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MORRIS MATTERS

Contents of Volume 40 Number 2

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Reviews or other contributions are always welcome – to morrismatters@outlook.com

My immense thanks to the contributors to this issue who have made good use of their time during the pandemic restrictions to producing some really interesting articles about morris past, present and maybe future. I sincerely hope that by next year we will be steering gently back to something like before and we can report on current morris-related activities. It has been marvellous to finally see members of my team live - rather than on ZOOM - over the last few weeks and to dance with them!

Beth

Nine Daies Wonder revisited

Many people will know of Will Kemp's dance from London to Norwich and there has been much speculation on why he undertook such a ludicrous journey. The speculation is largely based upon disagreements with Shakespeare, but there has been little said on exactly how he achieved his feat. By taking a closer investigation into the only evidence we have, namely the pamphlet 'The Nine Daies Wonder' (Kemp's own account of his exploit) this article hopes to tease out more details about the dance event itself.

How relevant was the title?

Firstly the title; the proverb upon which it is based is older than Kemp's dance. Shakespeare alluded to the old proverb "A wonder lasts nine days and then the puppy's eyes are open". Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable explains the proverb as 'Something that causes a great sensation for a few days and then passes into the limbo of things forgotten …….. the eyes of the public are blind in astonishment for the space of nine days, but then their eyes become fully open, and they see too much to wonder any longer.' as in the case of puppies that are born blind. Brewer then goes on to quote Shakespeare's Henry VI part III:

King Edward: You'd think it strange if I should marry her…

Gloucester: That would be ten days' wonder, at the least.

Clarence: That's a day longer than a wonder lasts.

This was written in 1591-92 about ten years before Kemp's dance. It was a misleading title in two ways. Firstly, it is still being talked about over 400 years later and secondly, it took more than nine days to accomplish. It is a catchy title however and I am sure Kemp would be delighted that we are still talking about it now. Figure 1 shows the days taken to complete the task of dancing from London to Norwich in bold type.

How many days did it take him?

So, although there were nine days of dancing large distances, the days were not continuous but were, rather, spread over 27 days. Also, Kemp did not complete it in nine days. It would be *10 days* if the day dancing through Norwich to the Mayor's house were included. It would be *12 days* if the two 3-mile sections danced (at Chelmsford and Braintree, on February 16th and 19th) were added and *13 days* if the re-danced section in Norwich were included. This section (which was danced on 11th March) was to satisfy Kemp's overseer, George Spratt, that Kemp had danced the whole way, because Spratt had lost sight of him in the crowds the previous Saturday.

Kemp's rest days were as follows. There were two days at Romford "to give rest to my well labour'd limbes" after a long stint of 12¾ miles from London on day one. At the end of this day he accepted a lift offered by "a kinde Gentleman of London" to take him the final ¼ of a mile to his Inn at Romford on his horse. Two days were spent resting at Chelmsford on 16th and 17th of February though on 16th he danced a three mile section ….."I footed it, three myle of my way towards Braintree". Kemp then *returned* to the "good cheere and kind welcome" he received at Chelmsford, not forgetting that part of this welcome involved dancing for an hour with a 14-year old girl that evening. Another enthusiastic welcome at Braintree, caused him to stay another day there apart from dancing another three miles "on Tewsday, to ease my Wednesdaies journey". After 16 miles of dancing the next day Kemp rested at Master Colt's for two days.

He then set off for Bury St Edmunds and it was here that he had his longest rest of five consecutive days. This was not so much due to injury or exhaustion but rather "by reason of the great snow that then fell". After dancing to Thetford on leap year day he was persuaded to stay with Sir Edwin Rich, where he was bountifully entertained for two days and then sent on his way with a gift of £5.00. Kemp's account does not mention what he did between the eighth day (3 March) and the ninth day (5 March) of his journey, so we must assume that he rested in Hingham on Tuesday 4 March. The following ninth day took him to St Giles gate at Norwich where he was persuaded to postpone his final entry to Norwich until the Saturday giving the surrounding populace time to get to Norwich to witness his triumphant entry. So he rested another two days with "the Mayor and many of the Aldermen who "invited us privately to theyr severall houses".

Figure 1 KEMP'S 'NINE DAIES'		
Date	**Distance**	**Miles**
Monday 11th February (1)	**London to ¼ mile of Romford**	12 ¾
Tuesday 12th February	Resting at Romford	
Wednesday13th February	Resting at Romford	
Thursday 14th February (2)	**¼ mile of Romford to Ingatestone**	12 ¼
Friday 15th February (3)	**Ingatestone to Chelmsford**	6
Saturday 16th February	*Chelmsford + 3 miles*	3
Sunday 17th February	Resting at Chelmsford	
Monday 18th February (4)	**Chelmsford + 3m. to Braintree**	8
Tuesday 19th February	*Braintree + 3 miles*	3
Wednesday 20th February (5)	**Braintree + 3m. to Long Melford**	16
Thursday 21st February	Resting at Master Colt's, Melford	
Friday 22nd February	Resting at Master Colt's, Melford	
Saturday 23rd February (6)	**Long Melford to Bury St. Edmunds**	22
Sunday 24th February	Resting at Bury St. Edmunds	
Monday 25th February	Resting at Bury St. Edmunds	
Tuesday 26th February	Resting at Bury St. Edmunds	
Wednesday 27th February	Resting at Bury St. Edmunds	
Thursday 28th February	Resting at Bury St. Edmunds	
Friday 29th February (7)	**Bury St. Edmunds to Thetford**	10
Saturday 1st March	Resting at Sir Edwin Rich's, Thetford	
Sunday 2nd March	Resting at Sir Edwin Rich's, Thetford	
Monday 3rd March (8)	**Thetford to Hingham**	20
Tuesday 4th March	? Resting at Hingham ?	
Wednesday 5th March (9)	**Hingham to Norwich (St. Giles)**	15
Thursday 6th March	Resting at Norwich	
Friday 7th March	Resting at Norwich	
Saturday 8th March	**St. Giles to St. Stephens to Mayor's House**	1
(Tuesday 11th March	*Repeat of St. John's to Mayor's House)*	
Total		129

At what speed did Kemp dance?

There are several references to the time Kemp set off and arrived at various places in his account and these can be compared with the distances involved to give us an idea of the speed at which he danced. When I helped organise a relay style re-enactment of Kemp's dance by The Morris Clubs of London in 1977, as part of the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations, we worked on an estimate of 3 mph for a Morris side dancing a processional dance on asphalt road surfaces. Taken day by day we have the following information in Kemp's pamphlet. Kemp left "somewhat before 7 in the morning" on day one, leaving Ilford in "moonshine" to dance the final five miles to within a quarter of a mile of Romford where he accepted a lift on a horse to get to his Inn. It would get dark early in February, and we also offered, or at Stratford Langton, where a bear baiting had been arranged, nor at Ilford, where he resisted supping from the "great spoon". If we assume he had been dancing for 10 hours his speed would have been 1¼ mph, but only 1 mph if it had been 12 hours. This does not seem very fast, but Kemp did mention the huge crowds that followed him which could not have made his progress very easy.

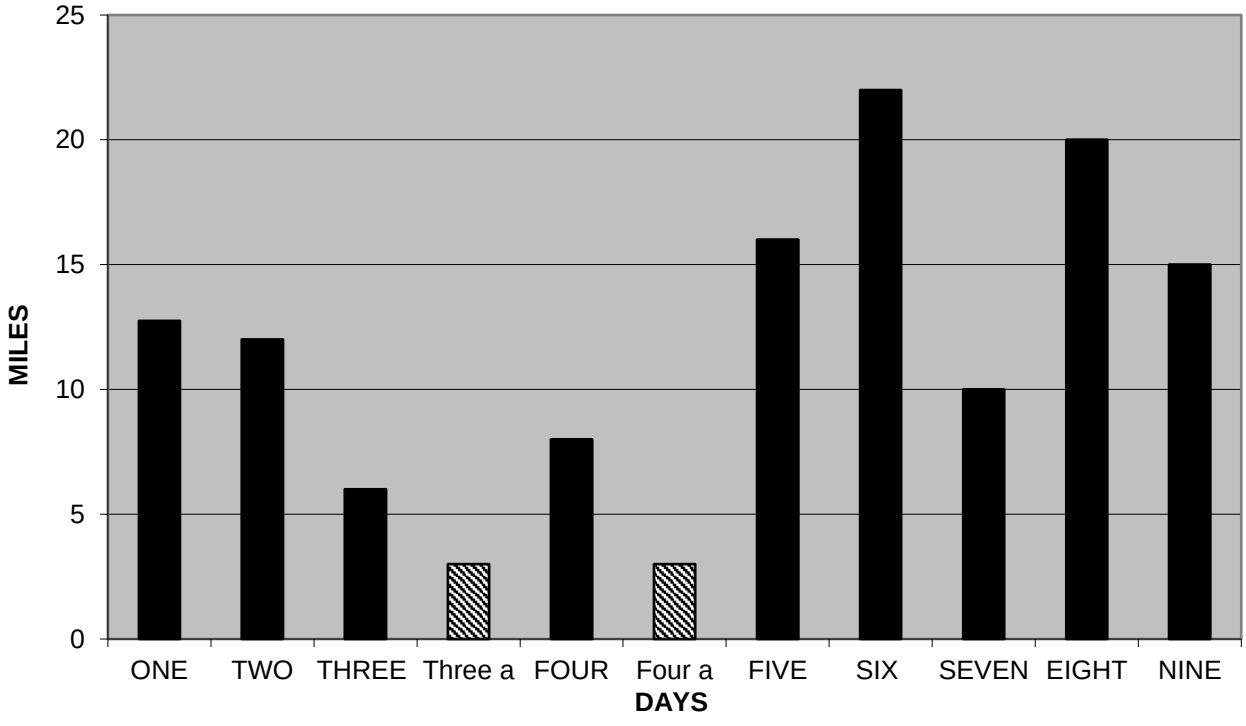
On day 2 he was "earlier up than the Lark" as he returned to where he had accepted the lift when approaching Romford. The fact that he strained his hip "and for a time endured exceeding paine" may have slowed his progress, as would the "multitudes" that hindered him getting to his Inn in Brentwood. Here he "rested well" before dancing the five miles to Ingatestone with "the Moone shining clearly" which was probably a speed of between 1 to 2 mph for a distance similar to that achieved on the first day. The third day Kemp attempted the six miles to Chelmsford. Here he paused at Sir Thomas Mildmay's park gates. In Kemp's account we read that Sir Thomas "received gently a payre of garters of me". Kemp then explains that "gloves, points and garters, being my ordinary merchandize" illustrating that selling his merchandise along the way would also have slowed his progress, since it is unlikely that Kemp would have turned down any opportunity to profit from his venture. We do not know how long this delayed him but he does then state that the crowds were so great that it took him an hour to get to the gate of his Inn where he stayed that day being "so weary, that I could dance no more". It had therefore, taken a morning after an early start to go six miles.

Day 4 saw Kemp dance 8 miles to Braintree having risen "very early" and reached Braintree "by noone". He does however note that it was a "foule way" beset with deep ruts often filled with water. His progress could not have been easy. If he had left at 7am then this would have been five hours and meant 1.4 mph but very early might have meant 5am. This would then have taken seven hours and the speed would be more like 1 mph. On day 5 Kemp tells us he "tript it" to Sudbury Here he met Master Foskew and so must have rested, before continuing on to Long Melford. There was an event here that led Kemp to comment on his speed of dancing. A "tall, lusty" butcher decided to dance with him to Bury but according to Kemp gave up after ½ mile complaining he would not do it even if offered £100 because as Kemp tells us "indeed my pace in dauncing is not ordinary". However he then explained that "a lusty Country lasse" put the butcher to shame saying "if I had begun to daunce, I would have held out one mile though it had cost me my life". In fact she she kept pace with Kemp until they reached Long Melford which Kemp described as "a long myle." Day 6 was the longest distance Kemp danced in a day – 22 miles from Long Melford to Bury by way of Clare. According to Kemp's account we are told that he left "in the morning" and arrived at Bury "in the afternoon". The journey included two stops, at Clare "where a while I rested" and then at widow Everet's house If this was 10 hours or so of dancing then his speed was over 2 mph. It then began to snow which gave Kemp five days of rest.

Day 7 at last gives us some accurate data. Kemp tells us "I set on towardes Thetford, dauncing that tenne mile in three houres: for I left Bury somewhat after seaven in the morning, and was at Thetford somewhat after ten that same forenoone." In other words his speed was 3.3 mph. Kemp obviously thought this a good achievement and goes on to explain why and it is worth quoting in full. "But indeed considering how I had been booted the other journeys before, and that all this way or the most of it was over a heath, it was no great wonder: for I far'd like one that had escaped the stockes and tride the use of his legs to out-run the Constable: so light was my heeles, that I counted the ten miles no better than a leape". This would imply that he had lighter shoes for this section of the journey. The well drained sandy heathland was also likely to be free of ruts and puddles. It was also possible that in covering the previous sections in boots they were probably caked in mud, thus slowing his dancing even more.

Day 8 was the second best distance achieved, 20 miles, from Thetford to Hingham but apart from the fact that he left in the morning and rested at Rockland there are no timings. It was probably not a very fast journey because Kemp mentions that it was a "foule way". Day 9 from Hingham to Norwich obviously started at a good pace because Kemp stated that he did not stop until he got to Barford Bridge with "five young men running all the way with me, for otherwise my pace was not for footemen". It would seem that the state of the roads was the most important feature that controlled the pace that Kemp danced at and where the conditions were good, for example the heath land near Thetford, his pace was 3 to 3 ½ mph which is about equal to what the Morris Clubs of London achieved in the 1977 re-enactment on metalled roads. However, where the roads were poor, and Kemp quite frequently mentioned this, his pace was probably nearer to 1 or 1½ mph.

Figure 2 DISTANCE DANCED EACH DAY



What did Kemp dance?

The next question to look at is what exactly did Kemp dance? It was certainly not like the Morris dance we see today which is largely based on the choreography used in the nineteenth century. Most of the terms used in his pamphlet were descriptive and were mainly energetic terms (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 DANCE TERMS USED IN THE TEXT	
Terms applied to himself	Dance terms generally applied
gambols heighs trille-lilles bel-shangles leapt hey de gaies dauncing came in a turne I tript it I footed it our jumps lightly tript I fetcht a rise fetching a leap	a Trenchmore

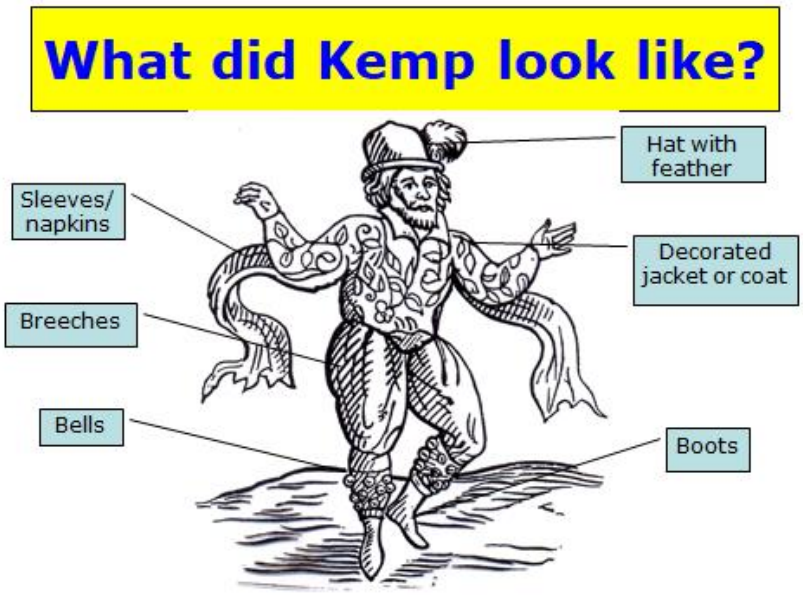
Kemp strained his hip on day 2 when performing "a turne" at Romford and for a time he endured pain though decided not to trouble a surgeon but rather to dance his way through it. Whether the "turne" was part of the dance or a move to avoid an obstacle is not mentioned. Obviously he had to adapt his movement in order to cope with the tracks which Kemp described at various times as a "foule way"; "a durtie way"; "the way were rotten"; and "miry". The spelling of the word Morrice was consistent all the way through the document and in the Dedication at the start of the book an indignant Kemp was keen to redress some of the inaccuracies that had appeared in print since he finished the dance including that "Some sweare in a Trenchmore I have trode a good way to winne the world." A Trenchamore was a boisterous country dance in triple time and Kemp was keen to point out that it was not that that he danced but a Morris dance.

Bells seem to be an important part of making it a Morris dance. The two times he danced with women they had to have a set of bells. The maid at Chelmsford who requested that she would like to dance the Morris with him in a great large room, when that request was granted, Kemp was "soone wonne to fit her with bels". When the lusty country lass wished to dance alongside him to shame the butcher who had given up she said to Kemp "if the dauncer will lend me a leash of his bels" which Kemp promptly did. Kemp then called her his Maid Marrion alluding to the May games with which Morris dancing were frequently associated. The butcher had asked to keep him company to Bury, but only lasted half a mile. There was no mention of bells for him. Maybe it was the lure of the female leg when Kemp "beheld her ready to tucke up her russet petticoat" that he "fitted her with bells". Also the Morris dance must have been associated with a certain rhythm and type of step since when she finished dancing, after giving her a "skinfull of drink" and a crown to buy more, Kemp complemented her by saying "she had a good eare, (and) daunst truly".

It also appears that Morris dancing was a test of stamina, and was also seen as being a competitive dance. This is apparent in his dance with the maid at Chelmsford where Kemp says "and to our jumps we fell. A whole houre she held out: but then being ready to lye downe I left her off: but this much in her praise, I would have challenged the strongest man in Chelmsford, and amongst many I thinke few would have done so much". The words *challenged* and *strongest man* convey the idea of stamina and competition being connected with the Morris. Perhaps also there is a connection too with it being a comical dance. When he left Long Melford Kemp was accompanied for the first mile by Master Colt's fool before, as Kemp put it, "two fooles parted faire in a foule way". Also in the dedication to Mistress Anne Fitton, Kemp claims he is sure she will find nothing "but blunt mirth in a Morrice dauncer". Therefore here the Morrice appears to refer to a style or genre of dance that was improvised, much as East Anglian step dancing is today, which only became choreographed at a much later date. The other thing to remember is that many of the early sixteenth century references to Morris dancing are linked to the processional urban Morris. When discussing these events, John Forrest in his *History of Morris Dancing 1458-1750* states "A Morris dance that is part of a procession, must therefore, place little, if any, stress on choreography that takes time to develop a comprehensible pattern, and place more on simple repeatable motions, such as rhythmic leaping, stepping, or the clashing of weapons. It must also allow for forward progress, travelling on average at the same pace as marching soldiers." (pp101-02). This is much more what we see described by Kemp.

What did Kemp wear?

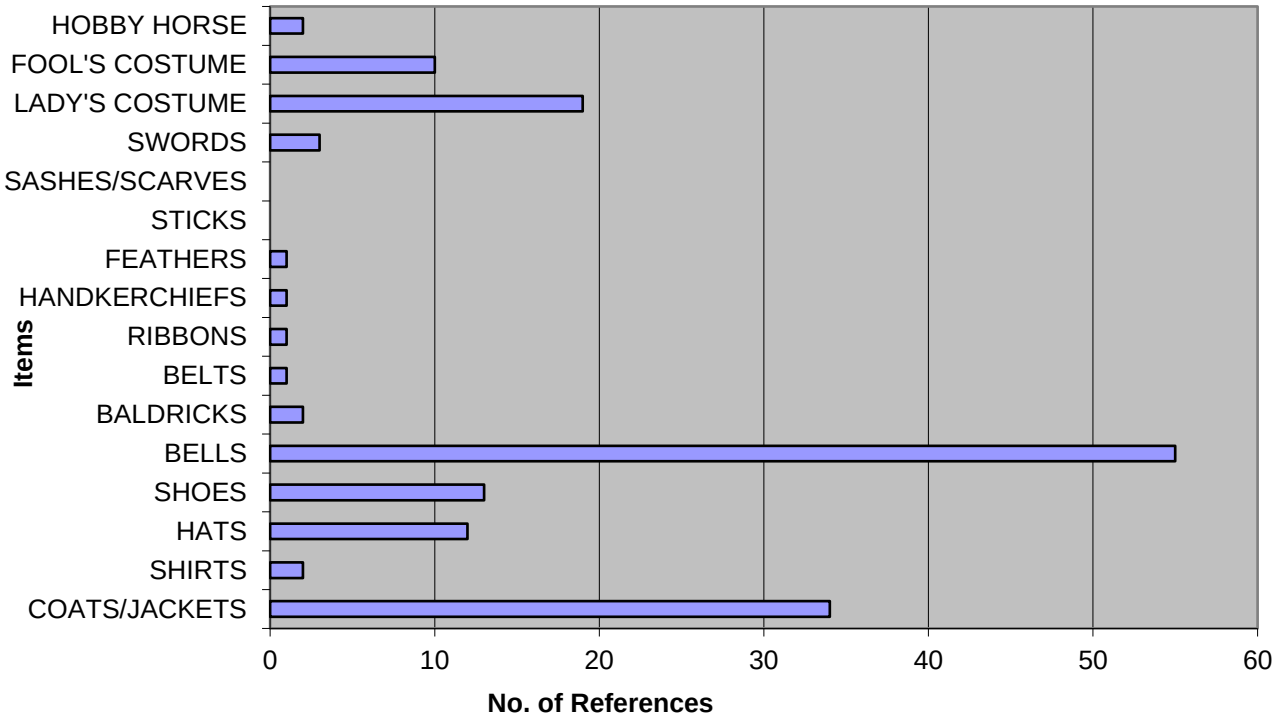
Figure 4 AN ANNOTATED VERSION OF THE WOODCUT OF KEMP ON THE FRONT OF 'THE NINE DAIES WONDER'



It is much easier to answer the question what did Kemp look like because of the well-known wood cut that accompanied Kemp's pamphlet. Was this typical of a Morris dancer at the time? The latter question can be best answered by referring to the *Annals of Early Morris* compiled by Michael Heaney and John Forrest. They list, amongst other things, all references to articles of costume mentioned in the records. The number of references to each item of costume, before 1900, was then totalled and displayed in a bar chart (see Figure 5). The most frequent item mentioned was

bells (55), followed by Coats or Jackets (34) and, if we ignore the Ladies costume which would have been inappropriate in this instance, it is then shoes (13) and hats (12). The wood cut of Kemp has all of these, although, understandably considering the state of the country roads, Kemp chose boots rather than shoes. Going by these instances and the lack of other contemporary illustrations it seems likely that Kemp was dressed like a Morris dancer of the time. Kemp refers to being booted and later in his pamphlet explained that his footwear was displayed in the Norwich Guildhall "where my buskins that I then wore, and daunst in from London thither, stand equally divided, nailed on the wall". Buskins are half length or calf length boots.

Figure 5 COSTUME REFERENCES PRE 1600



Why doesn't Kemp have handkerchiefs?

If you were to ask someone what comes to mind when you think of Morris men (excluding beer bellies and beards) bells and hankies are the most likely items to be mentioned. As we have seen bells were frequently associated with Morris dancers in the sixteenth century, and they are the most commonly mentioned item of costume found in the pre-1600 references. However the *Annals of Early Morris* found only one mention of Handkerchiefs/napkins over the same period. Early pictures do not show Morris dancers with handkerchiefs and it is not until a woodcut of 1650 that a Morris dancer is clearly shown with handkerchiefs. It is not until 1725 that there is a clear depiction of a group of six dancers all waving handkerchiefs. This is shown in a painting of the Dixton Harvesters in Cheltenham Art Gallery. Arm movements, however, must have been an important part of the dance; early pictorial evidence shows dancers gesturing with their arms and hands in unlikely positions. This is clearly shown by the Erasmus Grasser carved wooden 'maruschka tanz' figures to be displayed in the Munich town hall, dating from 1480. Maybe these gestures were emphasised in the early form of the dance by the slashed hanging sleeves displayed

in the woodcut of Kemp shown in his pamphlet. This style of sur-coat, or doublet, had dangling sleeves attached at the shoulder or elbow, which would flow with distinctive arm gestures. Kemp hints at this when he talks of the Chelmsford maid who requested to dance the Morris with him. In Kemp's own words "I was soone wonne, to fit her with bels, besides she would have the old fashion with napking on her armes." Perhaps this indicated that the old fashion included the attaching of napkins on the arms to mimic the action of Kemp's hanging sleeves which later became replaced with held handkerchiefs once the style of Kemp's Jacket had become completely obsolete.

Kemp of course, did not complete the dance single handed. He was accompanied by Tom Slye, his pipe and tabor player, William Bee, his servant and George Spratt, his overseer. It was Spratt who made him dance the section by St John Maddermarket church again the following Tuesday because as Kemp stated "having lost me in the throng, [Spratt] Would not be deposed that I had daunst it, since he saw me not." Slye is portrayed on the woodcut with Kemp, but not Spratt or Bee, although they have been imagined by Mark Goldsworthy in his wood carving sculpture of Kemp and his companions in Chapelfield Gardens in Norwich. (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 GEORGE SPRATT, TOM SLYE AND BILLY BEE BY MARK GOLDSWORTHY.

Jonathan Hooton
February 2021

The First Antipodean Morris?

In trawling through British newspapers for evidence of morris dancing, I came across this letter from a correspondent from Christchurch in New Zealand to the *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, describing the visit of the then Duke of Edinburgh, Queen Victoria's son Prince Alfred, to the town at the end of April 1869. This was the first royal visit to New Zealand and large crowds came out to see him in Christchurch, greeting him with a procession over a kilometre long through the town, and including four bands.

The correspondent, writing a couple of days later (but whose letter did not reach the newspaper till August), described the procession in some detail, including this:

Then there was a fire engine and the Volunteer Fire Brigade; also a rush cart, whatever that may be; it looked to me like a London dust cart thatched. It bore the inscription L.R.C., which I was informed meant loyal rush cart; four men accompanied it, who, I was told, was morris dancers, but as they did not give us a specimen of their abilities (disappointment number two) I am unable to speak quite positively on this point.

This is, as far as I know, the first intimation of morris dancers in the Antipodes – presuming they did dance, albeit not in the sight of the correspondent! Rushcarts were already becoming rare in the north-west of England by that time, and required significant investment of time, resources and people to construct and to parade them through the streets.

Just eleven days before the *Birmingham Daily Gazette's* report, the *Ashton Weekly Reporter* had described the wakes at Mossley, near Manchester:

With some few exceptions, Roughtown has not failed to send a rush cart to the wakes; indeed, the "owd teauners" resolved that there should be a rush cart this year, but their hearts failed them, and their efforts dwindled to a wreath of garland of flowers, which was erected in a cart, and drawn through the streets, preceded by Morris dancers.

If communities with a strong tradition were struggling, it's not surprising that Christchurch's rush cart was a rather modest construction. Describing it as like a dust cart suggests that the rushes were not piled very high on the cart. However, there is evidence that this was not just an individual effort. One local paper, *The Star*, did provide a bit of background in describing the preparations for the visit on 19 April:

A meeting of Lancashire and Cheshire men, was held at the Mechanics' Hotel, on Saturday evening, Mr J. Brunt presiding. After a lengthened explanatory address from the chair, it was resolved to invite all the natives of the counties named to co-operate, and the dresses of the Morris dancers in attendance upon the "rush cart" were determined upon.

Sadly, I've not been able to trace a Mr Brunt in the New Zealand immigration lists up to 1869. However, *The Press* newspaper in Canterbury gave a little more detail in its description of the procession:

Next came the Lancashire and Cheshire men with a rush cart, a vehicle which terminated in a pyramid thatched with rushes, surmounted by a flag and decorated with ribbons. Morris dancers walked on each side of this cart.

So the morris dancers did not actually pull the cart along; it was presumably horse-drawn (as indeed were many in England). From this it also seems that the Birmingham newspaper's contributor was right and that the morris dancers may not actually have danced after all.

The *Canterbury Heritage* blog has a piece about the visit, with photographs (sadly, none capturing the rush cart), available at the Internet Archive.

Although there are several instances of composed orchestral 'Morris Dances' being played in nineteenth-century New Zealand, and of 'Merrie England' carnivals with children performing maypole and morris dances, this is the only example I've found of an attempt to recreate morris dancing there as it existed in the communities of the mother country.

Maybe the Nor'West Arch Morris Dancers in Christchurch today would like to revive the cart?

Sources:

"Letters from New Zealand", *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, Wednesday 18 August 1869, p. 6.

"Mossley: the wakes", *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, 7 August 1869, p. 5.

"The royal visit", *The Star* [Christchurch], 19 April 1869, p. 2.

"Christchurch", *The Press* [Canterbury], 23 April 1869, p. 2.

Canterbury heritage:
https://web.archive.org/web/20130504220411/https://canterburyheritage.blogspot.co.nz/2009/01/first-royal-visit.html

Mike Heaney
March 2021

North American Morris Dance Organization – NAMDO

On Halloween 2020, three mature Morris dancers got together, virtually, and established the North American Morris Dance Organization – NAMDO. This incorporation was the result of several years of conversations with many Canadian and U.S. Morris dancers, musicians and organizers and even a few England based folks as well.

Background

For a number of years, I had been fascinated with what I call the "Art of the Morris." This art is reflected in distinct forms: The hand/digital made drawings, posters, brochures, T-shirts, badges and related art that have complimented Morris events; still and moving photography; and original created dances and tunes. Many of us had been "collecting" some of this art in personal and semi-organizational ways but there was no central effort. Suffice it to say, we have lost much of North American Morris art history due to the passage of time and, critically, no formal process to archive historically matter.

Inspired by my photographer father and, in particular Dr. Tony Barrand's video and film collecting and archiving efforts, I began to discuss the need to preserve North America's Morris history in an organized, collaborative manner. Other excellent efforts to capture this history, often in real-time, include the American Morris Newsletter, last published in 2008, various on-line Morris databases, as well as individual team histories posted on websites. It seemed clear, to me anyway, that a new organization was needed.

What? Another Morris Dance organization!

The initial reactions I received were, polite, but often direct. People did not see the need for another organization. In fact, for many, NAMDO might not serve any direct purpose. But, after a little explanation, people started to come around. A few close Morris friends agreed, in principle, that some sort of organized effort would be interesting and might even be useful! Perhaps they were tired of hearing my pitch and were simply being polite.

At the May 2019, Marlboro Morris Ale, I pulled together a group of 28 or so people to advance the idea en masse. The group validated the concept in general but not many were willing, at that time, to commit to building the notional organization from the ground up. I might have had more success had this meeting not been held in the morning. Beer sometimes helps matters.

Over the 2019 Summer, I continued to discuss the idea on both sides of the Pond. Bob Antia, our secretary and founding member, suggested that setting up a not-for-profit organization would be "easy" and that he would help. Then COVID hit. The big silver lining, as we all now know, of time at home, away from Morris tours and pubs, has been time and the advent of technology to better support virtual connections over Zoom and the like. I reconnected with Bob and we brought in Jim Moskin as our other founding member and treasurer. The die was cast. Now what?

After incorporating, we submitted paperwork, in the U.S. government, to achieve federal not-for-profit tax status which we received the past January. During this past Winter, we began a slow roll out of the organization and reached out to the Morris Federation, the Morris Ring and Open Morris. The Joint Morris Organisations (JMO) invited me to join, over Zoom, their meeting. Simply put, the support from England for this effort has been great. During one meeting with the JMO, someone remarked that most, if not all, current officers of the three English Morris organizations joined established organizations and what NAMDO was doing was starting from the

ground up. Obvious, yes, but a fact I remind ourselves with often. It is simply not possibly to meet every organization objective at once and we will stumble along the way. Reality, sometimes, is both refreshing and cruel. Kind of like the weather.

The North American Morris Dance Organization sees our broad work in several key initial project areas: The History of North American Morris Dance; The Art of Morris; Morris Dances and Music; Morris Conversations; and Teaching Morris. Above these efforts are: building the organizational structure – adding board members; building membership; considering insurance schemes; designing and implementing a technology backbone; and raising funds to support expanding efforts.

To date, the most enthusiasm from across Canada and the U.S. is for the History project. Turns out the Morris community is replete with librarians, historians and archivists. Please visit our developing web site: https://morris.dance.org or join us on Facebook.

Thank you again to the leadership of the JMO organizations for their support past and future. We look forward to dancing with all of you on both sides of the Pond.

Alex Naar
May 2021

News: Sidmouth and the John Gasson Jig Competition

The 2021 John Gasson Jig Competition has been cancelled due to lack of entries. Tracey Rose thanked those who had entered and hoped they would enter in 2022. It was a hard decision to make. She said she is looking forward to next year when hopefully we will have been dancing again and people will be happier to enter.

Travelling with Thomas:
Behind the Scenes of a Folk Musical in the Making

I've been busy writing music, collaborating with artists from varied disciplines, and inviting everyone to be an active part of it! Eventually there will be a brand new folk musical, based around the traditional legend of Thomas The Rhymer.

Beth asked me to write a piece for Morris Matters with the starting point: "What inspired you to think "I'll write a folk opera over five years and involve people at every stage"?"
The short answer is "I thought it would be fun!". The long answer…

OFFSPRING

Many of you remember Morris Offspring, a company of young morris dancers creating shows for stage. Our founding idea was to peel open the Morris set to see if the interactions that happen between dancers inside the set could be shared with an audience across a theatre stage.

The team spanned ten years with highlights including working with fabulous musicians, a transatlantic exchange and UK arts centre tours. It was a privilege to lead a group of committed, inspiring people who gave everything a go and trusted my messy, badly-explained creative process! We pushed as far as we could without asking ourselves to do anything that wasn't morris. There are strong opinions on whether we achieved that! In my eyes, every step danced was a morris movement (albeit in unconventional patterns), every shape was derived from, extrapolated from or centred on a morris figure. Everyone who passed through gave something unique to the team that remained after they'd moved on.

MOVING ON

EFDSS supported Offspring throughout and Katy Spicer (Chief Executive) gave me loads of good advice and insight. Whilst considering what to do next, I kept returning to some of Katy's words, 'the music sets the emotional tone'. I considered how composers and performers choose which stories to tell through the spaces they do or don't leave, whether story is dependent on the relationship between performer and audience; and how in folk arts, the line between audience and participant, participant and performer is blurred and mobile.

I kept thinking about how utterly entwined dance and music are, how entwined participant and audience are, and that storytelling is a vital feature of many dance and music traditions worldwide. I felt I couldn't push Offspring farther without better training, and much as I love morris and choreography, I'm a musician first and didn't entirely want professional dance training.

The thing I did want was to try writing the music for a show, lyrics and all. A retelling of an old story, through dance and music, rooted in folk traditions. Something fun and silly and sweet and meaningful. A single song seemed daunting, but somehow a whole show was realistic!

Wildcard: I'm useless at delivering anything without an absolute (and usually public) deadline.

Fun fact: I do not like watching films, but love seeing behind their scenes and hearing about the process.

Solution: It would be fun to share this new journey from the outset and so the concept of 'writing a folk musical in public', and Travelling with Thomas, was born!

YEAR ONE

It took a year to get funding. Arts Council England (ACE) is great, however the forms are crushing and it's competitive. I put my application in to ACE four times, gradually improving it until being successful in December 2016. Funding secured, we were off!

The first 'year 'spanned 18 months and comprised four sets of showcases with different themes. I worked alongside **Lizzie Watts**, a brilliant illustrator and designer, who made lush screen prints and carvings for exhibition alongside the music, some of which are included in this article. We started with 'landscape of the different worlds within Thomas the Rhymer's story'. I wrote six pieces of music - all in the final week before the rehearsal. Thankfully, our musicians made it sound amazing and I breathed some relief that this was the right kind of crazy project.

We involved audiences and artists at every turn, showcasing each section and finding creative ways to invite feedback. Besides describing our process and answering questions, we had questions for people to discuss: e.g. "What was that song about?" "Who is singing?" "What do you think will happen next?

Reaching the fourth showcases and end of the project, some songs clearly set the tone! We hosted joyful gigs at The New Room, Bristol and Cecil Sharp House, London.

YEAR TWO

A friend offered to pay for a producer to write the second funding application and manage the logistics. This generous offer has made a huge difference, and we are enjoying 3 more sets of R&D!

The new funding enabled 'playdays 'with the artists ahead of writing, rehearsals and live showcases. It helped us increase the diversity and skills of project artists. We advertised for dancers and singers early 2020, auditioned 12 fabulous dancers in March, then drove home through deserted streets: the announcement to cease non-essential travel came while we were cocooned in the audition room.

DANCERS

The first playdays should have been 6th and 7th April 2020. After a lot of deliberation, fledgling zoom classes, and Lizzie being willing to wrangle a ton of homemade film, we decided it was worth attempting to run the entire R&D plus showcase online. The singer auditions also happened online, a fiery baptism for all involved!

It was a joy to have collaborative creative work, even with the screen barrier and time lag. Originally I was going to teach some morris as input for our contemporary dancers, but online, with everyone working from their houseshare bedrooms that was too complex. The artists' willingness to improvise and Lizzie's epic effort stitching videos together were essential. Everyone put in so much! Zoom gigs were new at that point. I was proud of the showcase we assembled and delighted by how many friends, family and total strangers came to see what we'd been up to, ask great questions and suggest what came next.

ACTORS

Next up: lucky timing! The second playdays fell in the only fortnight that Bristol wasn't in tier 3 or lockdown! Live work with Debs Newbold and four brilliant actors after seven months online was sheer delight! Characters and scenarios filled the room, laughter was everywhere and songs emerged quickly. I sent songs to some of my favourite folk artists to "cover" in their own style. Lady Maisery, Avital Raz, Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne and The Voxhunters nailed it!

We presented our fledging progress in 'developing the narrative 'online, with the new songs, rehearsal room clips, improvised stories by the actors, and tarot cards depicting characters the actors discovered: the gossip, the fairy policewoman, the reaper, and the fairy queen's daughter. Audiences made brilliant suggestions for key relationships between these characters! Familiarity with zoom allowed us to make the most of it and bring everyone into the process with a range of live tasks.

NEXT SHOWCASE & PATREON

So here we are! Summer 2021! We have such an exciting format for the third section. **Patreon** allows arts lovers to collectively commission artists, support their work, and be closer to the process. Patrons usually get exclusive content, or behind the scenes updates. Sound familiar? It's the perfect vessel to share new songs as they're written, pass on everything I learn about songwriting, host chats with the artists and give away goodies! We'll even be able to 'turn on the camera' to give a real-time peek into the R&D room! [Ed: Thanks especially to Laurel for finishing this article while at the same time trying to meet her Patreon deadline to present a video update on the music writing!]

MORRIS IS BACK!

October brings two full weeks of R&D with Debs, three actors, three dancers, three instrumentalists and three singers. Starting from the "finished" songs, we'll dive into big themes from Thomas's story; love, truth, time. We'll revel in the cross-discipline opportunities and come full circle back to morris: can we have a "conversation" between a dancer and a musician with crystal clear narrative? Can elements of morris become a shared language between all the performers? Can I write songs that function for both morris and other dance styles? Is contemporary dance influenced by morris the best medium to serve the story, or would folk dance itself do a better job?

The process needs to be open with space to allow ideas to surface and flourish, whilst providing sufficient focus and facilitation to keep moving and run with the best bits. It might fly and we write whole sections of the show, it could be excruciating as we discover that this show doesn't want to be devised! After these two weeks I hope we'll have a brief for a script writer and a handful of fragments that demonstrate how the final production will sound and move.

Everything we have done so far normally happens behind doors, or without any performers involved at all. I love that we've made a unique opportunity for everyone to be part of the project, and am so excited to be able to extend that via Patreon. If it sounds fun, come and join us!

Laurel Swift
July 2021
www.travellingwiththomas.co.uk www.patreon.com/laurelswift

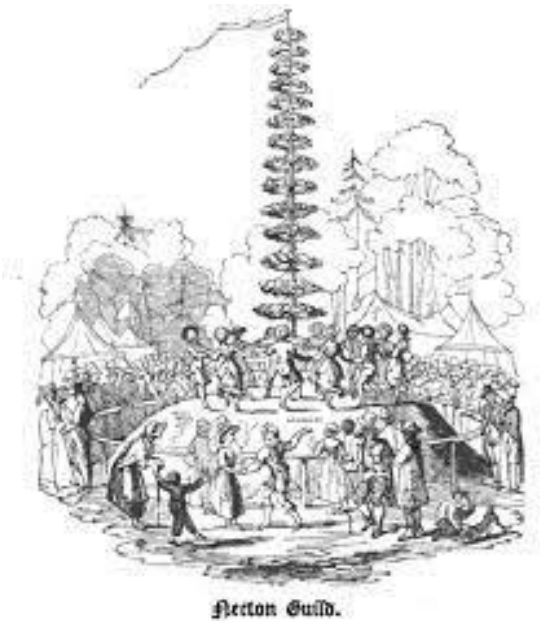
Expanding the Frontier, Part Two – When is a Morris Dance Not a Morris Dance? from East Anglian and East Midlands Newspapers

No, this is not a trick question, for the east of England presents us with a veritable can of worms in exploring designate 'Morris' and its dance. Clearly, Norwich knew what it was in 1599 when they welcomed Shakespeare's clown Will Kemp into the city after his nine days' gambol. However, we need to explore its various archetypes such as Cambridgeshire's molly dance, the East Midlands plough play, and many others before we can arrive at any tentative definition that doesn't necessarily encompass bells and hankies! For (in)convenience, I shan't discuss the Home Counties (north) as a location at this juncture, as part of this has been dealt with by Keith Chandler in his 1984 booklet 'Taking an Annual Circuit' which deals with rural morris dancers' visits, 1780 and 1870. I have highlighted selected place names in bold type for future indexing in any future geographical distribution analysis.

So, let us start with the 'and the rest' section which includes civic processions. The 'Ipswich Journal' of 15 February 1755 acknowledges the art in describing in a nebulous news item 'the Affectation of Splendour' describing at no stated location the bling of the day as 'one of the most certain signs of real poverty', saying 'the fribble is only ridiculous to the many, strutting in his Morrice Dancer's robe with hired jewels. To the few, he is an object of grief … that …'tis only want of sense in him.' At **Bury St Edmunds**, the 'Bury & Norwich Post' on 12 May 1802 describes the recent procession on the premature proclamation of peace (preceding hostilities in the Napoleonic Wars), which included the chairing of 'a female … round the town, personating the Goddess of Peace, with a Jack in the Green and morris-dancers (who) accompanied the procession…'

Mike Heaney is currently researching how Morris was incorporated into political campaigning. The 'Bury Post' of 13 May 1807 states, that upon the chairing of electoral candidates around the town, they were preceded by 'a garland and morris dancers' without further useful description. The peace of July 1814 was celebrated in **Clare**, Suffolk, in a procession which also had morris dancers, and the return of the East Norfolk militia was welcomed at **Harleston** by 'morrice dancers and flower strewers'. At **Ipswich** in July 1820, the victor of the recent election was celebrated by the 'procession of a groupe of Morris-dancers, who were dressed with great propriety, and whose activity on the light-fantastic toe excited a good deal of admiration…'

Into Norfolk, a more graphic representation of morris dancers en fete, took place in the 1820s at **Necton** Hall when a Whit Monday event usually took place in front of Colonel William Mason and his family with a 'mayor' and his 'retinue of morris dancers &c not appearing in costume' (sic). Fortunately, William Hone's illustration in his second 'Book' published in 1827 helps us, showing the maypole, around which it is known that children from the local national school encircle. Below that, one can see a swain bedecked in boater-shaped decorated hat with what appear to be bells around his upper arms and lower legs, beckoning to a bonneted woman.



Necton Guild.

Hone's text says 'the dancers are the morris dancers in grotesque dresses: the men with fanciful printed waistcoats and small clothes, decked with bows; and the women in coloured skirts trimmed like stage dresses for Spanish girls, with French toques instead of caps.' However, this grotesqueness hardly equates to my own visual assessment of the man's costume! Concerning the **Eye** fair in Suffolk, an anonymous letter writer spoke of its chartered fair having morris-dancers rueing 'only their dancing is performed by lace girls (? lace weavers),' At **Ashley** in the same county, the 'Bury Free Press' writing on 15 February 1873, gives a court case surrounding a brawl between morris-dancers in the taproom of The Crown Inn resulting by a request or demand by the complainant for the dancers not to sing. Upon this being refused and a counter-demand for free beer similarly denied, five or six of them left the pub pursuing their critic. The case alleged that Benjamin and Francis Bell of the dance team were responsible for the assault and broken leg resulting, the trial being adjourned pending witnesses coming forward.

I have written at great length of the Molly dances of Cambridgeshire and Boxing Day Hummy dances of Thetford in this magazine and elsewhere. One recent example has been published in 'The Morris Dancer' magazine as 'Bedizened in Faded Finery' and doesn't need repetition, but to emphasise that the words Morris and Molly are interchangeable in Cambridgeshire context. Actually, examples of newspaper abstracts relating to this Plough Monday custom appear from the 1840s until the 1930s. Three recent discoveries consisted of Sybil Marshall's report of 'Molly dancers' at Ramsey Heights around Christmas in her 'Fenland Chronicle', reciting Beelzebub's line in a mummers' play. Fred Hamer reported other such plays in old Huntingdonshire, one of which was described as a Molly dance; and the 'Peterborough Advertiser' in 1912 gave the full text of a play from Yaxley performed around 1860, again, as a Molly dance. The plot thickens. A new edition of my book 'More Honoured in the Breach than the Observance' covering all aspect of Plough Monday custom including Molly dancing is in progress at the time of writing.

In Bedfordshire, an obvious retrospective in the 'Leighton Buzzard Observer' on 17 July 1894, speaks of May Day revels at **Tebworth** which, 'like many neighbouring villages, had its own band of Morris-dancers…' without elucidating much further. Although misconstrued, the moggies of **Ickwell Green** were noted as Morris dancers in an article in the 'Bedfordshire Mercury' on May 1903. The text speaks of 'a group of boys' dressed up as such 'with a very masculine Maid Marian soliciting largesse from villagers and visitors.' Indeed, their role is incidental to the May activities, their function solely to solicit donations. The 'Biggleswade Chronicle' only occasionally speaks of them, focusing on the small dancers traipsing around the maypole.

The 1910 image of these **Northill** Mayers is featured in many coffee table books concerning folklore, and one could be forgiven for mistaking them as bona fide morris dancers, but we are prejudging what and what is not pukka in this.

The maypole at Ickwell Green is there to be seen today: one of few remaining permanently in England.

The allegation of threats to plough up one's lawn or boot scraper materialising into practice, and ending up in the courts as a result of Plough Monday malpractice hardly feature in newspapers, but is worth exploring. The 'Stamford Mercury' for 26 January 1821 reports that the previous quarter sessions' chairman of magistrates at **Kirton** in Lincolnshire was 'determined to visit with exemplary severity the misconduct of persons who appear as Morris-dancers or Plough-bullocks' although no such case was brought as a consequence. Sixty-five years later, 'six young men… bedecked in various dresses 'desired to be considered Morris Dancers or Mummers' visited the principal houses of the same place. The same newspaper on 30 December 1831 noted that at **Deeping St James**, nine days before Christmas 'a group of strolling vagabonds calling themselves morris-dancers' from **Crowland** performed 'sans ceremonie' frightening a small girl and, during the ensuing hubbub, one of the gang named Fish or Fisher stole a new cap intended as a present for her brother. Normally, performances were reserved for Plough Monday not the Christmas season. The 'Mercury' simply reports on 13 January 1843 that 'two or three parties of Moris-dancers (sic) were levying contributions on the public in **Lincoln** last Monday, for the purpose of closing the day's tomfoolery with drunkenness.'

Twenty-seven years later the 'Lincolnshire Chronicle' of 14 January 1870 reported that 'a band of mummers or morris dancers visited the lower portion of our city on Saturday night.' One George Wilson, a gardener from **Old Leake** found himself before the magistrates in a report by the 'Stamford Mercury' on 7 January 1853, charged with being drunk and disorderly and causing an obstruction on the street (presumably of **Stamford**). His defence was that he'd come into town 'as one of a party of morris dancers, and had so exhausted himself with dancing and drinking that he laid himself across the footway in order to take a little repose.' A dim view of this was taken, and a fine of 6d with costs was demanded – or three days on the treadmill. Although not a review, the county's 'Chronicle' spoke on 30 December 1853 of 'strange-looking parties called Morris Dancers' at **Spalding** who 'still perambulate the fens' around Christmas.

The same organ informed us on 2 January 1857 that 'some fast bumpkins, who are in the habit of amusing themselves by going about the villages bedecked in tawdry habiliments and denominating themselves 'morris dancers', gratified their penchant for mischief by upsetting the waggon' of **Scothorne** farmer Olivant, the newspaper adding the miscreants are known and will be later tried. The 'Stamford Mercury' reported on 26 December 1862 that a party of grotesque Morris dancers 'were permitted to go through their block of clumsy antics in the interior of **Caistor** church last week for the amusement of the masons and workmen in the restoration.' The same journal on 1 January 1864 told how three **Ingham** morris-dancers named John Bird, Jos Williamson, John Vickers and John Carter all got into trouble at **Willingham by Stow** on 23 December by purloining ducks and fowls from two local farmers, and were remanded for sentence. On 22 December 1863 **Timberland** morris dancers John Elkington, John Potterton, Freeman Banks and George Elkington performed at **Metheringham** in a state of insobriety and later charged and fined, in a report in the 'Lincolnshire Chronicle' on 8 January 1864.

In 1866, it seems that no performances were forthcoming due to cattle plague. A graphic description is given of 'Morris Dancers' at **Brigg** by the same newspaper of 14 January 1876 having 'the traditional lady – a tall man with hob-nailed boots in woman's chignon, crinoline and petticoats; Aunt Jane with her crying child; the fool; the doctor; and what seemed to us an innovation, a bullock in the shape of a hobble-dehoy with the head gear of a horse's clothing, the ears stuffed with straw for horns, a hoop round the waist with a broom handle to which a tuft of

hair was tied as a tail for the yoke – and a rug over the shoulders to represent the skin. By means of bones, a kettle-drum &c, the grotesque crew contrived to make a hideous din, but not to extort much money from the inhabitants.' Another morris dancer, 17 years old George Booth was charged but cautioned with stealing a shaving brush at **Corringham** in a report of 23 December 1880 in the 'Stamford Mercury'. In **Boston**, the town's 'Guardian' reported on 31 December 1880 that 'on Wednesday, a party of Morris dancers visited the town and danced at some beer-houses. Their grotesque figures attracted a great deal of attention in the streets and the station.' It isn't stated where these visitors came from.

More Morris dancers were under scrutiny, this time from **Messingham** when George Altoft, John William Richardson, George Jackson, George Crampton and George Woodcock were charged at Brigg petty sessions charged with stealing tins of preserved fish whilst out Morris dancing or plough jagging, each receiving a fine in a report in the 'Lincolnshire Chronicle' on 14 January 1881. At the **Spilsby** New Year's market, 'a party of Morris dancers fantastically dressed visited the various inns during the day. Towards the evening, it was apparent that some of the visitors had imbibed too freely and fights ensued' reported the 'Boston Guardian' on 6 January 1883. The 'Grantham Journal' of 14 January 1888 reported that on Plough Monday at **Carlton Scroop** 'a party of our village's young men paid a visit to most of the houses in this and adjoining villages on Monday and Tuesday evenings last, dressed as Morris dancers, and went through an amusing programme with great credit.' Just to show that it wasn't all booze and petty opportunism, the Lincoln County Hospital report noted a donation by the **Stixwould** Maurice dancers, as reported by the 'Lincolnshire Echo' on 16 January 1894.

To date, no mention of morris dancing at county carnivals and associated processions has been made, until 1898. **Rippingale** staged an annual temperance festival which was reported from then until at least 1905. The 'Grantham Journal' for 9 July 1898 noted its procession comprised 'Morris dancers, headed by Jack in the Green in a decorated sedan chair, carried by four boys…' Eighteen names are then confusingly listed. The 1902 account cites 'three Morris dancers' processed 'with coloured roses, bells on their ankles, and carrying sticks with red, white and blue paper.' Sixteen names are then listed, so one must assume these were independent participants not associated with our trio. The 1905 report just mentions 'the Morris dancers' following the Queen's tableau. A similar temperance gala in 1904 taking place in the county town comprised 'Mr and Mrs Will Gadsby's Morris dancers attired in red caps, white jerseys and blue knickers' without further comment in the 'Lincolnshire Chronicle' in the 28 June edition. Unsurprisingly, the **Haxey** Hood Plough Monday pageantry gets a mention, this time by the 'Sheffield Daily Telegraph' in a review on 5 January 1903, describing the Plough Boggans being once 'dressed like morris dancers with a Harlequin or Fool.' To those not familiar with what goes on, this today resembles a no-holds-barred game of Rugby football, and would find it difficult to marry the boggan's clothing with that of what we might consider a morris dancer's, but let us not prejudge!

Nottinghamshire would seem comparatively sparse for reports of the Morris. One account in the county's 'Guardian' dated 12 February 1869 shows practitioners once more troubling the courts. 'William Wyer, George Hurt, John Spittlehouse all of **Thurgaston**, and James Buckle of **Southwell** were charged … with being drunk and riotous at **Bleasby** on 12 ult.' Damage had been done to a number of properties by nine persons who had had 'upwards of 26 gallons of ale (who) called themselves Morris dancers. The case was dismissed as the key witness was unable to identify the miscreants owing to the darkness of the hour.' I must thank Peter Bearon for alerting us to another case, which was reported in the 'Retford & Worksop Herald' on 12 December 1896, when John Slaney of **Retford** was summonsed with impersonating an army officer. In his defence, he claimed to be one of three other morris dancers of whom he acted as the recruiting

sergeant. Fellow 'dancer' Thomas Marsh confirmed this, but Slaney was fined for transgressing a law he was unaware of. The army 'officer' is one character often in the East Midlands plough play.

Chris Rose (of Rattlejags Morris) has done a full study of aspects of morris in the East Midlands and has independently published his findings, as reviewed elsewhere in this issue. Their impressive spreadsheet quotes 26 newspaper references for Lincolnshire with 41 from other sources, and six newspaper references alone for Nottinghamshire with 16 from elsewhere. I look forward to meeting and seeing them perform in the future!

The Hinckley Bullockers of Leicestershire are a revival team comprising members of other teams in the county, who have collated what little is known of any winter-related dance-based custom in the area. Leicester's 'Journal and Mercury' of 12 and 13 January 1849 respectively gave similar accounts of the recent petty session where on 27th December, several poor men dressed as Morris dancers came to **Hinckley** for the purpose of enjoying themselves and reminding the inhabitants of the annual return of the Christmas festival…' The 'Mercury' also described them as Mummers. Their tour was going well until a crowd of onlookers took exception and laid into them, despite protection from two police officers, a Thomas Clarke was charged with assaulting 'one of the Morris dancers, who had a rat on his back, and began striking it …' a number of his accompanying assailants were also charged, found guilty and sentenced. The 'Mercury' describes the dress of the team was 'of such a character as to baffle description.' Clarke laid into the 'rat man' who portrayed Beelzebub, near the Marquis of Granby public house when the affray ensued.

The same organ reported on 1 January 1859 that around Christmas, 'we have also been favoured with a visit from a party of Morris dancers, to the great terror of children, who were running about in all directions to get out of the way; and certainly, if strangeness of costume produces fright, we could scarcely wonder at some older nerves being startled.' Not related to the winter custom, the 'Mercury' of 21 May 1859 reports 'some merriment was caused a few days ago by the grotesque appearance of persons professing to be colliers who, in the costume of morrice dancers, have been practising country dances in the streets, to the no small amusement and sometimes terror of the children.' The Hinckley winter visitors were back eighteen months later, despite the pouring rain. Their 'gay dresses' getting 'somewhat soiled' which 'didn't depress their spirits.' On 26 December 1870, 'a company of Morris dancers appeared in our streets, and their bells, rattles, and sportive dances called together a large concourse of people who were evidently gratified with their antics' so reported the Journal four days later. The same (or a different) visitors were in town the following year, the 'Coventry Herald' saying they came from **Harwell**, the comment about bells, rattles and sportive dances repeated.

At **Melton Mowbray**, the 'Lincolnshire Chronicle' reports in January 1851 that 'a goodly number of fantastically dressed plough boys and morris dancers with musical accompaniment visited Melton as usual, to levy coined "remembrances" of the inhabitants.' On 15 January 1859, the 'Leicester Mercury' reported that 'on Monday last, a number of Plough Boys visited Melton with a band, &c from **Rearsby** and neighbourhood, dressed in various laughable styles. There were also others of the town and neighbouring villages. On Wednesday, **Melton** was visited by 'a party of Morris Dancers.' The Journal on 1 August 1879, quotes in an article on Old Leicestershire that in Macaulay's 1796 book 'The History of Claybrook' that 'I have taken notice of an annual display of morris dancers at **Claybrook**, who come from the neighbouring villages of **Sapcote** and **Sharnford'** without stating which season this event took place.

We must try and interpret some of these reports regarding any 'spin' their writers may have given each account. It gives us food for thought, having previously and conveniently compartmentalised Morris archetypes into Cotswold, north-west, Molly, and Sword. All is not as it seems! Despite Maurice Barley's scholarly account of the plough plays of the East Midlands in the EFDSS Journal for 1953 and how they might have equated to Morris dancing, and Peter Millington's 1984 'Interim List of Nottinghamshire Plough Plays and Related Customs', these newspaper reports show there was a separate Plough Monday play to some other Christmas custom which may or may not have involved dance as we know it. Chris Rose (Rattlejag) has correlated and intercalated some of these accounts with others in local history publications. It strikes me that when Joseph Needham wrote to Arthur Peck in the 1930s to suggest they had stumbled across a 'new and different kind' of Morris dancing in the Cambridge area, that Russell Wortley and Cyril Papworth's later findings for the villages west of the city show little comparison with what we call today 'Molly dancing' with the same at Little Downham barely 25 kilometres to the north, although further analysis reveals that each report is but a snapshot in time, perhaps derived from a common source - or not.

I didn't begin this particular study expecting to identify any undiscovered choreographic archetype. Instead, I have portrayed a diversity which is different to any preconceived mould. To put it another way, in 1980, Anthony Barrand responded to Russell Wortley's 1978 'XYZ of Morris' with his 1980 'English Dance & Song' article 'ABC Morris? L, MNO Morris' showing known diversity in nationwide ceremonial dance. Dictionary definitions of 'Morris dancing' consistently refer to an English men's country dance derived from the Tudor courts. Others mention bells in an indirect nod towards the dancers of the South Midlands. Clearly, the case in the East Midlands contradicts this narrow classification. Bearing in mind the Great Wishford 'Claim Rights Dance' mentioned in Part One of this series of articles (MM Volume 39 Number 2), was historically relevant, in that going 'in a dance' to Salisbury Cathedral was required – a distance of 12 kilometres from the village – it seems that the word 'dance' needs reassessment as it seemingly means some kind of procession and/or choreographic enactment.

I would therefore suggest that the 'Morris dance' in the East Midlands context means a 'costumed performance' which may or may not include the shuffling of feet worthy of the attention of Craig Revel Horwood and his panel. It is not unknown for words in the English language to modify or even invert their meanings over time. By way of example, for musical devotees, Rhythm and Blues 1960s, now means something completely different. There must be other examples. Now would the OED accept that?

George Frampton
February 2021

The Dancing Policemen

When the thousands assemble for May Morning in Oxford there is singing from the top of Magdalen Tower and morris dancing in the streets below. One team which never performs, however, is the Oxford City Police Morris Side. They existed right enough. But they never danced on May Day.

Morris dancing featured in Oxford's May revels at least as early as 1599. In that year we are told 'the inhabitants with drum and shot and other weapons, and men attired in women's apparel, brought into the town a woman bedecked with garlands and flowers named by them the Queen of the May. They also had morris dancers and other disordered and unseemly sports.'

Unseemly sports! Men in women's apparel! Maytime revels always brought clashes with the authorities. How could the police involve themselves in such shenanigans?

The answer lies in the great morris revival which flourished in the early decades of the twentieth century. The tradition had declined in Victorian times and Oxford University men were keen to encourage a renaissance. They made contact with surviving sides, learnt the dances and even gave displays themselves.

In 1923 enthusiasts from the colleges began dancing under Magdalen Tower on May Morning, and police were put on duty that year to see that there was no hindrance to traffic. But far from disapproving of the street display, officers were so smitten that they asked the dancers if someone could give them lessons. Inspector John Hewett, in particular, thought a morris team would make a useful addition to the Police Athletic Club.

So, officers approached the legendary William Kimber from the Headington Quarry Morris Men. An outstanding dancer and concertina-player Kimber agreed, and a seven-man team of officers took up morris dancing with gusto.

Mike Heaney, a historian of the morris, has researched this curious byway of English folk tradition. It seems that for many years Oxford City Police danced every year at Oxford Town Hall, at local sports meetings as well as benefits for police widows and orphans. More than that, they sent a team to folk dance festivals at the Albert Hall.

Apparently, the police side never themselves danced on May Morning, though they always watched with critical interest. A member of the Oxford University Morris Men reported to Mike Heaney that on a wet and miserable 1926 Mayday 'our worst effort was the Morris Reel. The police were pleased at this – it was on their repertoire'.

In 1979 Ernest Fennell, the last surviving member of the side, provided Mike Heaney with another vignette. It was early autumn and the officers were returning from a display at Redhill Orphanage in Surrey. They stopped at a hotel called The Hen & Chicken and were invited to give a display on the forecourt. The men danced to huge acclaim and ended up staying until closing time.

A thick fog came down. The coach driver missed the turn to the Oxford Road and, after circling round and round in the miasma, the weary side found themselves back at the Hen & Chicken. It was now after midnight, and only the assistance of a Surrey police officer - crouching on the coach steps – finally got them onto the right road through the fog.

Oxford's dancing policemen continued to perform until a 14-stone officer went through the platform at a display. This rather took the wind out of their sails, and in 1936 the team disbanded.

In 1968 Oxford City Police itself disappeared, merging with four other forces to create the Thames Valley Constabulary, later renamed the Thames Valley Police.

Louis Thurman was with Thames Valley Police from 2014 to 2018, playing melodeon in Oxford for Summertown Morris, a women's side, on May Morning 2016. He also played for the spectacular local side Armaleggan, famed for their weird face paint, tattered coats and clashing sticks.

Louis didn't know of any other police officers who were in the Morris at the time, though has met one since, 'and I'd be surprised if there weren't more police/folkies. I didn't get too much flak for it. There were the occasional raised eyebrows, and some intrigued colleagues who thought it was a fun idea; I don't remember any open mockery ever being an issue'.

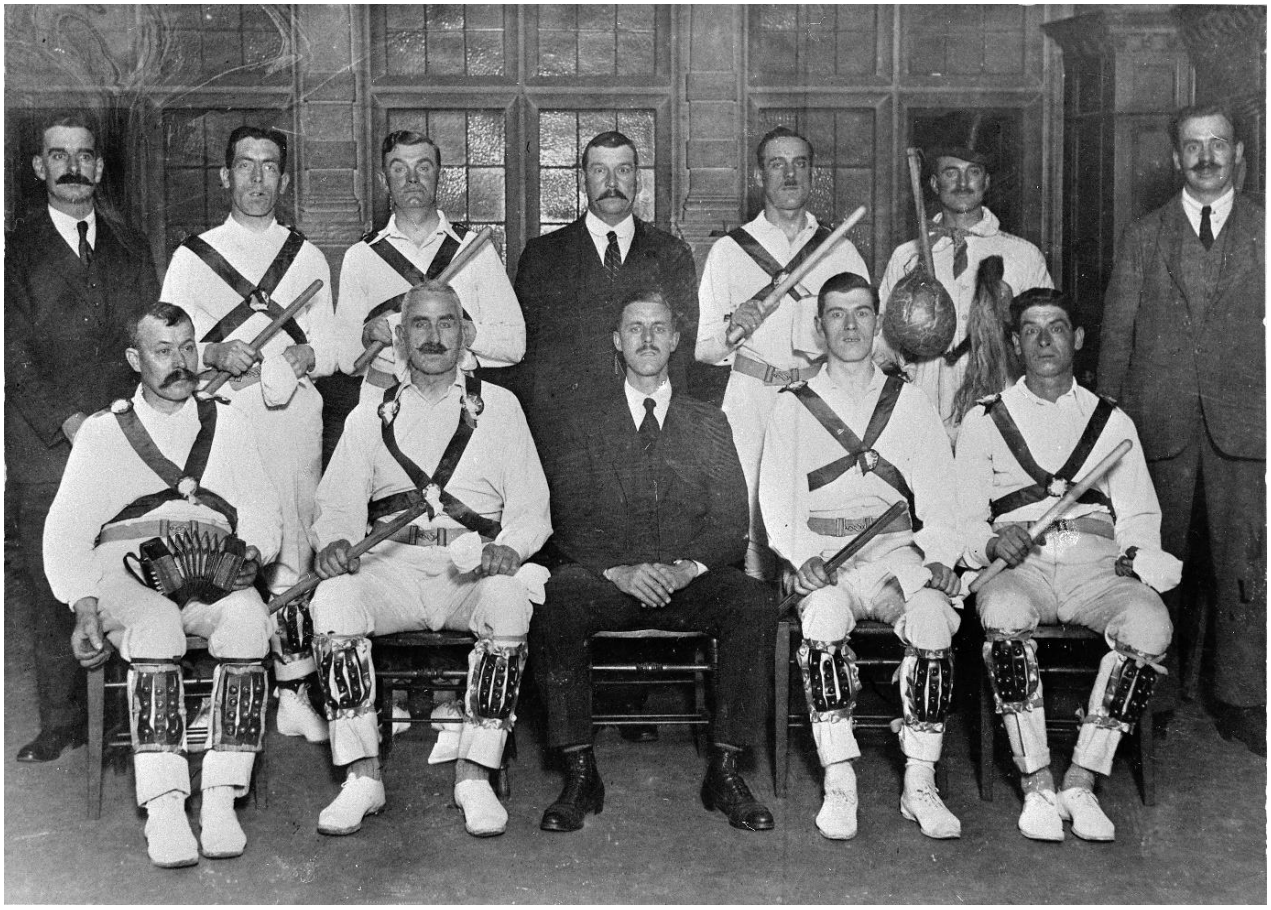


Photo of Oxford City Police Morris, credit: by courtesy of Oxford University Images.

William Kimber is seated, front left.

Louis stressed how concerned present-day police are about public opinion and highlighted the controversy over black-face in Morris. Is it racist in origin? Probably not. It is more generally believed that 'blacking up' was adopted by countrymen centuries ago, simply to disguise their identities. They would rub soot into their faces when they were about any nefarious activity, which might be as mild as morris dancing to earn pennies in times when begging was illegal.

Border Morris was typified by blacked-up faces and Armaleggan used to follow their tradition - though members always looked as if they owed more to Seventies rock icons, Kiss, than to any English folk lineage. They had black, white and zebra-striped faces too. Still, the cultural climate

is changing and Louis was properly sensitive to any possible misunderstandings. He told me that when playing for Armaleggan, 'with the media taking almost any opportunity to slate police officers, I initially avoided face painting entirely. But as time went on I started to introduce small amounts of paint, and eventually I went with a basic black and white design'.

Could Louis imagine a police troupe today? 'Trying to convince the higher-ups to approve a Police Morris Side would be an unenviable task if not impossible. There are very few things which I can see the police happily giving their name to these days for fear of public criticism - and Morris Dancing is not one of them'.

Much has changed since this article was published in 2019. For one thing, the Joint Morris Organisations agreed in 2020 to entirely eliminate full face black make-up from their membership.

Secondly, Covid restrictions meant that no May Day celebrations took place in the streets of Oxford that year and it is doubtful whether they will happen in 2021.

Lastly I should add that in my 2019 article I wrongly asserted that The Oxford City Police Morris men were 'probably unique as a team of morris dancing policemen'. I was quickly corrected in a flurry of emails. Hadn't I heard about the Birmingham City Police morris side of the 1930s? And what about the Hobby Bobbies (possibly from Portsmouth)?

Oh yes, and a former police officer recalled that in his day training used to be done at residential district training centres. At the end of his course the men had to put on a talent show. Apparently the PE instructors did a brilliant morris routine in their judo suits (with bells) and truncheons. 'That demonstrated about the only practical use for the old wooden truncheon, as we never really used them for self-defence because they were bloody useless!'

Tim Healey
Revised March 2021

Do you have memories of other police morris sides? Or any other 'niche' occupation ones.

If so, Morris Matters would love to hear from you...

'Dancing in Their Uncouth Fashion' by Chris Rose

Roy Dommett once told a Morris workshop that some form of dancing that cannot simply be described as 'social dance' took place in 'almost every area of the country'. He was addressing a group which he was teaching some aspect of the South Midlands (Cotswold) Morris of course, but it made some of us to go away thinking of exploring something other than Cotswold and Northwest dance forms. Since then, we have had efforts by Paul Davenport and Phil Heaton looking into aspects of sword dance (and other Yorkshire-based dance), Francis Boutle's book on Cornish dance, and my own modest forays into Cambridgeshire morris or molly dance.

So, it is with delight I read Chris of Retford-based Rattlejag Morris who, in 2019, published his own research in the above title – taken from an 1870 newspaper report. Its 95 pages encompasses all the historical evidence that enabled his team to compile and compose their own dances indigenous to Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire in keeping within historical parameters. He incorporates evidence from Holderness taken from Davenport's book 'Under the Rose', otherwise his catchment area is sharply defined. The first third of his work comprises the history, taken from local newspapers, and work of folklorists Ethel Rudkin and Mabel Peacock. Sword, broomstick and bacca pipes dancing are identified, along with the steps, figures, characters, costume and mode of performance. This analysis is supplemented in Appendix II with the relevant newspaper abstracts.

Dancing in the contiguous counties of Cambridgeshire and Leicestershire are then compared and contrasted, citing Elaine Bradtke in the former and antiquarian sources in the latter – a mistake, I feel, as it omits references to the exploratory work of Joseph Needham and Arthur Peck in the 1930s, Russell Wortley post-War and Tony Ashley in recreating his Hinckley Bullockers team from 1987. That said, the fly in the ointment that is the local plough play and its actors is recognised and reported, but dismissed too rapidly perhaps. Now into the twentieth century, possible influences from the Esperance Guild's teachers are noted, then the finale: brining it all together to create Rattlejag, complete with colour photographs, tunes and notation. I confess, I am yet to see the team in action, and hope armed thus, I won't be disappointed. Methinks a dance workshop is needed to teach them using Dommett's head-to-foot method! It also occurs that it's high time Chris Cawte et al's 1960 Journal article on the geographical distribution of ceremonial dance be updated incorporating an historical dimension as, this time fewer gaps will be evident in the eventual map.

Buy this book, and marvel at this unjaundiced approach to one more unsung form of dance tradition beyond the bill of fayre normally taught at morris workshops. Available from the author at chrisivyfarm@googlemail.com, priced £6.50 inc p&p.

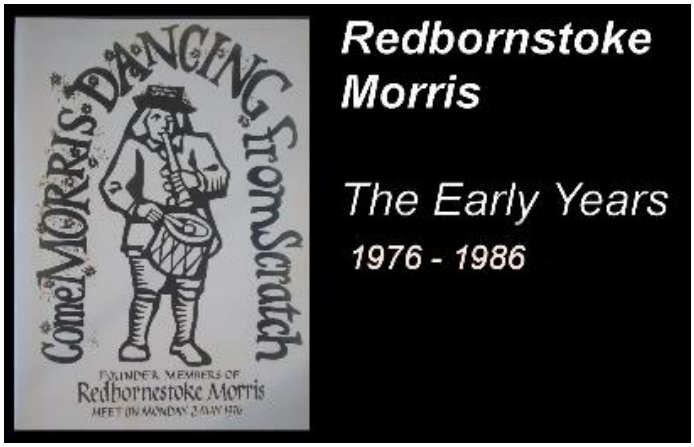
George Frampton
May 2021

Search for Archive Material - Redbornstoke

It's now just three years since Redbornstoke Morris retired from dancing. We subsequently put together a new website full of archive material, including amongst other material: historical information of the side; information on our dance traditions, with videos, dance notations, and music; and extracts from the side Logs from our beginnings in 1976 to our final Toddington Tour in 2018. The new site went live in February 2021, with the address www.redbornstokemorris.co.uk.

There is a contact form on the website - if you have any comments, notice any errors with the website, or have any videos of Redbornstoke Morris dancing, please contact us via the contact form, or email redbornstokemorris.co.uk. We are particularly looking for full videos of the missing dances but any videos will be interesting to see!

Then (1976)



And 'now' (2018)

Photo: Chas Leslie

Taz Tarry
February 2021

INSIDE BACK PAGE

FUN FOR BOYS AND GIRLS!

Decorate your own

TATTERED JACKET

Figure.

Simply cut-out the textures
Below and glue them
On the jacket overlapping
As you go!