfield wrote...

*"Sorry, not so fast. Jingy Wells (in the EFDSS Journal of 1956, V. 6, N. 1) tells us that old Tom was a Forester who also lived in a caravan as a "awker". He lived the life on the road with his nephew Jim Kent, who married an Oxford girl who acquired the nickname Old Molly Oxford. I'm not making this up."*

Peter Klosky responded

*"I'm pretty sure you're not making that up, Norman, but I'm not so sure Mr. William Wells didn't! In any road, I'll be off to the local university to photostat the journal reference. Thanks!"*

*"Wells himself was something of an "(H)awker," as we learn from Francis Shergold's wonderful intro to the song "Needlecases" (on "Greeny Up"). Jingy apparently drove around in an old truck selling odds & bobs & tinkery things. Kind of a nice thought, but a helluva way to make a living!"*

...a good example of the kind of odd facts which come to light on the MDDL, to be filed under "don't throw it away, it might come in handy..." ...back with the Haiku brigade, Jennifer Sawin asked:

*Could we introduce / Morris to an audience / In haiku format?  
It would certainly / Shorten the introduction! / Viewers would be pleased.  
"Bampton-in-the-Bush"? / Is it just coincidence / The name fits haiku?*

There was a discussion about how often British Sides dance out, compared with American sides. Sharon McKinley (a regular from the US) told us...

*"Sunset seems to only be able to muster about once a month this time of year. We seem to suffer an inordinate amount of burnout, due to the fact that nearly 50% of our team dances the Ren Faire stuff for about 8 weeks starting mid April. By the time June comes round, and that gig has ended, about the last thing anybody wants to do is more dancing. Then, of course, it starts to get pretty hot. Several of us have been lamenting this fact, and trying to get something going, but it doesn't always work out."*

...but Rich Homes commented

*"All the messages in this thread so far seem to have the unstated axiom that "if morris is good, then more morris is better". Allow me to disagree. We've debated here various tactics to make morris more interesting to the public and to the jaded dancers; one of the easiest ways is rarely talked about: don't do as much of it!"*

There was even a recipe. Sometime around the point where quarter days and the Gregorian calendar were being discussed, there were questions about souling. Norman Stanfield asked:

*Is anybody in England making plans to go house-to-house singing Souling Songs this coming NOV1?*

and Debbie Lewis, from the US, reproduced a recipe for Shropshire Soul Cakes. (Again, copyright material, details available from the list) This sparked off a discussion: Norman said...

*"Thank you, thank you, thank you for that recipe and info! For non-chefs like me, would you please give us a brief description of the final product - are they dinner buns with the addition of a bit of spice and sugar?"*

...and Debbie replied

*"Okay, I confess I've never actually made the things, but the recipe indicates they're as you imagine, because of the egg, somewhat like brioche (only another shape altogether). "treacle" is somewhat akin to molasses or sorghum syrup..."*

...which eventually ended up with a learned of different types of treacle, ending with definitions from various 'definitive' sources. Then, Michael White wrote...

*"We are blessed with youthful (?) dancers with the core of our group between the ages of 30-40 years. We are also experiencing the pains associated with Morris dancing. One member has missed the last 6 weeks of practice with a bad knee. I fear that surgery may be in his near future.*

...there was plenty of good advice, including this from Steve Corrsin, another regular...

*"Actually, you cope. You dance less, spend more time stretching before and after, wrap ankles and knees somehow, remember RICE for injuries – Rest Ice Compression Elevation).*

...as well as from Peter Klosky...

*"Seriously, you dance, you get old, you start to fall apart & you don't dance as well. That's life, goddamnit. The hard part is doing it with grace & aplomb!"*

...the discussion then moved to where to get good quality footwear, such as trainers in sensible colours. (Once again, details available). Back in haiku-land, I attempted a very pretentious response to Jennifer Sawin, with

*I was going to post another senryu back, but then I thought... [sometimes I do that, you know] if we don't follow / haiku in our morris, then... / probably we should*

there was more, which doesn't even bear re-reading, let alone reproducing: however, I was completely upstaged by the redoubtable Norman Stanfield, who posted...

*Subject: morris "haiku" (jakugo)*

*utau to mau mo*

*ho no sho*

*Both music and Dance,*

*Voices of "the way"*

*- Zenji Hakuin*

leaving everyone with a "Thought for the day"

amongst the topics still current, as of the end of November, are: Rapper events, Hutterites, the Wicker Man, Hammersmith Morris (replacing Flag Crackers as the main topic). Plus, workshops, diaries and recruiting hints and tips...

LETTERS PAGES

**On Musicians:**

Thanks for the latest Morris Matters - Of particular interest was the letter from Claire Lain on Morris Musicians. I wish I lived in Godalming! Sometimes at weekend events a "team" arrives without a musician and I have been asked to play for them from cold. The first thing I ascertain is their speed and then, if the dance has any slows, the order in which they come. (I have seen many a musician floored by the slow corners in Valentine).

The way the musician phrases the tune is very important and determines how the dances perform. I have played the morris for well nigh sixty years and always use a very punchy, restrained off-beat bass that lifts the dancers, rather than driving them into the ground. Kemps Men of Norwich are in the fortunate position (vertical ) of having eleven musicians (some even play the same tune at the same time). The concertina players tend to play the "wall of sound", i.e. no holes in the music. One melodeon player likes to play heavy basses and our fiddler is somewhat legato. The other members were taught by me and tend to adopt the rhythmic style. I cannot understand Fleur de Lys musicians leaving when they are criticised - surely they are part of the team?

Norris Winstone  
July 1996

**The truth about the ancient fertility rite?**

I sometimes wonder if we aren't being too academic about the morris. After all, if it isn't an ancient fertility rite, but a rustic pastime, it was either done for a bit of a lark or to amuse the audience. If the latter is true, why has it survived so long.?

To get an idea of "authenticity" one can watch Bampton, Headington Quarry, Chipping Camden or the revival Adderbury, Wheatley and Brackley sides. The way Wheatley dance now is not the same as when we learnt it some years ago, but much more vigorous.

Some years ago, when we had adjudicatory festivals in Norwich, Marjory Sinclair was the judge. She said, "It is all right if a change in a dance has evolved, but it shouldn't be *deliberately* changed e.g. to get a symmetrical effect." I remember the late Ewart Russell saying, "To write down a dance freezes it in time".

An example is the Black Book. Unfortunately people use it as an instruction book - that's how it's done etc. I'm all for evolution, keep certain features that show differences between traditions, but let the style suit modern trends. I once knew a chap who made an experimental set of resin sticks - tuned!

And talking about naffness \* - a now-defunct local side had a hollowed-out Morris stick fitted with a rifle firing

bolt which fired a blank cartridge, in Adderbury Beaux!

Norris Winstone  
July 1996

\* see Simon Pipe's article in last issue of Morris Matters - Ed

**"Slow Morris"**

At this year's Kemps Kamp (1996) there were two young ladies (mum and daughter) from Oyster, who danced very slow Fieldtown jigs. The exercise seemed to me to be pointless. There is a tempo at which a dance looks "right" and if the dancer likes to do very high capers, the musician will wait for him/her to come down! Playing some of the tunes very slowly seems to make them laboured. I recently saw Bampton (Shergold's team) dancing and was surprised that they danced even faster than Kemps Men - who have always danced vigorously;

attempts at dancing slowly have failed. A side should pick a tempo that is satisfying and entertaining - but not laboured, and enables the dancers to perform all the steps accurately. I know one side who (in Dearest Dickie) put an extra rtf in the corners to avoid dancing a slow galley at the end!

Norris Winstone  
November 1996

P.S. I have, recently, been trying to "unteach" a morris club - they invited me to see them dance. None of the dances they performed looked like what is generally accepted ( I avoid "right" and "wrong") as morris, mainly because they had 'learnt' from THE BOOK and therefore were not performing morris stepping, hadn't a clue what "Once to Yourself" was about , were glued to the floor, didn't move together etc.; there must be a moral here.



And just for fun - one of our more regular authors sent the following offering:

**THE KAMA SUTRA AND MORRIS DANCING: SOME POSITIONS**

- Face to Face
- Back to Back
- Leg Across
- Cross Back
- Foot Up
- Hands Around
- Two Between
- Side by Side
- Leap Frog
- Hook Leg
- Bottoms Up

## **VAGRANTS, ROGUES AND VAGABONDS**

Plough Monday Tradition in Old Huntingdonshire and the Soke of Peterborough.

George Frampton has added another title to his ongoing publication concerning Molly Dance and Plough Monday tradition in Cambridgeshire and East Anglia. This will complement those already published on The Whittlesey Straw Bear, Balsham's Plough Monday ("Pity the Poor Ploughboy") and Little Downham ("Necessary to keep up the Day")

As in all the eastern counties, Plough Monday was fervently celebrated in Cambridgeshire and the county districts of Huntingdonshire and Peterborough have displayed in the past a more varied selection of activity than in most other places.

After a short historical introduction, the 32 page booklet explores the best-reported custom in the area; that of plough witching at Godmanchester. The straw bear custom at Ramsey is then considered, with notes on the contemporaneous Christmas mummers play noted in various other parts of the district. A survey of Plough Monday in all other parts of the district is then included in a 'pot pourri' section. The booklet concludes with notes on the Plough Monday revival at Fenstanton which began in 1980 and continues today - although the author notes that the seeds sown for this reached an earlier fruition some two years earlier. A full bibliographical list is included.

Apart from being on sale at selected festivals, the booklet is on sale by mail order only, priced £1.20 (plus 40p extra for post and packing, please), from:

George Frampton, Melrose, Thorn Road, Marden, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 9EJ