

MORRIS
MATTERS

VOLUME 1 N° 4
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How many times have you heard the questions, 'Where did the morris start?' and 'What's it all about?'. And how many times have you mumbled something about fertility or Spring-time? Roy Dommett provides a more scholarly explanation.

Calling all Foremen! p 9

Anyone who teaches or wants to teach the morris, turn now to page nine. There are still places left at Roy Dommett's instructional - don't miss it!

The Morris Matters Interview p 10

The logistics of starting up a side and the inevitable disagreements that follow must be familiar to all of us. Bernie Cherry - 'the bloke that started Old Spot' - has strong ideas about what's important about the Morris and what's not. In this issue he talks to us about his experiences.

Milkmaids' Garlands p 14

Anybody interested in reviving an old May custom? Grab your milking stool and don your yoke and turn to the centre page spread!

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Sidmouth seen through the almost unsullied eyes of two of the younger members of Windsor Morris.

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 4th issue of Morris Matters - the last one of this year. We've all thoroughly enjoyed editing the magazine and we hope we can continue in the post in 1979.

Our main aim for the mag has been that it should appeal not only to members of WMF, but to everyone that dances, plays for and cares about the morris. Because of this we'd like to suggest that as well as being available free to WMF members, Morris Matters should be on sale to anyone who is interested enough to buy it. By increasing the readership in this way we hope to attract new and fresh contributions on all aspects of the Morris.

This brings us to the question of editorial policy posed in a letter from one of our readers. While we are in broad agreement that articles which would increase our knowledge and improve our dance technique are more positive and have more practical benefit to us all than the 'negative ideas' expressed by morris men in the last issue, there are several reasons for not printing only positive articles as she suggests.

The first one is probably obvious from the letters page this issue - many more people (including us) feel able to pontificate about 'political' issues than have the experience or understanding to write about dance technique or history.

Secondly, the politics do actually affect us all. There can be few people who have not personally come across opinions like those expressed in the last issue. Also, there may be newer dancers who do not realise the speciousness of the old familiar arguments, and for them the vigorous response this month could be a source of moral support. Surely the answer is that Morris Matters should include any contributions which concern the morris world as it is - political as well as technical.

Finally, we'd like to thank all our correspondents of the past year - with a special thankyou to Roy Dommett for his unceasing support.

The copy date for incoming articles is Sat. 16th Dec.

How it all Began

n 7500 BC at Stone Carr near Scarborough, early post-glacial Neolithic hunter/gatherers were becoming adapted to a forest environment. The site gives the earliest example of artificially felled trees and of a domesticated dog in England. It also has red deer horns that appear to have been worked so that they could be worn. The site was occupied only by 5 or 6 families but the need could have been disguise in the hunt or ritual.

The earliest known reference to a linked chain dance is depicted on rocks in the open air in a valley NW of Luxor in Upper Egypt dated c.3400 BC, showing girls holding hands. This was before metal was introduced into Egypt and therefore before the first sword was made. Nine skirted women are shown dancing round a naked male in a rock shelter in Catalonia. About 2000 BC a small carving was made in Sardinia of 3 naked women dancing a wild dance round a stone. Stone circles were built in Britain from 3300 to

1500 BC. Many have an associated legend of dancing maidens turned to stone. It is generally believed that these circles were dancing areas, rather than the sites in the mountain states of the USA were used by Red Indians at a similar level of civilisation.

However to talk of pre-Christian roots to what we do is pure speculation. It implies a continuity of form of culture and social environment that did not exist. It confuses with the survival of superstitions and folklore which are individual and not community activity. There are certain characters and activities which have forgotten ritual roles but these have nothing to do with the morris as a dance form or as an entertainment. Significance can not be hung on the simple fact that people have always danced and done things in due season. Where are the comparable dances of the Celts, Saxons or Danes in other countries? In any case the "old religion" is witchcraft.

The pan-European dance is the hilt and point sword form and a very suggestive correlation has been made with the distribution of early mining sites. However the earliest references are in Nuremberg, 1350 AD, and Dordrecht, Holland, 1392 AD and subsequently in Medieval towns in that part of Europe that were developing an independence and a new culture. The earliest British references are Edinburgh, 1590 and Lathom, Lancs, 1638.

Early records

The earliest records are where records were kept, so were the guilds adopting something already existing in the villages or did the villages come to adopt what was done in the towns? There is ample evidence that most of folk culture was survival from earlier more sophisticated levels. Also that things pass either up or down and when one part of society adopts something from another, the originator drops it. Like evolution in animals, society does not reinvent something already eliminated: the potential is not there - that is excluding our present time with its novel awareness of the past.

The first Morris or Morisca was staged in Lérida in 1149 at the betrothal of Petronilla, the young Queen of Aragon to Ramon Berenguer of Barcelona in the

form of a Moors versus Christians battle as one of the court celebrations. The Moors had been driven from the town the year before. The form spread through Spain as it was recovered and along the south coast of France into the northern Italy plain where the Moors never invaded. Perhaps John O'Gaunt really did bring back a performance of the Morisca to England in the mid-14th century. The Morisca evolved in different ways, different places emphasised the martial movements, the 2 lines or subsidiary characters like the young bride.

The Medieval Church had a feast of fools which when expelled from the church was welcomed into towns, law-courts and universities. In France the Sociétés Joyeuse were associations of young men which existed from the mid-15th to the mid-16th century with some surviving to the mid-17th. The Parisian societies Enfants-Sans-Souci and the Kingdom of the Basoche first mentioned in 1442, were lawclerks associated with Parliament in Paris who celebrated traditional festivals and acquired considerable reputation as comic actors and organisers of pageants. They were frequently summoned to act farces at court, to devise Royal entries, Masquerades and Morris dances.

The English imitation was led by a Lord of Misrule and one

appeared at Court from the reign of Henry VII (c.1500) to the death of Edward VI (1553) and still existed at Oxford in the early 17th century. The first English mention of Morris was at Court in 1494 and for a few decades appeared where the Royalty frequented such as Kingston on Thames, Richmond and Reading. About the middle of the century it began to be picked up by the town guilds, for example Abingdon 1554-92, and towards the end of the century it had descended to the lower classes. The first known morris competition was at Middleburg, Holland in 1525.

Analysis

An analysis has been done of all the English references up to the early 17th century. There is no evidence of a fertility-ritual origin. The performances were arranged for holidays and important events. There is no reference to the

blacking of faces although this was common in the masques. Bells were universal. The costumes were expensive, uniform within a team, and valuable enough to be left as major items of property in wills. Parishes would hire costumes if they could not afford them, e.g. Marlow. Fees for dancers were initially high, £5 to £25, c.1500, suggesting professional performers. Even in Gloucester in 1553 Master Arnold's Servants, a company of players, were paid 5/- for providing the May Day morris dancers, but incidentally 20/- for Bringing in the May, another newly arrived fashion from the continent. It is possible to distinguish two types of early dance. The first and most popular involved a female character and is best called a Ring dance and included pantomimic elements and has a recognisable relationship to children's games. The other form is a processional, in a column two by two.

WANTED

We hope, in a future issue to be running a detailed article on 'The Media Image of the Morris', and we would like you to send us copies of your press cuttings, and also any anecdotes regarding contact with reporters, journalists, interviewers, etc. It would be helpful too, if contributors would include a few words on their own attitude to the media.

By the reign of James I the morris was waning in interest and it was called out in the Book of Sports as needing restoration to its previous position, along with archery. It had been very popular. In the 16th century Phillip Stubbes told how morris dancers sometimes entered the church during a service and how the congregation would mount up on the forms and pews after divine service was finished to sing and dance in church on certain holy days and festivals. In 1571 the Archbishop of York had to prohibit Christmas and May Games and morris dances in churches and church yards during the time of divine service or of any sermon. Kemp's Nine Daies' Wonder, pub. 1600, showed that interest could be generated.

Decline

The decline in the morris and the maypole is shown in the little protest at their loss during the Commonwealth although there was no prohibition against dancing in general (after all it was the period of the first of many editions of Playford's Dance manuals), although it suited later generations to blame it on the Puritans. The restoration of Charles II through the negotiations of General Monk, of the famous march, in 1660, led to an outburst of reviving Merrie England. Spring bonfires, maypoles

and may games were enthusiastically restored even before his arrival in London on the 29th May, his 30th birthday, especially in Oxford and the surrounding districts. The event left such an impression that many seasonal celebrations were transferred to Oak Apple Day in perpetuity, not to change again till the Bank Holiday Act of the late 19th century.



There are several very local dance forms in England now called Morris. They were often calendar customs and once kept alive by particular groups, but they were all associated with the concept of good luck visiting and therefore were part of the community and dependent on the existence of a suitable social environment. Such a countryside existed since the late 17th century, with independent farms and the houses of the minor gentry. The form of the dance varies markedly over the country, each fossilising a social dance style appropriate to its initial peak of popularity.

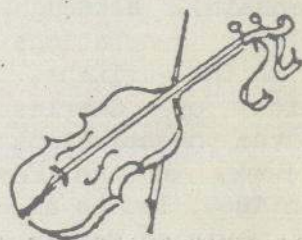
The Cotswold morris was as Kemp said in the old form with napkins and bells. It would be better called Wychwood as the teams showing the most complexity and uniformity are almost contained by the Royal Forest boundaries defined by Henry II. The forest focussed on the Royal Palace at Woodstock, a favourite residence for Kings up to Charles II and often forming part of the dowry of the reigning queen. The technical detail is that of Society dancing of 1600, simplified as one might expect of a revival half a century later but showing little subsequent influence from the developments in social dancing, and therefore having quickly become a dance of the people, who were uninfluenced by the Country Dance till the 19th century. The tradition diffused up the dessected plateau of the main Jurassic Cuesta into northern Oxfordshire and Southern Warwickshire and Northants, losing characteristic elements but did not catch on in the surrounding vale farming lands. In Northamptonshire it overlapped with the Midland or Bedlam morris which appears to have spread from Northampton to the Welsh Border and the Vale of Evesham to Shropshire. This was a midwinter activity and tradesmen maintained, with the chief characteristic of the regular clashing of sticks.

The combat aspect of the Morisca had developed in Italy into the

Metachin and spread in popularity to France, Spain and then England in the latter half of the 16th century. The first English references at Court are in 1582-3 to 1590. A description was published by Arbeau in 1589, showing the use of simple fencing movements and clearly a forerunner of dances shown by continental sides today. In Northamptonshire in the 18th century the two forms were clearly distinguished but use of sticks in the Cotswold dance diffused southwards.

In the 18th century all popular antiquities, as they were then called, were viewed as survivals of classical mythology. In the 19th they were all given Scandinavian origins. The folk revival looked for history that was indigenous and lost in the mists of time. Today we are not surprised if fashions come and go. But fashion is innovative whereas the traditional process is selective. The origin is not important but the use to which it is put is.

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Calling All Foremen!

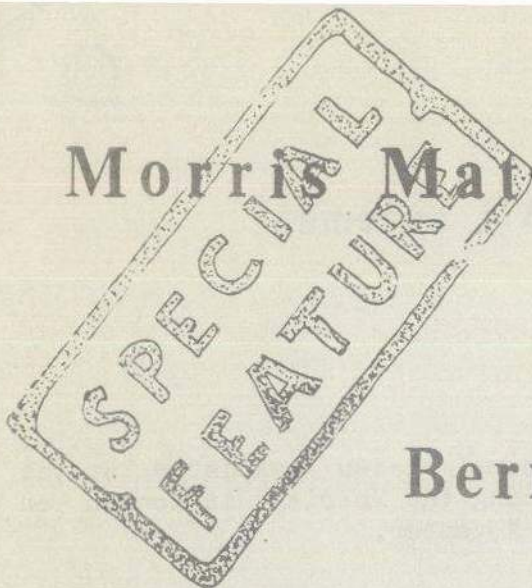
There are still some places available at the Instructional on 'Teaching the Morris' in London on the weekend 10th - 12th November.

Roy Dommett will be running the weekend. Anyone who is or who wants to be involved in teaching the Morris is invited to come along - be prepared for criticism on your own dancing and teaching.

Obviously a side is only as good as the person who tells them how to dance, and one of the problems of women's morris has been the lack of experienced, good women dancers able to teach. This weekend will be an excellent opportunity to develop skills both of dancing and teaching. The numbers will be kept fairly low so that, unlike the usual workshop where individual criticism just isn't feasible, everybody will have a chance to improve on their own performance and to learn how to put over the ideas to other people.

The instructional will run from Friday evening till Sunday teatime. The cost is £9 - including two night's accommodation and all meals. Please contact Sarah Jarrett if you want to attend. (Work 01 749 5045 or home 01 878 5545.)

Morris Matters



talks to

Bernie Cherry

What influenced us most, as very new and green Morris dancers at Sidmouth 1975, was watching the top-hats of the Gloucester Old Spot Morris Dancers, way above the heads of the crowd outside the Marine Bars. The impact was immediate and lasting, and to hear Bernie Cherry (their then foreman) expounding his personal philosophy of the Morris later in the week proved a turning point in the history of our own side.

Morris Matters : First of all, tell us about your history - when you started, what had an effect on you, etc.

Bernie Cherry : When I first started dancing - about 1968 I was with the Gloucester Men and we had a really great bloke who was foreman - Alex Hamilton ! He used to go into great detail about what we were supposed to do, and I noticed (once I'd actually learned to dance - which took quite a long time because he wasn't very forceful) that people tended to ignore what he said ! That was one of the early things which made me think that things weren't what they might be.

MaM : You mean they ignored the critical things that he said ?

BC : Well yes, like which foot you start on, how you dance it - all that. People would say 'well, we've been dancing like that for years so we're going to stick to it no matter what he says.' The fact that they elected him foreman every year didn't seem to make any difference. Anyway, after a while I decided that I would go down to London for a while - not sure why. I went and joined Hammersmith because I knew people from Bath who had joined Hammersmith, and Bath was the side that really impressed me in those days because they used to jump in the air. That was something that was just creeping in. It seemed a bit strange that people didn't sweat very much.

The first practice I went to (we were doing Adderbury at the time) Hugh Rippon said " Come on Bernie, pick your feet up!" and I thought well am I not ? and of course I wasn't. I stayed there for about a year and then went back to the Gloucester Men and had lots of arguments. A lot of other people were pissed off with it, so we decided we'd move on and start another side.

LM : That was Old Spot?

BC : That was City of Gloucester. Another thing, - I'd taken to going out to the country a bit. I'd walk a lot, go into pubs, and I got talking to people and got to know the Cotswold people a bit. (I'm not Cotswold - I've only lived there since I was seventeen.) It occurred to me, after what Hugh'd said on that first occasion, and also talking to Tubby Reynolds, that the sort of people who live in the Cotswolds, being the descendants of the old dancers, just couldn't possibly have danced the way most sides do. It just didn't ring true, somehow. They're a very lively sort of people anyway - like if you're in a pub there's always a lot of pissing going on, lots of joking, very energetic, pushing people around etc. It's quite physical, lots of cricket, silly football, things like that - and they put so much into the way they live!

Finding all that out and then meeting Roy Dommett (who was really the man who changed it for me) finally tipped the balance. For a start he said go and look at the traditional sides and see what they do. I saw Bampton and Abingdon early on - in my first year I

should think. I was very impressed by Bampton; not only were they fairly energetic, but they kept their lines straight - in a fairly loose sort of way, too, very together.

Anyway, eventually we got this side going with some 50% new people and 50% people who'd left the Gloucester Men, and I started teaching this energetic style that I'd learnt at Hammersmith. Some people agreed with me and could do it, some agreed with me and couldn't, and some disagreed with me entirely.

To cut a long story short, we ended up with a meeting where we didn't do any dancing at all. We just did a lot of talking and there were a lot of hard words spoken. There was a lot of bad feeling generally and we had a vote as to whether I was to stay on as foreman or not - and I won by one vote!

We had about eight men and a musician, I think, and we were in that position for quite a while, but then people started turning up. We'd been dancing out as the City of Gloucester Morris and we weren't very good especially as we had about three people who put into it as much as they could and three who wouldn't. It seemed much worse than six people all dancing alike but badly, if you like.

MM : What traditions were you doing then?

BC : We were doing Bledington and Longborough, and we'd started doing Oddington and Sherbourne. We decided, (actually, before the split) that for a year we'd concentrate on Longborough and have a four year thing where we'd have a year on each. We'd keep dancing what we'd learned and learn another tradition, and end up with the four Gloucestershire traditions which weren't being danced. The other one, of course, is Campden which we weren't interested in doing because it's still danced and they weren't interested in it being danced. The other four are much more alike.

The people that stayed after this argument decided we'd do just that - dance Longborough for a year, I was coming round to my idea of a single tradition, and as far as I know we were the first single-tradition side outside of the traditional sides. (I think Adderbury probably started at about the same time, but they had a precedent in that they were a village side) We

weren't sure whether it was working or not.

When the Gloucester Ring meeting was held we had already decided we weren't going out as a side, but we thought, well, we can't just stand by and watch it when we live there. So we went out, and, I don't know, I might be being a bit unjust, but someone told me (I can't remember who it was) that they'd decided to put us out with a team not considered easy to get on with.

So we were out on tour with Chingford.

The thing is that Chingford in those days, and now for that matter, were a really good side. They were much more typical Ring then, but they were very good and they did it very well. (this was just after the Albion split and they'd just got themselves together) They told us we danced really well - and it hadn't occurred to us before then. So we thought we WERE good, and it sort of snowballed - people saying how amazing it is and all the rest of it.

MM : In some ways it was a bit of an accident that you picked on Longborough.

BC : Yes. It could have been Bledington or Sherborne or Oddington, but we knew more Longborough than anything else anyway.

MM : What has always struck me as being odd, is that it's still possible to pick on one tradition and do it really well - like Old Spot did with Longborough. Do you have any ideas as to why no-one has done it?

BC : Well, I don't know really. I do know that some people have said 'well we think you're right but we couldn't possibly do it' - which seems a bit silly to me. But people do tend to say 'Oh well, it's impossible to dance like that' - except that people ARE dancing like that.

MM : So there's nothing special about the people that are doing it?

BC : I don't think so, no. I think it has to do with the way it's put across and with the conviction of the people that are dancing. The thing about Old

cont. on p.19 ...



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Milkmaids' Garlands

In the 17th century it was the custom of milkmaids to dance like Morris on the customary days in which dancing was accompanied by which were often bright objects, gold, silver, glass needing one or two persons to carry. The items were lent by people in the country being toured.



Sometimes flower garlands were taken round, similar to those still used in some villages. These were fashionable at the time as the pastime of Maying, having been recently introduced from France, was spreading through the British countryside.

R.L. Donnett



SIDMOUTH

— The First Time!!

Joining the Morris at an early age is somewhat of a disadvantage when you have no insight whatsoever as to what "folk" is. When we signed on to Windsor, we were almost immediately thrown into a completely different world of festivals, pubs and complete dedication to what seemed to us then mad pastimes!

Now, two years later at age 14, we are nearly "old hands"! But all the time we were getting into this "folk" there remained one almost sacred word - Sidmouth. Even standing with friends, this word was spoken in hushed whispers - what could it mean?

jigsaw

Gradually the secret leaked out ...International...Folklore... Festival. Aahh! So that was it, these new bugging systems are wonderful! The jigsaw was almost complete for us and the last piece was fitted when we

found we were able to go down with the side this year. The prospect of a week of dancing, singing and drinking was too much for the average morris dancer to resist, so before we knew it August 4th found us sitting in a field surrounded by tents, sleeping bags and morris kit - Sidmouth had begun!

sleep

We were staying at a site away from Sidmouth itself. We were told this was an ideal way of gaining more sleep and frequently during the week we thanked our lucky stars we were away from the strains of melodeon, concertinas and bagpipes during the early hours of the morning.

Settling in was difficult, and to adjust to the fact that you really were at Sidmouth was most hard but we flung ourselves in headlong and began to enjoy ourselves. The great difficulty on the streets was putting a name

to faces. Everybody rang a bell but try as hard as you could no name was dredged up from the sea of past events. Fortunately they were having the same difficulty themselves, so you would pass with a merry "hello" and hope for the best. By going to a nearby friend cum name consultant, by the end of the week you'd just about got everyone placed.

pubs

The first job on the list so to speak was getting to know the pubs. Apparently most informal morris had been done outside the Swan in previous years but as the traffic system had been changed it was almost impossible this year. So people decided The Masons' Arms was the ideal morris pub. We think the rumour got around as we saw a number of sides informally dance at this location. (The Bucknell session courtesy of Holdens is classed as a feud workshop - important) We also visited the Ship, frequently blessing the fact it had a children's bar for the Windsor playgroup! On Tuesday night it also came in handy for Windsor and assorted male basses to hold a choir practice. It all started with Ding Dong Merrily on High or was it Oh Come All Ye Faithful? Anyway, it's a good method of clearing the bar in five minutes!

It was also a change from the usual vocal noise which drifted past your ears on entering a

pub. It would be boring to name all the pubs which contributed to the festival by letting in the masses. We were very impressed by the general attitude of landlords and staff of pubs we visited.

We were determined to see as many sides from overseas as possible as we were rather ashamed to confess we'd never before seen any foreign ritual dances. The arena we both agreed was beautifully situated and very well decorated. We always seemed to find the performers vaguely distant when sitting on the bank but even so it was very spectacular. We saw most of the international sides and were equally impressed with all. The Spanish Basques were uncannily like an English morris side in kit but the dance style was very different in stepping and rhythm.

plastic flowers

Of the English teams we liked most the two north-west morris sides, Garstang and Poynton Jemmers. At this point we are not going to be prejudiced but we were glad Poynton Jemmers didn't have any plastic flowers!!

Having never seen northwest before we came to the conclusion you couldn't have had two better sides to demonstrate it at its best. We are both greatly looking forward to seeing more colourful performances by guests from all corners of the world!

next year.

We saw all three of the main processions. The Winster Processional was very ragged and we were glad we didn't take part. The torchlight was an anticlimax for us, having waited 1 1/2 hours in the increasing cold. When it finally arrived we could only just about tell who was who. A number of new teams had been formed, including Hobby Horse Adlington and Winchester Morris Pavement Show. The mad rush for the sea was most puzzling. Apart from simultaneous dousing, simultaneous igniting of the crowd must also have taken place!

disorganised

We only saw the women's odds & sods morris but heard reports that the men's was its usual disorganised gathering. We both came to the agreement that odds & sods was a bad thing. Whereas sides may be exceptionally good on their own, when there is a set up with six in a multitude of different kits of varying colours it causes colour blindness for a start!! It doesn't help when they all decide to do their own hand movements and begin and end the dance in their own way. With practices before hand the odds & sods morris would probably become an attraction and encourage more individual dancers who don't belong to sides.

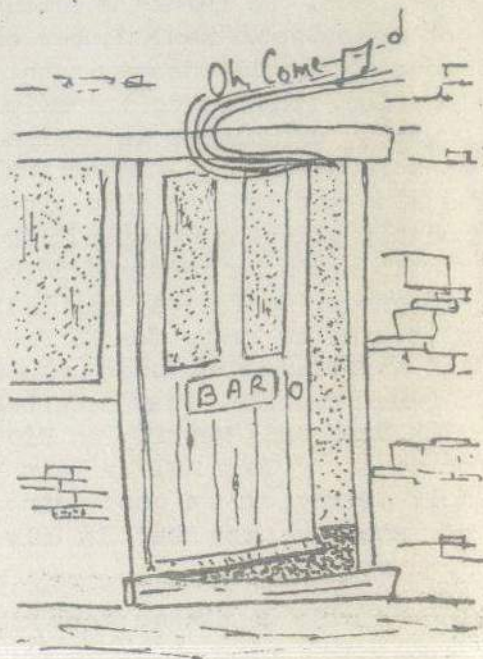
We greatly enjoyed performing

at the Drill Hall on Friday for flower power revival night. Being of such a young and tender age we didn't know all the songs and just about got the hang of Harri Krishna or was it Harra Khrisi? It's a pity it wasn't punk this year, we may have got into that more - the pogo comes easy doing all this morris!

But what more can we say? We were asked in writing this article to let the "first time at Sidmouth" views come through. Let's hope the second time is as good as the first!!

Cath & Becca.

(The Kids from Windsor).



... from p.13

Spot is that they're very keen - there isn't a man in the side who wouldn't talk to you about Morris. The Gloucester Men who weren't really very interested enjoyed dancing and they had a good time. They danced as well as they could, and all the rest of it, but it never seemed to take off - it never had any magic about it.

MM : So, given that the possibility is there, how do you get out of people the commitment and the conviction that you need - it has to be a personal decision from each person in the side.

BC : That's true. It does seem, looking at Old Spot now (I've been left Old Spot for about three years), that there are great similarities between the people in the side. They tend to be friends, and also, unfortunately, they tend to be a bit inward-looking. I suppose we always were - perhaps maybe it's because I'm not there.

Bernie's three-year absence from Cheltenham was spent working as a farm labourer in Wales. (where, incidentally, he raised a side). Recently, he has returned to the Cotswolds, and started a new side in Stroud. We asked whether he had considered re-joining Old Spot.

BC : I used to re-visit Cheltenham quite frequently and I danced out with Old Spot a few months after I moved to Wales, until I got out of practice really.

MM : The dancing seems to have changed since you were foreman.

BC : Yes, well it's changed quite a lot really. - there are some things that I disagree with, but they're purely a matter of taste. Apart from anything else, I said that I thought John Willoughby ought to be foreman and once somebody else is foreman, it's up to him as far as I'm concerned. I did think of re-joining when I went back to Cheltenham and I went along to a few practices. I decided that it wouldn't be very easy or practical to do that, because I wasn't really prepared to change the way I danced to fit the

side's style. There are certain things I disagree with but at the same time I didn't feel that I had the right to make John change his mind because it's up to him after all.

MM : So by your own rules really, you had to stop ?

BC : Oh yes, absolutely. You know, later on when I had been away for quite a long time I used to turn up for the Easter tour in particular. (in fact, I've only missed one year since the side started, despite the fact that I've been out of the side for three seasons) But I was never allowed to dance in with the side. I agreed with that and I didn't ask if I could either.

MM : The more you talk, the more it seems that Morris and democracy don't mix.

BC : I don't think they do mix very well. I think democracy is a political thing (we can leave that out of this, can't we ?) Democracy in it's better senses I agree with, but when it comes to Morris Dancing it doesn't appear to work. The only thing you can aim for is what does work. It's one thing we discovered about dancing a single tradition - some people might find it boring, but it works. Ask anybody in Old Spot and they'll tell you it works, if nothing else.

MM : I suppose you've got the same sort of thing in the side you're starting now. When people come up to you and say they want to join what do you say to them ? Do you say, well it means this....

BC : Well, for a start, we decided that we'd take anybody that wanted to join, but we put a limit on people from Cheltenham when we felt we had enough. It would be unfair on Stroud otherwise and I didn't want the side to become too big. I think it's a very big mistake to have more than about twenty people - in Cotswold Morris anyway.

I said the side isn't dancing out until I say it's ready to dance out. I don't think there's a lot of room for democracy when it comes to standards - then individuals won't dance out until they meet the standard of the team.

MM : So who decides on that, then ?

BC : Well at the moment I do, because I'm the only really experienced dancer in the side, and there's only one man in the side who was anything like a competent dancer when we started. I certainly wouldn't send the side out at the moment, after five weeks, though it's not a lot worse than some of the stuff I've seen.

MM : About practices - what do you do ? I've been to some sides practices where they do a dance and they say 'well we'll just run through this' - they run through it, and that's that. How do you actually get down to managing the practice ?

BC : Well can I talk about the way I do it now ? We've only had five

MM : Well in the first one

BC : In the first one you teach people to do double step really. You teach them to do a foot up and a foot down.

MM : What about when you haven't got all new ones - once people know what they're doing ?

BC : I start saying things like: you'll find at a certain point in the dance you'll be on the wrong foot, or you're doing nothing for a couple of seconds, so try adding this ..

MM : Do you have a picture in your mind of what it should be like, before you start the dance ?

BC : Oh yes, I know exactly what I think our side should look like when they're good. I might be totally wrong, but then my ideas will change as the side develops.

MM : So you watch it, and if it's not working out like that you say, well I want it to be more like this .. ?

BC : Yes, but also if it doesn't suit the side, I'll change it. I don't believe that the notes are there for us to copy slavishly. I think they're there as a basis. It's the same with everything. For instance, if you're

a melodeon player, and you want to learn to play in the traditional style, you don't go along and copy Oscar Woods or Bob Cann, you go and learn what suits you. Go and have a look at what was collected or if you possibly can go and hear traditional singers, musicians, go and see traditional dancers and work from there, but don't slavishly copy them.

MM : What do you do about people who just can't do it ?

BC : You just keep working on them. There was one dancer in Old Spot who can remain nameless, who was coming to practices for a couple of years before he danced out, but he was very keen and in some ways he's one of the better dancers that Old Spot have got now. And certainly the side would not have run as smoothly without that particular bloke, but he had a really hard job getting it together. But he did it in the end, with help. Some people take a long time to learn to dance but I think that practically anybody can learn as long as there's some kind of a sense of rhythm.

MM : And if they aren't willing to do that then it's up to them to leave the side really ?

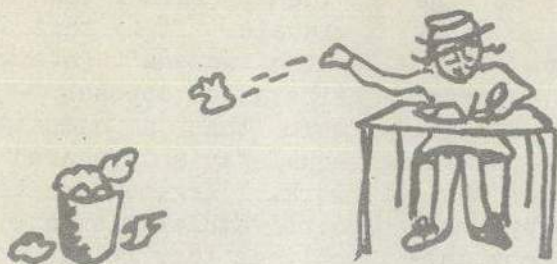
BC : It is really, yes, because you never get asked to dance out until you're ready.

MM : That's what always seems to stump people who run sides, there are always the same problems like the ones who can't or won't.

BC : Yes. But if you want to be a good side then you've got to have good dancers. You don't have to be a natural dancer to be a good morris dancer, in fact I think very few people are. The majority of Old Spot's dancers aren't natural dancers, but they're all good dancers. I still take my standard from Old Spot, though I see it more objectively now. But it still impresses me.

Divorced from it I sometimes have difficulty in remembering that I ever had anything to do with it at all.

Bernie Cherry was talking to Jenny Joyce and Alan Whear of Windsor Morris.



Applied Misogyny

Dear Editor,

I read with great interest (not to mention mounting disbelief) John Wilson's essay in applied misogyny in "Morris Matters 3". What desperation is it that can drive a "purist" to advocate the replacement of a live musician with a tape recorder? It appears that, like the unfortunate Vietnamese village, morris must be "destroyed in order to save it".

I cannot accept that fidelity to tradition is achieved by freezing everything as it was on the day Cecil Sharp met the Headington Quarry Men. A tradition is a process of development, as the EFDSS statement recognises, and it is this which gives us the variety of dances and songs and the various versions of

them. What is more, John Wilson seeks to contrast "day-to-day life" with rituals which are re-enacted, whereas it can fairly be argued that ritual is an important component of everyday existence and is not readily separable. He seems to treat morris as a piece of quaint rustic behaviour from a bygone age, rather than as something still very much alive. Morris danced now is of necessity contemporary and cannot exactly duplicate that of Kemp or Kimber, although it comes down from them.

Given that custom and ritual are an integral part of society it does not appear unreasonable that they should neglect and embody social change. That women should now dance morris can be seen as complementary to changes taking place in our society. Furthermore, as the original

purpose of the dances remains a matter for speculation, it is unrealistic to claim that male exclusivity must be the vital element when so many other changes have been accepted. It is not apparent that Ring sides feel obliged to reside in a few specific villages, dance once or twice each year and employ only pipe and tabor for accompaniment. There can be few dancers who do not wear some synthetic fibres, but how do they know that this will not fatally undermine the ritual?

In these circumstances all anyone can hope to do is to dance in the way they think best, rather than interfere with other dancers' chosen approach. Father Christmas notwithstanding other areas of folk activity absorb innovation (e.g. Lord Nelson in a pre-Christian mummers' play) and there seems no reason why dance should be an exception. I suspect that John Wilson's wildly convoluted schemes to hamper womens' morris are more symptomatic of Ring members' attitudes to relationships between the sexes than of reverence for traditions of folkdance.

In considering the possible motivations of female dancers the obvious is overlooked - that their motivations are as

varied as those of men. Throughout the article women are treated as a monolithic "them", rather than as individuals. It is this attitude which womens' (everyone's?) liberation opposes - it is more than a campaign for equal pay and shared housework. Arguments about dancers' athleticism are important only as they relate to individuals and, as Rose Jones's letter says, crude generalisations are absurd on such a topic.

Nick Beale
(Groupie/Stick-carrier,
Glory of the West)

Infuriated

Dear Editor,

Even after six years of dancing the morris, I am still infuriated by articles such as John Wilson's in the summer magazine. I'll try and restrain myself from the obvious arguments I could use in reply - they've all been said before and there's very little point in going over the same ground time and time again. But some points are worth answering.

Firstly, I cannot understand why the Ring discriminate against men's sides with women musicians. All the arguments that John Wilson produces against women's morris have nothing to do with women musicians- surely even the most chauvinistic man would not be against women playing musical instruments. Why does the Ring believe that men can only dance to music provided by men ?

John Wilson also appears to have little knowledge of the motives behind women dancing the Morris. Why doesn't he consider that women may want to dance for the same reasons that men do? Or do most men dance solely to maintain the traditions? Personally, I am not trying to show that I'm "just as good as the men" or to show how "manly" I am. I dance because I enjoy it, because I take pride in being able to do something reasonably well that people stop to watch and applaud.

The fact that Morris is an ancient tradition makes it more enjoyable and interesting, but this is a bonus, the joy of dancing and performing comes first. Because something is traditional does not give it an

automatic right to survive; a tradition will only be kept alive if people find pleasure in it. If the tradition of morris dancing was not enjoyable, we would not be arguing about it now- it would have died many years ago, with few mourners.

I would be interested to hear why other people dance- are there any women who have joined a morris side to strike a blow for women's Lib as John Wilson suggests? I must contest the view that the Women's Liberation movement is a "major driving force behind women's morris" and I should like to believe that I know more about our background and origins than John Wilson does (even if I didn't join Bath City until the year after they started). However, I do not agree that Women's Lib should only be concerned with such things as employment and household duties - it must touch every part of life before basic attitudes and prejudices can be changed.

However, the reasons why we dance are less important than how well we dance and whether the people who watch like it. So maybe we should all ignore articles like John Wilson's and concentrate

on our stepping etc instead. Somehow I don't think we'll all manage it and I suppose we'll carry on arguing with some morris men for many years to come.

Finally, I must admit that I cannot see the connection between women's morris and Father Christmas. Does John Wilson mean that because Santa Claus had a beard, I can't dance the morris in public?

Sally Wearing,
Foreman,
Phoenix Women's Morris.

Editorial Policy

Dear Editor,

As a contribution to the debate held in "Morris Matters" about women and dancing I would like to quote Poulain de la Barre, a 17th Century feminist who said:-

"All that has been written about women by men should be suspect for the men are at once judge and party to the lawsuit."

also:-

"Being men those who have made and compiled the laws have favoured their own sex, and jurists have elevated these laws into principles."

It takes an exceptional man to abdicate his "superiority" in favour of the basic humanity of us all. It would be nice to find that there are men of these qualities amongst the dancers of England, however I am too cynical to credit the possibility. Therefore I can't really see why this debate should continue in "Morris Matters". Personally I would prefer to see more articles about research, technique, etc. and other related aspects of the morris.

I would like to see an Editorial policy in "Morris Matters" which excludes negative ideas and prints only articles of interest to people who want more knowledge about dancing because they want to dance well.

I suggest that women simply continue to dance and ignore the posturing of those who are only capable of "favouring their own sex".

Pennie Gillis Crane

Finally, Val Parker replied to John Wilson's letter by writing to the magazine "Rocking Chair" in which it was published. Many of the points she made were also covered by our other correspon-

dents. However, we reprint an extract of her letter:-

I was also intrigued by the comment "these are all male activities" since, on looking back to those listed, I found them to be athletic performance, fertility rites, celebration of Festivals, great jubilation, high spiritedness, fighting and display of victory or prowess! Only the last two could be argued to be all-male fields.

Like the men, the women aim to perform to the best of their ability, as an accomplishment, some inevitably succeeding better than others. They do not see themselves as being in competition with the men, but as being complementary to them. Thus, whether they could "Really match the men at them" is of no consequence.

This brings me on to the assertion that the women are in fact trying to prove how manly they are. Whether the "qualities of the morris" imply masculinity rather depends on what one considers masculinity or femininity to be. Too often, the quite valid epithet "weaker" when describing the muscular strength of the average female compared to that of the average male has been interpreted as "weak" in all respects, which distorts the whole picture.

Society has become bogged down

with the Regency/Victorian idea of femininity which, when compared with other historical periods, was not entirely natural. In Tudor times, women were not discouraged from showing off their skills in hunting, riding or archery, on the grounds that they were trying to be men. Queen Elizabeth's favourite dance was one in which she was thrown up into the air in what Queen Victoria would have thought a most undignified manner!

By all means let us have masculine men and feminine women, but let us allow nature to manifest what those qualities are, and not impose preconceived ideas onto people.

Finally, how is it that certain morris men can happily disregard the appropriate seasons, dance in isolation from the rites which used to accompany the morris, perform Oxfordshire village customs in alien counties, wear kit bearing little resemblance to pre-Revival costume, play instruments unknown to the morris even a hundred years ago, display hobby-horses which were reintroduced in the late nineteenth century with little or no idea of their original function, and yet debar women in the name of so-called "purism"??

Val Parker.

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