

MORRIS
MATTERS

HM

vol 1 no 1 winter 1978

EDITORIAL

Hello and welcome to the first edition of "Morris Matters". I should say at the outset that this mag. is a group effort on the part of Windsor Morris (the post of Editor being very much a nominal one) and we have, of course, several strong views on what its role should be.

Firstly, we want to stimulate the kind of contact which for us has been the best part of W.M.F. meetings - discussing the Morris with like minds; getting different viewpoints and general gossip.

Secondly, since the mag. will have arranged publication dates, anyone wishing to address the organisation as a whole can be sure of seeing their ideas in print in the near future. I hope we will be discussing issues here while they are still topical.

Most importantly, however, we want to take an active part in what we see as the logical growth of W.M.F. towards a much wider contact with the Morris world as a whole. Not only do we hope that "Morris Matters" will be read by people 'outside' but also that these same people will be contributing news, views, and opinions themselves.

Alan Whear

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At the last AGM, W.M.F. was reorganised and new officers were elected. We invited all of them to write and introduce themselves to the rest of the membership, and this is what they had to say :-

Betty Reynolds - President

I have followed Tubby Morris dancing for sixteen years, either sitting or standing quietly, always watching and listening, at practices, Ring meetings and days of dancing.

In Oct. 1967, Tubby founded the Bath University Folk Dance Group, teaching social dancing and running ceilidhs, and teaching Morris to the men.

In Oct. 1971, I started a practice for girls on the same night as the men, in a room next door, because Tub wanted the men by themselves as he felt they were being distracted by the girls (or just leaving) because the girls were tired of simply watching.

I taught White Ladies Aston and North-West Border Morris, learnt from Roy Donnett that August at Sidmouth. All dances danced by women. I had some Irish stepping and corn dolly classes too.

This is where Val Parker and Sarah Jarrett, amongst others joined us. We appealed to Roy Donnett, and he taught us Ilkington on the assumption that Sam Bennett taught it to women and that is how it all began.

I went to the very first meeting of Cardiff Women's Morris, and taught them Keswick. I wasn't at the first meeting of England's Glory, but I went round with them looking at material for kit. Cardiff was Feb. 1972 and England's Glory soon after.

I see my role as a link, using my years of experience of following the Morris and if I don't know the answer to a Question, I know someone who will. I know the standards of dancing that should be maintained, W.M.F. was formed for the clubs, new and old, to help them to dance well, and to have material available. This Objective I plan to guide and help, making sure it is democratically established.

Val Parker — Secretary

My involvement with the Morris began in November 1971, when I formed a romantic attachment with a Bath City Morris Man. "Asking for trouble" I hear you say! Well, it was certainly a case of "If you can't beat them, join them", and I did. At least, I joined the Folk Dance Club which coincided, or rather overlapped, with Morris practice. While the men rehearsed, the girls engaged in other folk pursuits, including the dancing of two North-West morris dances taught by Betty. Alas, that seemed to be it, until I and one or two other troublemakers decided to spur things into action.

It wasn't easy. We had most of the men against us, and even some of the girls seemed to have preferred the previous condition of stagnation. However, we got there in the end; at the same time starting the movement towards the situation today, and the very existence of W.M.F.

As a direct consequence of the early struggles, and the many and varied arguments levelled against me, I became keen on taking notes on events and delving into the past for the truth about female morris. I still hope to publish a book one day! (Has anyone a spare few hundred pounds to enable me to give up full-time work for a while?)

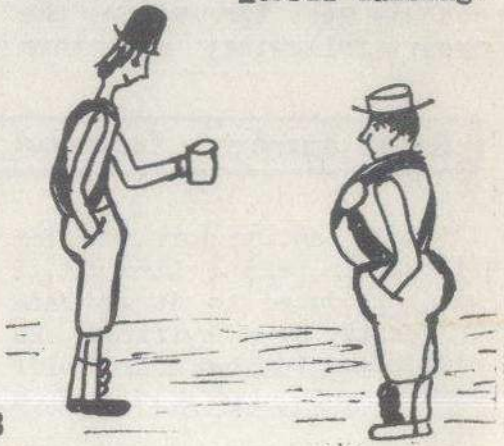
I spent four years at Bath before moving to Hatfield, where

I have recently formed a new side. I was one of the original handful who set up W.M.F., and after being defeated two years running, I have now been elected officially to the position of Secretary!

Thus, I have been closely involved with W.M.F. since its inception, and although we have come a long way since then, I still see the Federation as a means of communication, and as a hand of friendship and help held out to others. I do not, therefore, see my role as 'political'; which is not to say that I do not have my own opinions on things, as you will probably discover! In my capacity as Secretary, I am someone who may be approached, by anyone, for help or information and one who, along with the rest of the Committee, will endeavour to implement the wishes of the membership, as a whole, as unbiasedly, unselfishly and as democratically as possible.

Val Parker.

"Women just aren't built for Morris dancing"



Bev Lane — Events Organizer

I first started morris by joining Cardiff Ladies' Morris in September 1973 (C.L.M. started in the Feb.) The instructional became the next interest - Bath and Cheltenham. By that time Morris was in my blood - everyone you met on week-ends etc. were so friendly - although at first the Morris' Men were a little worried, but in time a few sides invited the ladies' sides to their functions. In 1974 W.M.F. started at a Bath Instructional as the women's sides were growing. It was at the 1975 January Cardiff ladies A.G.M. that I became elected as Baglady and held the office for the following year and enjoyed every minute of the hard work.

I was involved with the side's 'Llaregub' tradition - would you believe in a small room in Talwerin St. (Pam 'mistress' and me 'bag's' house). I also became Rep. for W.M.F. the year following, and this

past year - (can't give up) - scrapbook keeper.

If you were at the W.M.F. A.G.M. in Cardiff, you will know that I am Meetings Officer.

I am married to a Morris Man which does help - I did start Morris before him and dragged him in, although it didn't take much dragging, to join Cardiff Morris Men.

He also became bagman of the side for two years.

We have now moved to London and have been invited to join several sides and in time (when I get the house straight) I will pop along and see how I get on with the travelling. If not I will not hesitate to start another side in the south of London. Mike joined Hammersmith - what else can I say on that!

I must finalise by saying I will endeavour to do my best to succeed as 'Meetings Officer' with your help.

Bev.

Sarah Jarrett — Technical Officer

I've been dancing morris now for almost six years. Like Val, I was introduced to it at Bath University by a boyfriend. He didn't last long but morris did! I became enthusiastic right from

the beginning and was bag and squire in my time. I was around when the idea of W.M.F. was first discussed and have followed its progress since with interest.

After leaving University I moved to London but didn't join another side immediately. When some friends said that they were trying to start one in S.W. London I joined forces with them and Strand-on-the-Green Morris was the result. Over the last couple of years, while trying to teach Strand-on-the-Green (the trying being on my part not theirs!) I have realised how comparatively little I know about morris. This year of office will certainly give me an opportunity to increase my knowledge while attempting to answer your queries.

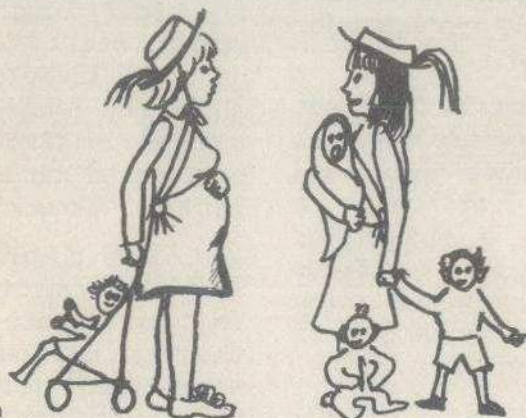
One of the tasks that I have set myself is revising our notations and hopefully adding to them. I know that new information has come to light on some of the dances since the notes were first taken. Unfortunately if it takes me as long to write

notations as it did to compose this little piece my successor will have plenty left to do!

In conclusion I see myself as the information channel of W.M.F. on matters relating to Morris and I hope that plenty of material will be flowing through the channel in both directions.

As you may have gathered from the December newsletter I am turning into an amateur archivist and the more scraps of information, photos etc. that you can send me, the better I shall like it (serve me right if I'm inundated!). If you have a query, or want some notation, music, or an instructor, please get in touch and I'll do my best to help -- that's what I'm here for after all.

X X X X X



"We'll just have to cut out these fertility dances."

Confessions of a Morris Groupie.....

Like Quasimodo, I have grown to wince at the sound of bells. In my case it's not the cacophonous pealing of Notre Dame carillons but the all pervading - in our household at least - presence of my wife's Morris bells, constantly warning of the imminence of chaos and mayhem.

Not that I've got anything against the Morris, of whatever variety. It's just that being married to a dancer wreaks havoc with an ordered existence. There are times when I wish Cecil Sharp had been a deaf mute, incapable of taking down a tune and certainly totally uninterested in resurrecting ritual dance forms.

It would be more bearable if there was a closed season for dancing. But even when there aren't any bookings there are the regular weekly practices which almost inevitably produce major domestic incidents.

Loud comes the lament: "Who's got my hankies - and where the hell have I put my bells?" No bland rhetoric this - it's all in deadly earnest, a signal for turning our household effects over with a thoroughness which would do credit to a team of professional burglars.

And when she returns, gone midnight, slightly unsteady on her feet and breathful of home-brewed ale, do we go to bed? No chance, at least not before some

practice steps, an odd caper, a quick hey.

I'm not complaining mind - or at least not too much - it's just that we live in a small terraced house with neighbours who have ears as effective as Jodrell Bank in picking up the slightest signal or sound. It's embarrassing, after a session of late-night sticking, to be asked in the morning "Is everything all right? It sounded as if you two came to blows last night..."

In addition there are those veiled threats to seek rates relief on the ground of un-neighbourly noise. "Why can't your wife take up something more soothing: like the bagpipes" they say, a mite tetchily.

Once the Morris season - it gets longer every year - is in full swing weekends become purgatory, an ulcer-forming sequence of rushed meals to fit in with dancing schedules: "Christ, we should be round at Jenny's (the squire) in five minutes", with bewildered children forced to eat at breakneck speed, if at all.

Acting as chauffeur, finder of lost hats, guardian of the children and expert navigator ("I think the next pub is called the Wheatsheaf - or is it the Load of Hay?") Saturdays and Sundays during the summer become a blur of fetes, garden parties and pubs.

Drinking, which should be one of

life's more enjoyable pastimes, becomes a breathless round of queueing for pints (children screaming for lemonade and crisps), swift gulps and on to the next port of call.

Incredible as it may seem, around our way in summer you can't settle down for a quiet pint without the cursed sound of the Melodeon and the ragged chanting of the Morris side inviting us to kiss some part of their anatomy....

Even before the side decided they were the best thing since sliced bread, I was expected to comment critically on performances - as if I could recognize a well-executed Badby to save my life. In my innocence I'd always thought it was a type of cheese.

For us super groupies, though, there's one word which strikes fear into our very hearts - Sidmouth.

It's a good thing it only lasts a week: any longer would mean the end of modern marriage as we know it. It sounds inviting - a week by the sea accompanied by heavy drinking. The reality is nothing like so idyllic.

Up early to ferry the fanatics to instructionals, and then an exhausting day trudging in the wake of processions and impromptu sessions desperately trying to keep children happy who would really rather like to indulge in

the more traditional seaside pastimes of sandcastle building and swimming. "Not now, Mummy is appearing in the arena and we've got to go and watch her..."

What with reluctant kids, bags full of cans, liniment, splints, finger bandages, nappy liners and so forth, plus a bewildering array of baby buggies and pushchairs we hapless husbands, lovers and assorted male friends follow the Morris around Devon streets looking like particularly tatty camp followers. We look - and feel - like a modern day equivalent of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow.

Far from being a holiday, Sidmouth becomes a testing ground for marital bliss. There have been times when I honestly could have cited the Devon resort as suitable grounds for divorce.

Trouble is, I shouldn't carp as I'm partly to blame for encouraging my wife in the first place. Such was my naivety at the time I thought it sounded like a good idea.

Now, a sadder and a wiser man, I reflect that Morris Groupie is really rather an inaccurate term for what I have become. As I understand it, groupies - in the Pop sense - are after a little bit more than their favourite rock stars autograph.

After a day of Morris our women are generally too tired.....

The Future and the Morris

By Roy Dommett

The public acceptance of the Morris by men and by women shows that it has a place in today's society. Tastes change but the Morris is basic and it should take as large an upheaval of society as happened before to stop it again. Today's Morris is in the 1970's and moving forward. It is time to step the mental separation into the "tradition" and the revival". Already many 20th century sides have existed longer than 19th. century village teams. Most traditional sides now have the characteristics of revival clubs, proof that it is a viable adaptation to present conditions.

It is still important for all to be aware of the roots in the villages and it is essential to have available what is actually recorded about the Morris of the 19th cent. and to have a detailed baseline description of the dances and their style of performance. A detailed authentic, 19th. cent notation can not be provided, only an account of current practice as handed down. Even then the character of a "tradition" that appears in any particular performance is an interpretation by the group doing it and is dependent on

the skills, experience and techniques available within the group. That this varies with the personnel is obvious when seeing the adjustments made at Bampton from year to year. Acceptance already exists for more conscious developments. A good interpretation of a tradition, whether an attempt to recreate from MSS. or an extension on artistic grounds, is stimulating, as with Jockey M.M.'s Ilmington or Russell Wortley's Sherbourne. An appealing analogy is with Shakespeare's plays, where the inherent quality of the material allows endless orthodox and avant-garde presentation.

So far there has been little deliberate invention. Perhaps the known existence of a large amount of unpublished and therefore inaccessible traditional material has been inhibiting.

Invention usually works within self imposed constraints as to what is "right", although the recorded material indicates that the old dancers felt less constrained in what they introduced, like coconut shell halves for hand clapping.

Good, simple and original ideas are hard to produce. It is easier to adapt dances from one style to another.

Invention must not be complex. Morris is not elaborate pattern making nor is it exotic stepping. It is interesting that no one seems to have imported or invented steps from outside the known corpus. Invention is parochial. It is to meet the team's needs and to make the team different, not for the whole Morris world and posterity.

Morris succeeds when it belongs to its territory. Local references in titles are good, if they are significant to the dancers or to the audience, but it must be recognised that the relevance can be ephemeral.

Facetious or clever names are lost on an audience; it is difficult enough to explain traditional titles.

Abingdon once called The Squire's Dance, The Aeroplane Dance during **WWII**. Wings for Victory fund raising, possibly because of a fancied resemblance of the distinctive figure to two propellers. Originally named

'If God had meant women to wear skirts He'd have given them webbed legs.' (overheard at Sidmouth.)



Greensleeves, it was renamed when the title became an embarrassment.

A viable, balanced repertoire is necessary to maintain the interest of the dancers. Experience and tradition suggests about 24 set dances and jigs, enough to support 3 shows without repeats. The common situation of a lack of knowledge, experience and inventive talent is a justification for a club maintaining two contrasting "traditions".

Thought must be given to how much can be added to a "tradition" before its character is affected unless achieving uniqueness is an aim for the club. The doubling of the number of dances available for public performance by Abingdon has contributed to the changed overall "feel" of the tradition.

When deciding what to do, sides should consider their "good" points and exploit them, for example Cardiff women with cross-back-steps and Bristol men with capering.

The converse is also true, to a point, but standards will only rise by setting technical challenges. In general women's sides are poor at capering. There is no physiological reason why they can not be athletic; the explanation is probably sociological.

In the future there must be a more general awareness of technique, not only of good dance, but also of good teaching. The real technical difficulties in each tradition can be recognised by bringing together the experience of many foremen.

Between them they probably have the understanding for ensuring effective learning.

The idea that sharing experience and learning from good teachers will lead to stereotyped morris is surely wrong. By the nature of the facts teachers can appear to be definitive but they can not be dogmatic even if the recognised authority in a tradition.

What one does as a side should be a conscious choice. Morris as a hobby has to allow self-expression or it holds little attraction. This is not to mean the toleration of individual deviant performance because the Morris is a group activity.

The number of sides will continue to rise rapidly and the national organisations must rethink their role. In recent years the Morris has been opened up to a wider part of Society and grown faster than the available informal method of training potential leaders can work.

It takes time to develop dance skills and to gain experience and knowledge.

Why do we not have a rule of thumb for the average number of hours on the hoof? There is a strong obligation on established sides to help even though there may be some mutual incomprehension.

It should be in their own self interest to avoid bad performance of the Morris in their own vicinity.

It is reasonable that under modern conditions many sides may have short lives. Dancers will change clubs frequently. With sides thicker on the ground, this is probably a better way of broadening experience in the dance and may slow down the constant urge to do so by introducing too many dances into a club's repertoire.

I hope that the prejudice remains against mixed morris. Why do we never have to worry about the odd man dancing in a women's side?

There are a few women who dress like the men and can dance like the men but these should remain exceptional. A more difficult question is that of having a musician of the opposite sex.

It is very desirable that musicians have experience of the dance to be able to play with an understanding of movement. Without it, a side can not dance well. The subtleties of rhythm and phrasing are the difference between good and average dancing.

With the increase in club numbers, there will be a growth of interest in the byways of the tradition, both to be different and to be local. For most parts of Britain there is not the same wealth of material as exploited by the Shropshire Bedlams and Martha Rhoden's from the Border counties but local material does exist if looked at without prejudice and preconception. Of course the number of known Molly dances, Ribbon dances, Garland and Stave dances are limited.

Clubs will have to turn to contemporary social dance material as did the original 19th. cent performers. With care, some dance form repertoires can be augmented by using similar continental dances as they are also based on the same 19th. cent international social dance fundamentals. The legitimacy is a problem for each individual club. It will depend

on whether it is a necessity because of constraints that the club has set itself or whether its motivation is to preserve local ritual or does not mind becoming in effect a folklore troupe.

Often a local ritual is more a question of the custom and the costume rather than the content of the dance, as at Salisbury and Shaftsbury. The dance form can be relatively unimportant. In the final analysis is it right to transplant some forms outside their original regions and not others?

I believe we could be entering a golden age for the Morris with more morris, better morris and more diverse morris than ever before. Morris is developing and sides exist today who could not have been conceived 25 years ago when I first met the Morris.

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We need

- + Articles- humorous, controversial, trenchant, serious etc.
- + Jokes- except the one about falling off the bonnet.
- + Amusing/embarrassing experiences- e.g. 'A funny thing happened to me on my way to a Ring meeting'.
- + Dates- of Instructionals, festivals, tours etc. for a diary page.
- + Suggestions- for future issues.

Copy Date for next issue - 31st March.

* From MAIDS OF BARUM. This letter refers to the open letter that the MAIDS sent to the A.G.M. in October. The earlier letter is printed in full opposite.

Dear Editor,

Betty came flying down to see us the weekend after the A.G.M. and it seems we have been misconstrued, so we would like to expand a little on our letter.

1. You may not, but we still regret we could not attend.
2. As our paragraph on the committee system agreed with the other two letters that had previously been circulated and they did not raise a furor, we don't suppose ours did either.
3. With regard to our paragraph on the standard of dancing, we hope it did not raise any problem.
5. Associate Membership. From what Betty told us, we feel we have been misunderstood. The last thing we want is the accepted Ring view of Associate Membership, but we do feel it is grossly unfair for a single non-team member to have the same voting rights as a complete side. In the absence of postal votes and proportional representation, a single person has the equivalent to 12-30 people, depending on the number in a side.

This is our feeling on the present Associate Membership system, which brings us to our suggestions for a different Associate Membership structure (which we were getting at in our paragraph on W.M.F. versus the Ring '4'). We put it under the heading of Associate Membership because we felt there should be a time for looking and learning before becoming banner carriers for W.M.F. We agree with W.M.F.'s edict of learning by example. Okay, we are all show-women(?), there to entertain the public, but you have to learn the basics of your craft first. We seem to be getting bogged down with this written word - what we are really trying to say is written in W.M.F. newsletter 1976 - Helen's version (see at end). Everyone needs to care about standards of dancing and behavior.

We are not adamant about Associate Membership and we never intended that W.M.F. should have a system like the Ring. We just want people to set their own standards after watching others and always strive to better them.

QUOTE FROM W.M.F. NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 1976

" The question of standards was thrashed out at the weekend and a few disturbing reports have got back to me about women's sides. This is a quote from a letter I received earlier in the year :-

" Since women's Morris is a comparatively new thing from the watching public's point of view, it does seem that when people (including Morris Men) see a women's side, they do go away and think that this must be what Women's Morris is all about. Unfortunately, if they see a poor side then they go away with the impression that all Women's Morris is poor, as compared to Men's Morris. It has to be said that there is a lot of sloppy, effete women's dancing to be seen - we have seen a side who refused to give their name to onlookers because, they said, they were so bad! If they're not good enough to give their side name, then what on earth are they doing dancing 'out' leaving you, me and all the rest of us to answer the jibes of " Women's Morris is no good ".

* To W.M.F. A G M October 1977 from MAIDS OF BARUM.

1. We regret that none of us could attend the A G M , but please accept our apologies. We hope our comments will contribute to the discussion.

2. Committee System

The basic principle is sound - we agree that as W.M.F. has grown, there has become too much work for one person.

However, it will prove difficult to put into practice if the members of the committee are all in different parts of the country; liason will take time - new members especially may find difficulty in contacting the correct person and valuable time and incentive could be lost by the time the committee replied.

Perhaps Area Representatives would be a solution, so the secretary could mail everything to one person in each area and so spread the workload.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Helen for all the work she has put into W.M.F. over the past two years.

3. Standard of Dancing

There are some good women's sides dancing now - the women certainly stole the show at Sidmouth. However, we still feel that the general standard of dancing needs to be raised. A lot of sloppiness is still observed, which gives the men every reason to be against women dancers.

While saying this, a lot of men's sides also give Morris a bad name, but that is no reason for women to follow their example.

We have heard the excuse that, as we are women, then our style must be different - we quite agree that each side should develop their own style, but there is no such thing as a good sloppy style!

4. W.M.F. versus the Ring

We realise that an exclusive membership of W.M.F. is contrary to a lot of people's feelings.

We were among the early sides who joined W.M.F. When we started, we would not dance out until we were sure that we would not let ourselves or the public down by giving a sloppy performance. We would have been quite prepared to " dance our way in " before being accepted as full members of W.M.F.

We still want W.M.F. to encourage and help new sides all they can and perhaps a conditional " open welcome " could be devised. W.M.F. could give associate member rights to these new sides - e.g. insurance facilities and newsheets, but a set standard of dancing should be obtained before full membership would be granted.

5. Associate Membership

Point 4. raised the issue of Associate Membership. We feel that associate members should not have voting rights until they become full members - i.e. their team had " danced their way in " .

So last year's decision on voting rights (see minutes of A G M) would have to be reverted. We feel that Associate Membership should only be available to complete sides and as they could receive full insurance cover and postage, the associate fee should be the same i.e. £5-00.

continued on page 14.....

6. General Dancing

We would like to encourage all sides, but especially new sides, to do more research into their dances. It is very difficult to dance Morris well and nigh impossible from a book. Watch and learn as much as possible, take advantage of instructionals and try to gain experience all the time. Also remember that the dance is always evolving, so keep an open and receptive mind.

THE MAIDS OF BARUM .

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LATE ARRIVALS AT THE MORRIS BALL

Mr. & Mrs. Ington and their extensive family including
their eccentric son Odd
their hippy son Head
and their awfully anaemic daughter Bled
and slipping in the back door their Irish cousin Padd (a gatecrasher!!),

and bringing their pets with them come
Mr. & Mrs. Jury and their Adder

Professor Lington and his pet Duck.

* From GLORY OF THE WEST (Exeter)

Dear Editor,

As we are a 'new' side you asked us for our views on W.M.F. so here you are. We first saw 'Ladies Morris' in the summer of 1976 and later, through the people we saw dancing, we acquired beginners' notation, and a vague idea of what W.M.F. was all about.

From then we managed to get a side together with help from several people, to some of whom we remain grateful. This brought us to the last A.G.M. which we attended with 4 dancers and 2 musicians.

It was at this time that we began to feel that W.M.F. was not functioning very efficiently; in fact, the meeting was a complete shambles as far as most of us here are concerned.

It is not really possible to hold a meeting with such a long agenda, and to have a sensible and thorough discussion of all the points raised in the time allowed. If more time was allowed the meeting would not have to be abandoned in the mad rush for lunch. The total abandonment of 'other points' due to the general feeling of the meeting, meant that we could no longer raise what we considered to be an important matter.

Our point was that the A.G.M. needs a completely impartial chairman. With all respect to the President, it is obviously difficult to put forward one's own point of view as well as everyone else's. We feel that the meeting should start with the election of a chairman to keep order & to maintain good feeling while allowing expression of everyone's views.

As new-comers, we feel that the basic aims of W.M.F. are excellent, and dancing with so many other sides was highly educational for us. We do feel, however, that drastic rethinking is needed by some sides as to their position in W.M.F. and that the 'Jolly Hockeysticks' atmosphere should become a thing of the past.

Finally, despite all our moans, we enjoy being part of the Morris Federation and look forward to much good dancing together in the future.

In every "Morris Matters" there will always be a letters page in which you can express your views on anything from massed morris to baldricks! We hope we will not have to prompt you and your letters will come pouring in. Have you got any new ideas? Views on a certain article? Disagree with someone's letter?

Send your letters to :-

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'Letters Page'
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Windsor,
Berks.

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