

Volume: 20 Number 1.

Morris Matters



Lambeth Morris: circa 1957



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Thanks to Jill Griffiths for help in checking text and to Steve Poole for getting it all printed out OK.

EDITORIAL

This issue we are trying something new – colour pictures. It all started when I realised that one of the featured teams would not come out very well in black and white (see the pictures and you'll see why!) so – into the unknown with colour reproduction. Thanks to Jeff Bates, Chas Marshall and Malcolm Major for supplying the pictures in various formats; I have had to learn all about the differences (or not) between jpg and tif files and discover which ones just cause my printer to give up in despair.

Having said that, now the process has been set in motion, if any other teams would like a bit of self-profiling and have got some good photos – especially if you go back a few years...then get in touch. Also let me know if you like the touch of colour even if you don't have anything to submit.

Looking to the future – now we're in the real 2001, space odyssey year – another time to reflect on the position of morris in the world today? I am pleased to be able to include so much in the way of “information” in this issue, but how much new research is going on into morris and how much are we just recycling the available information in easier ways to take it in? And how much is getting lost for lack of someone to chase it up?

On a sadder note, I am sure that by now most Morris Matters readers have heard of the death of Roy Judge – a fine researcher and writer; the morris world has lost another great character.

Let's hope we all have a fine dancing year ahead

Beth

USEFUL SOURCE MATERIALS (1)

Roy Dommett has managed to find time to browse through a book and found it full of useful articles – maybe to help with writing your team's publicity articles, your recruitment blurb or for your own edification.....

A Dictionary of English Folklore

Oxford University Press, £20 hardback ISBN 0-19-210019

by Jacqueline Simpson, Secretary of the Folklore Society, and Steve Roud, Honorary Librarian of the Folklore Society, an impeccable background.

From Abbots Bromley Horn Dance to Yule, this is an honest account, identifying speculation for what it is, and giving earliest reference dates. It's nearly all much more recent than you might suppose or have been led to believe. To open it at any page is to be quickly lost in fascinating detail from the enormous variety and distinctive features of traditions and beliefs with connections to virtually every aspect of life. It should be the standard source for many years. To do it justice is impossible but there are a few extracts of interest to performers.

Calendar Customs : ... take place once a year ... folklore calendar is complex ... combination of several historically independent systems ... the natural and the ecclesiastical ... the legal year ... one extremely important factor is the annual cycle of food production, which itself varies according to the crop and the climate ... the reform of the calendar in 1752 caused the 'loss' of eleven days ... customs can be usefully classified ... 'display' ... 'visiting' ... 'processional' ... 'static' ...

Dance : ... basic distinction in folk dance scholarship is between 'ceremonial' and 'social' dance ... ceremonial dances are performed by a special group within the community for display at special times, in special costume ... social dances ... are performed in everyday situations by both sexes, without special training ... the notion of a separate identifiable English 'folk' dance repertoire is difficult to sustain ... the usual assumption, based largely on the writings of Cecil Sharp, is that the indigenous English folk dance was what became known as the 'country dance' ... there is no real proof that the courtly country dances were taken from the village at all ... until recent years, studies of dance history have usually concentrated on the dance forms themselves, and have largely ignored the social context, the venues and events, and most importantly, the style of dancing ... the term 'barn dance' is used by most lay people ... the repertoire is deliberately revived/contrived, but the informal gathering - the event itself - has many claims to be termed 'traditional' ...

Hobby Horses : ... earliest reference in England ... 1460/1 ... several types of Hobby Horse ... Tourney Horses ... historical records ... almost exclusively concerned with tourney horses ... was one of the major ways of raising money for the church in several parishes ... from 1529 until well into the 17th century ... mainly in the New Year ... Municipal horses were more often summer beasts ... Cawte ... provides a list of plays in which hobby horses are mentioned or appear ... in the playwright's mind, the hobby horse is inextricably bound up with the morris dance ... the sieve horse only appears in

Lincolnshire, as part of the local mumming or wooing plays, which are recorded from the 1820s onwards ... the mast horses, although apparently much rougher and cruder ... appear much later ... from the mid-19th century onwards ... in many cases they appear on their own ... examples ... are ... Old Tup, Old Horse, the Broad, the Wild Horse, Old Ball, and Hooden Horse ...

Morris Dance : ... the name includes a range of types and styles ... the common features are that the dancers were almost invariably male, wore a special costume, and they danced for display on particular occasions and not normally at other times ... popularly seen as archetypically English ... by 1494 at least morris dancers were performing at the king's court ... hardly a rare occurrence in the 16th century ... could be included in a range of spectacular events at various times of the year ... early references give little substantive information ... in the 19th and 20th centuries, scholars identified several types of morris dance, concentrated in different geographical areas, and featuring different styles of dancing, costume, and social organisation ...

Cotswold ... within an arc with a radius of 40 miles, with the heart of the Wychwood Forest as its centre and the Thames as the southern boundary

... *North-west* ... dances primarily designed for processional performance, such as accompanying rush-carts ... and participation in carnivals and wakes

... *Border* ... *Bedlam* ... can be distinguished from other 'Cotswold' dances, characterized by stick and handclapping rather than handkerchiefs, the absence of bells, ribboned costume rather than baldricks, and often by blackened faces

... *Molly dancing* : a relatively simple type of dance, found only in East Anglia from the 19th century

... *Carnival Morris* ... developed ... during the 20th century, almost exclusively danced by young girls at fêtes and carnivals

Further collecting work after Sharp's time ... demonstrated that the neat static picture ... with each village possessing a relatively discrete unbroken tradition ... was not tenable ...

Morris Federation ... the Women's Morris Federation was thus formed in 1975 ... changed its name to Morris Federation in 1983 ... a membership of about 400 clubs ... coexists with the Morris Ring and a third morris organisation, Open Morris, in a spirit of co-operation and mutual assistance

Morris Ring... An association of morris dance clubs, founded in 1934 ... with about 170 clubs as full members ...

Mumming Plays : ... most widespread of English calendar customs in the 19th century ... went by different names ... Tipteerers ... Seven Champions ... Johnny Jacks ... Soulers/Soulcakers ... Pace-Eggers ... White Boys ... Paper Boys ... Guisers, and so on ... Hundreds of versions ... (except, oddly, Norfolk and Suffolk) ... variations are markedly regional and the similarities across the country are more remarkable than the differences ... three basic types of play : the Hero-Combat ... the Sword Dance play ... the Plough or Wooing play ... describing the custom as a 'play' is misleading in that the word raises expectations which the mummers could not, and did not try, to fulfill ... stiff upright postures and toneless singsong voices .. was the traditional style in which the play was meant to be performed ... modern-day revivalists appear to base their performance on the model of either pantomime or melodrama ... The mumming play has been the most consistently misrepresented and misunderstood of English calendar customs .. theories ...

there is a stunning lack of evidence to support them ... the first identifiable references ... middle to late 18th century ... the play is notable by its absence in the written and pictorial record ... despite the fact that, if later distribution is anything to go by, it would have been performed every year in thousands of places throughout the kingdom ... would strongly argue ... a 'literary' origin is most likely.

Sword Dance : ... those found in England are called 'linked' or 'hilt and point' dances ... the earliest being found in the Low Countries in the late 14th century ... evidence from England, however, is extremely rare from before the 18th century, and the earliest references are ambiguous ... Corrsin writes : 'It is as though sword dancing suddenly blossomed in the second half of the 18th century without antecedents' ... this could also be said of the mumming play ... even on the Continent there is little reason to believe that the sword dance is any older than the Middle Ages ... attempts to prove connections between the dances and early trade guilds have also proved unconvincing ...

Other entries worth a look are Abbots Bromley Horn Dance (before civil war), Antrobus Soul-Cakers, Bacup Britannia Coconut Dancers (origin 1857), Bampton Morris Dancers (1800), Betley Window (between 1509 and 1536), Castleton Garland (from 1749), Church Ales, Cross-Dressing, Green Man (name invented in 1939), Helston Furry Day (1790), Hooden Horse (from 1807), Jack-in-the-Green, Milkmaids Garlands (from 17th century), Molly Dancing (1820s), Minehead Hobby Horse (from 1830), Padstow Hobby Horse (from 1803) and Wishford Magna. There are also entries for key personalities.

Thanks, Roy! On reading this review I bought my own copy and it is fascinating!

Beth



WHAT I DID ON MY HOLIDAYS A PERSONAL VIEW OF MORRIS AT SIDMOUTH 2000

This was the first time since the late 70's that I arrived at Sidmouth in time to watch Great Western dance in the Market Square on the first Thursday of the festival. Whilst many things have changed in the Morris world in the last twenty or so years it is reassuring to find some traditional events still going strong. It was a great opportunity to catch up on news and gossip with long-standing friends.

The Morris line-up at the festival lived up to expectations with a wide range of styles encompassing the traditional and the innovative, old and new. A veritable feast was laid before us, matched by the stunningly fine weather.

There were three scheduled Morris-packed events, Whistlestop, the John Gasson Solo Jig Competition and the Morris Party, each exhibiting very different aspects of Morris today.

Whistlestop, overture provided by the men in black, a.k.a. the musicians for Mortimers Morris. If you've never seen them, you should! The show was representative of the best Morris-related activities to be found out on the streets. It was entertaining and exciting, starting with a stage filled with three sets of Mortimers dancing energetic and stylish North West. They were followed by the relentless drum and swishing tail of the Minehead Hobby Horse.

Berkshire Bedlam, in dazzling white, danced a double jig with vigour and spirit, using a cross shape and ending literally on their knees. In complete contrast, Flag and Bone, in black and red, used the cross shape to completely different effect, with smooth flowing movements accompanied by whistle drum and with mesmeric clicking of bones.

Ripley Morris Men gave a fine display of the kind found most often in the best Ring teams. Two sets doing Vandals of Hammerwich with four extra characters; a horse, a unicorn, a jester and a man dressed as woman. From the rough (in the nicest possible way) to the incredibly smooth, none smoother in the Rapper world than High Spen Blue Diamonds, giving their usual incredibly slick display.

For those who sometimes despair that all Morris teams are ageing there was the treat of "Morris with Attitude", delivered by the young men of Dog Rose, doing a single jig for four, accompanied by a fiddle. I saw them again at the end of August in Whitby when, along with Black Swan, a seriously "youth" rapper team, they filled the late night venue with screaming hordes of young girls. Who said Morris can have no street credibility?

The display closed with a wonderfully disciplined garland dance from Betty Lupton's and a nine man dance from Ripon City.

Sunday afternoon saw the staging of the Jig competition. In some years there have been around twenty entries, making the judges' job very difficult. This year there were only eight, but the quality was exceptional, making the judges' job no less hard. The variety was great, both of content and style of dance, with the graceful and flowing through the

technically difficult and nail-biting fool's jig to the powerful with dramatic leapfrogs. The music ranged from "Greensleeves" played on the cello, through "Blue-eyed Stranger" and "Ladies of Pleasure" to the seriously electric "Stairway to Heaven". The eventual winners represented a definite cross-section of the entries.

In complete contrast to both these events, the Morris Party gave dancers a chance to display a very different part of their performance repertoire. The evening was brilliantly organised by Berkshire Bedlam who had the apparently impossible task of getting a party going in the Anchor gardens with no amplification allowed as they had no entertainment licence after 6pm. But then, as someone said, "but its Morris and we all know that isn't supposed to be entertainment." The glue between the "turns" was very ably applied by the musicians of Mortimers.

So what do Morris dancers do at a party apart from drink? They dress up or indulge in school-boy/girl humour. Berkshire Bedlam put on wellingtons and do a convincing imitation of Black Umfalosi and dress as Swans to do a very passable version of the Adventures in Motion Pictures' all-male Swan Lake (but sadly no Adam Cooper look-alikes). Mortimers don fishnet tights and become Tiller girls. Betty Lupton's and Ripon City do a Music Hall song with serious actions. Black Annis "Stand Like a Man". Flag and Bone have fire-eating, uni-cycling Dave. The high standard of performance did not waver despite this being play not work.

All this crammed into the first weekend, leaving the rest of the week in which to try to learn High Spen's first dance and perform it on the sea front on the Friday. But that's another story.

**Rhian Collinson
December 2000**



EIGHT DAYS WONDER

OK the toenails have all dropped off and regrown. And you thought that was the end of it! This diary has the blow by blow account of how it happened. The Scribe records during the event the delights, highlights, bewilderments and amazement of those who witnessed this blistering attempt to dance from London to Norwich in eight days.

A pub-to-pub official guide critic drinks his way to Norwich “ The Golden Lion – The beer is OK. Drinking Old Peculiar and I asked the bar maid for an Old Peculiar and she asked me for my phone number.”

The super loo sleuth reveals all along the route: “ Those loos – I would move into them”

“On a wet and miserable day, we gather round green wheelie bins with pots of tea and home made cakes supplied by the villagers of Croxton.....Howard’s drum has gone soggy and out of tune. He decides it would be of more use to wear it on his head instead.

Compare these modern day travels with those of Will Kemp 400 years ago. He might have had cart tracks to dance around but these intrepid dancers had the M25 to negotiate.

Read about the piss up in a brewery and the secret of how to prize morris men away from free beer.

The grand entry into Norfolk heavily disguised as Mr Blobby. The alarming height of Kemps Wall and... would you do it all again? NO way ...next year we do the Alps!

Copies of Eight Days Wonder can be ordered direct from the publisher:

“The Larks Press”, Ordnance Farmhouse, Guist Bottom, Dereham NR20 5PF

tel/fax 01328 829207

e-mail: larkspress@talk21.com

Price is £5 (post free in UK).

Please make cheques payable to The Larks Press

Editor’s note – I look forward to receiving an account of the Alps crossing!!

TRADITION FROM THE BARE BONES

An insight into the "Flag and Bone Gang"

This article is based on material used for the similarly named workshops run by Dave Williams, Jeff Garner, Chas Marshall and the Gang at Sidmouth 2000 and for an article written for the Winter 1997 edition of our local folk magazine "Tykes News".

Background

There have been many exciting developments during the more recent years of the morris dance revival, no doubt driven by a number of differing desires, including:

- to retain the best of traditional practise
- to find and revive a tradition belonging to the locality of the team
- to innovate and develop, providing "new recipes from traditional ingredients"
- to raise the standards of dancing, musicianship and the performance as a whole
- to be different

Many teams have succeeded in their desires and some names spring easily to mind in association with particular morris traditions - Gloucester Old Spot and Cotswold, the Shropshire Bedlams and Border, the Seven Champions and Molly, Garstang and North West. They have set their own standards and styles for others to follow.

In the early 1990's a group of experienced dancers, motivated by such factors as those described, met to discuss ideas for a new morris team and new style. The background of the participants included the Seven Champions, the Shropshire Bedlams, Wakefield Morris Dancers, Ripon City Morris Dancers and Betty Lupton's Ladle Laikers. A number of discussions and a couple of practical sessions took place and many interesting ideas were turned up on dance style, music and dress. However, nothing came of this initiative, no doubt for a number of reasons. One of the main reasons was the lack of roots or "traditional authority" for the ideas - there was no peg to hang them on. The enthusiasm waned and the ideas lay dormant for a few years.

The Forgotten Morris

A fresh impetus was given by the appearance of a booklet written and privately published by Paul Davenport in 1993 entitled, "The Forgotten Morris - An investigation into Traditional Dance in Yorkshire". This booklet describes dancing mainly in the Holderness area which does not conform to the normal expectations of Yorkshire ritual dance, that is to say Longsword. The theme is that these dances belong essentially to Plough Monday and the various associated customs of Plough Stotting, Plough Dragging, Longsword dancing and mumming. There was "no regular dance", but the main essence involved a single straight line of dancers performing reels and either rattling bones (or "knick knacks" as they were called) or waving small flags. There was also a solo dance performed over the poker and tongs from the fireplace in the manner of the "Bacca Pipes" jig.

The Blue Stots and a missed opportunity?

Some details of Paul Davenport's researches were previously published in the Morris Dancer (Volume 1, Number 15, March 1983). A copy of this article was studied in connection with research into another Plough Monday custom - the Blue Stots plays from the Vale of York. (The Blue Stots plays, it has been suggested, are a sub-type of the Hero-Combat mummings play peculiar to the Vale of York.) The first details of these findings were already in print - see "The Return of the Blue Stots" in Tykes News Autumn 1982. The opportunities this new material presented did not strike anyone at the time, even when coupled with an appearance in January 1984 of the East Yorkshire Vessel Cuppers at the Derby-based "Dancing England" traditional dance showcases. Minds were focused on different matters then.

A dance of some sort was performed at the end of the Marton-cum-Grafton Blue Stots Play and this feature was included in the revival of the Marton play by the Knaresborough Mummings. Subsequent revisiting of the Blue Stots play material reveals that, around Christmas and New Year, the "shepherds" of Roecliffe and Aldborough (near Boroughbridge) used to dance heys in a line. This type of performance seems to have the same roots, or at least spirit, as the dances described by Paul Davenport.

The beginnings of a team

However back to our main story. Jeff Garner obtained a copy of "The Forgotten Morris" at Whitby Folk Week in 1994 and was filled with enthusiasm again - at last there was some basis to work on. Dave Williams, Jeff Garner and Chas Marshall, who were members of the original "task force" based in the Harrogate and Knaresborough area, with the help of a couple of people not actively involved in dancing, began to study the material and put together two dances in the winter of 1995. We had one bone dance and one flag dance which were reasonably faithful to the notations provided in "The Forgotten Morris". The team first appeared in public in 1996 with just these two dances. It was considered important that we got a feel for these before we then went on to look at extending the repertoire.

Flags and Bones

The notion of dancing and playing the bones is the real winning idea as far as we are concerned. To begin with none of us had any bones playing skills and we started with the very simple idea of a single click on the off beat. As our skills developed we were able to introduce some more elaborate rhythms but we are still by no means experts. Indeed, we found some difficulties in playing the bones and dancing at the same time.

The flag dances provide a contrast to the bones but we feel the need to try and avoid the movements becoming too much like Cotswold handkerchief movements. The size of the flags has a significant impact on how the flag movements are performed. The original information suggested flags of the size waved by the crowds at jubilees and festivals in the late 19th century.

The costume

There were some problems with kit. Some of the old teams blackened their faces and had strips of cloth pinned to their clothes. We decided against black faces and tatter jackets because there was a desire to avoid any suggestion that we were yet another Border Morris side, though there are some parallels between the styles of dance. We have discovered evidence of masks being used in Plough Stot customs in the Vale of York and we opted for a hat with a black veil as a form of disguise for our faces. The idea of arm and leg tatters was picked up from Plate XI "The Fool Plough" in George Walker's "Costumes of Yorkshire", published in 1814. This arrangement seemed far more practical than the chicken feathers reported in Paul Davenport's booklet! Some "trial" tatters were made with "leftovers" of red satin and so successful have they been that we have stuck with these. The shirt, trousers and shoes were originally intended to be any dark colour with the red tatters providing a unifying theme, but later became fixed as black.

The black veils have a number of associated problems. The visibility is sufficient to allow the dances to be performed, but the performers are cocooned from each other and the audience. The lack of eye contact can be quite disturbing and certainly reduces the pleasure of dancing. And it's no good someone hissing "back to back with me" when you have no idea from where the advice came! The hot and humid micro-climate which develops under the veil has to be experienced to be believed.

The Music

We started using slowish hornpipes to fit in with the lolloping single step that we had chosen. At first any convenient tune was used but later we decided to try to use local tunes (or at least northern ones) which were not currently connected with any morris dance tradition. We have since focused on two music collections that are from villages which are happily only a matter of a few miles from Harrogate. The two music books we have used are:

- Tunes, Songs and Dances from the 1798 manuscript of Joshua Jackson - published by the Yorkshire Dales Workshop.
- The Fiddler of Helperby - published by Dragonfly Music.

We still use a couple of tunes from outside this new remit, but we intend to substitute these over the coming months.

Other teams and other information

About the time of our first public performances the Morris Federation address list included a new team in the Selby area - the Infamous Audreys. Curiosity led to an enquiry as to what they performed and we found that they too were working on the same source of information. Some of our team members saw them during a joint performance with Ripon City Morris Dancers in July 1996. We have not had a great deal of contact and we believe the "Audreys" have since disbanded but reformed under the name of "Fourpenny Plough". They have discovered some details of a dance from Snaith and this was included in the second edition of "The Forgotten Morris" which was published by the South Riding Folk Network. It is interesting that the family responsible for the

Snaith dance also appears to be the family that I found to be responsible for running the Plough Stots who did the mummers play. In fact there seems to be quite a quantity of material coming to light and Paul Davenport is now talking of a publishing a third edition. Paul also believes that there may be another team from North Yorkshire, in the Richmond area, who are using his material.

The name of the team

Because we dance with flags and bones, one of our number suggested the name of, "The Flag and Bone Men" - a play on the name "rag and bone men", those of the same calling as "Steptoe and Son" who used to collect from door to door with horse and cart in years gone by - the original recyclers! We liked it but this was slightly modified to the Flag and Bone Gang, since the original teams were generally referred to as gangs.

What's in a name?

If you were to ask a member of, say, Windsor Morris what style of dance they perform, you will (hopefully) get the answer "Cotswold Morris". Ask the same question of a member of the Flag and Bone Gang and you will likely be asked if you want the five minute or fifteen minute summary of this article! The lack of a defining collective term has been a bit of a problem. The style of dance may be related to other forms but we feel it is sufficiently distinct to merit a name of its own. At Sidmouth 2000 we found ourselves labelled as "Northern Border" whilst Paul Davenport has suggested "Yorkshire Morris". Since these dances are associated with Plough Stotting and Plough Monday customs and have a rather loose form, we conclude they should be called Plough Stot Dances.

The future

The gang seems to have caused quite a flurry of interest in the last year or two. Whilst we do not believe we are in the same league as the trend-setting teams mentioned at the beginning of this article, it will be interesting to see if anyone else picks up on and develops our ideas. We have a number of fertile minds in the team and there is a consistent flow of ideas for new dances and the dance repertoire now comprises seven set dances plus a processional. However, we need to exercise some judgement to ensure the flow of ideas from different people doesn't produce a hotchpotch of unrelated steps, styles and figures. There is also some scope for the inclusion of other aspects of Plough Monday customs into the performance but this has yet to be thoroughly discussed within the team. Watch this space!

Chas Marshall **September 2000**

Chas would like to thank both Dave Williams and Jeff Garner for their help in the preparation of this material. If you would like any further information, please contact: Jeff Garner on 01423 865086 or Dave Williams on 01423 562894

Flag and Bone Gang 2000





• Photos 1, 2 and 4 from Dave and Annelies Williams of Flag & Bone Gang; photo 3 JKL video(Sidmouth)

Early Berkshire Bedlam (Silwood Morris)



Berkshire Bedlam - about 1981

1



Berkshire Bedlam at Sidmouth 2000



• Photos 1 and 2, Jeff Bates ; photo 3 anon via Malcolm Major, photo 4 JKL video (Sidmouth)

A PERSONAL VIEW OF A MODERN MORRIS TRADITION³

by Jameson Wooders

Following Berkshire Bedlam's successful appearance at Sidmouth Folk Festival this summer, Jerry West and I (Foreman and Squire respectively) were interviewed by Beth Neill on behalf of *Morris Matters*. Having read the transcript of the interview, I decided that I wanted to elaborate upon some of the issues raised.

Background

The origins of Berkshire Bedlam Morris date back to the mid-1970's. It can thus be seen as constituting part of the wider movement which saw many young people come into the folk scene at that time, and which in turn was largely inspired by the development of Folk Rock music from the late 1960's onwards. The young were dissatisfied with what they found. There appeared to have been a drift away from the vital characteristics of the morris: energy, youth, and spectacle. Although the Morris Ring had engendered the revival of morris dancing, it was thought (rightly or wrongly) that it had also been responsible for a rigid attitude towards innovation by encouraging a common repertoire of dances to promote the social aspects of "Ring Meetings". This included dances from the whole range of available sources and so incorporated several dissimilar "traditions". Most teams thus gave an indifferent performance in which style and competence in the trickier steps were lacking because of the technical difficulties of a "mixed" repertoire. The few jigs performed were one indication of this general lack of expertise. In short, most revival teams had ceased to question what they were doing and seemed too conformist for significant change to occur.⁴ Certainly there was little evidence of the development of a rich variation comparable to the old village traditions.

In the past, the style of dancing varied greatly from village to village. Each "tradition" had its own way of stepping; the hand movements and slow capers were often distinctive; and the types and order of figures varied considerably. Whilst it is possible to view these differences as resulting from some vast, geographical game of "Chinese Whispers", with deviations from an "original" morris style occurring as it was passed on

³ What is it about morris dancing? Everyone seems to have an agenda, whether it is men versus women, working class versus middle class, competitive versus non-competitive, "white shoe" versus "black shoe". Everyone has their own point of view, and the historical evidence concerning other ways is often discounted or overlooked. I am no evangelist. This article is not intended to describe the "right" way or the "wrong" way: it is simply an account of *Berkshire Bedlam's* way, and that is good enough for us. It is a "snapshot" of just one team amongst hundreds. As such, it may be of interest to others - or it may not.

⁴ What's new? This remains equally true today, and not just about Ring teams. There still seems to be a widespread belief that what we do is *only* morris. By definition it is performed by amateurs and it therefore does not have to be very good. Indeed, I have heard it said that if a team's performance is too good, then it somehow is *not* morris!

from village to village, it is more likely that each team took great pride in its own dancing and performance. Occasionally several teams would dance together at the great annual gatherings such as the Kirtlington Lamb Ale, and competitions were often held between teams from neighbouring villages. The competitive aspect of morris dancing is generally overlooked today, but competition leads directly to innovation. Competition led to the elaboration of the ‘Final Figure’ in the North-West morris, whilst a special innovation prize has been awarded in the John Gasson Solo Jig Competition in recent years.

Origins

Berkshire Bedlam was formed with these original objectives:

- 1: to develop an original and true-spirited morris style using information from only one village tradition as a starting point.
- 2: to dance precisely and in an energetic fashion.
- 3: to present a generally spectacular and original performance.

The founder of the team was Jeff Bates⁵, who had become increasingly dissatisfied with the established morris scene until inspired (as so many at that time were) by the Gloucestershire Old Spot Morris Dancers, who appeared at Bampton on Whit Monday 1974 and subsequently. Old Spot had taken and reconstructed an entire extinct morris tradition from Longborough in Gloucestershire and presented it in a refreshingly colourful, precise and almost unbelievably energetic fashion.

The first suggestions towards the formation of Berkshire Bedlam were made in 1975, but the team’s inaugural meeting was not held until October 1976. The side consisted of students and staff from the Botany Department of Imperial College, and practices were held at the College Field Station at Silwood Park near Sunninghill, Berkshire. The enthusiasm of the student members was such that they travelled to weekly practices from central London.

The team was originally known as “Silwood Morris” and enjoyed a successful first season, at the end of which many original members finished their undergraduate courses and left the area. Efforts were then made to preserve what had been achieved and the team went “public”. A small group of new recruits was gleaned from a local folk club. In effect, the team was re-started at this time. The name was changed to “Berkshire Bedlam” and in the spring of 1978 the team moved to Wokingham.

The Name

The name “Berkshire Bedlam” is not meant to be a feint imitation of anything else. It was suggested by the reference to “*ye bedlom morris*” in a paper by E.C. Cawte. The term seemed to express perfectly our approach to morris dancing and had not yet become synonymous with border morris. We now emphasise that there is no “s” in Bedlam to distinguish ourselves from the Shropshire Bedlams, and we threaten to turn

⁵ I am indebted to Jeff, whose notes concerning Berkshire Bedlam’s early history have proven invaluable to the writing of this article.

up as a border team if we get an invitation as Berkshire Bedlams. We have discussed changing our name but it has a good alliterative ring to it, and by now we are who we are.

Kit

The costume, perhaps not surprisingly, was constructed along similar lines to Old Spot's, but included red, white and blue rosettes and armbands. Rosettes are worn both front and back to provide a flash of colour when we turn during a dance. The colours red, white and blue were in fact almost ubiquitous amongst the old Cotswold teams and were very appropriate in 1977, as it was the Queen's Silver Jubilee year. We also wear white shirts, white fencing breeches, white fishermen's socks, the all-important white shoes and grey top hats. We are a tall team on the whole, and the top hats emphasise our height. We definitely want to stand out in a crowd!⁶

Evolution and Development

There are several possible courses which single-tradition revival sides can take. One is to reconstruct an old tradition and dance this in unvarying form. Another is to create an entirely new tradition, such as the Bantam Cocks' Raglan. Berkshire Bedlam adopted a third strategy, which was to take a traditional basis then gradually extend and adapt it to modern requirements. It might be thought of as an experiment to see how a historical tradition *might* have developed had it not died out.

The Field Town tradition (former dances of Leafield and Field Assarts in Oxfordshire) was chosen, partly because of the large and varied repertoire, but also because the Field Town side(s) had a widely acknowledged reputation for good dancing. In 1854, for example, they won a challenge dance held at "The Pike" public house in Minster Lovell against teams from Standlake, Ducklington, Brize Norton and Bampton. There was also an element of irony: present-day teams normally dance "Field Town" in a "graceful" (for which read airy-fairy) manner, but there is strong evidence that the dancing was actually energetic and spirited. When the Travelling Morrice first performed the reconstructed Field Town dances in Leafield, one of the old dancers (Alec Franklin) was not impressed and made it clear that the dancing was fussy and lacked vigour.

Jeff Bates went back to Sharp's notes, *The Morris Book*, Schofield's article in the EFDSS Journal and Lionel Bacon's *Handbook of Morris Dances* to see what actually had been collected concerning the Field Town dances. Berkshire Bedlam's repertoire thus began fairly close to that of the old Field Town side, but the team soon set about

⁶ We take pride in our kit. We dress *up*, with the emphasis on the up. Our costume is our disguise. It helps us get into "character". Morris dancers *are* special. Dressing up and doing funny things puts us beyond the realm of the everyday. We can drop our inhibitions, and witnessing uninhibited behaviour can have a great uplifting effect on an audience. But no inhibitions does not mean *no shame*. It is ironic that greater freedom also brings greater personal responsibility. Riotousness must always be tempered with respectability. To appear wild and undisciplined actually requires greater discipline if one is to get away with it.

making up new dances and tunes.⁷ The patchiness of the collected material meant that uncertainties about how to do certain steps or dances often arose. Berkshire Bedlam exploited these and usually chose another way from that more commonly practised. This allowed the team to develop its own distinctive style without necessarily deviating far from traditional authority. Some of the subtler stepping details underwent changes, and in some cases we deliberately developed our own ways of doing steps because we thought they looked better. In other instances we achieved “uniqueness” by conforming accurately to what had been collected. We do not dance the spiral rounds or back-steps that have become characteristic “Field Town” features, for instance, because there is no traditional authority for either. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that there was an EFDSS-inspired revival of morris dancing in Leafield prior to the First World War which probably introduced some Headington Quarry influences. We are not unduly concerned about the uncertain origins of our dances - if they work, that is good enough.

Decline and Revival

I first made contact with Berkshire Bedlam along with my brother Simon in September 1986. I had been dancing with Whiteknights Morris at Reading University for a year and soon became hooked. I started going to lots of festivals and workshops and decided to investigate other local teams. Although I had lived in Wokingham all my life I had not known that Berkshire Bedlam had existed. They did not seem to have a high profile and when I finally met them I did not consider that they lived up to the name “Bedlam” by any means. They did not seem especially outrageous, but they did have exceptionally high standards. Indeed, the team’s elite reputation put me off joining immediately as I did not think they would have me if I was already dancing with another team. Nevertheless, I maintained contact by going along to practices during the university vacations. Simon had remained with the team and I used that as an excuse to go along and watch.

I eventually joined Berkshire Bedlam formally in the summer of 1987. I felt jaded after Whiteknights had over-danced that year and needed a new challenge. The two teams seemed to complement each other. Although by no means what I would call a “bad” team, Whiteknights were more conventional because they wanted to have fun. Berkshire Bedlam was “fun” in a different way: it satisfied my desire to dance as well as possible. I knew I had to join when the foreman of Whiteknights described them as “the best”.

I danced with both Whiteknights and Berkshire Bedlam throughout 1988-89. At the beginning of 1990, however, several long-established members of Berkshire Bedlam decided that they had had enough of winter practices. Instead we would choose a handful of events during the summer and just practise for a couple of weeks in advance. This system lasted for two years and we were surprised to find that the standard did not really suffer. We were a small team whose members tended to dance in the same positions. We all knew the dances from our own positions and were familiar with everyone else in theirs. By limiting how often we met and danced out, we were able to keep the morris “special”.

⁷ Some of Jeff’s tunes are still in use.

But it could not last. In January 1992 the team met at "The Dukes Head" public house in Wokingham to discuss the future. Most of the longer-established dancers now decided to retire. They had formed a band (Kickshins) and decided to give that their time and energy. The newer members, however, including Paul, Simon and myself, did not want to stop and decided to continue. Ironically, the team had just gained two new recruits (Rob and Mike) who, of course, also wanted to carry on. Two experienced dancers from other teams (Jerry and Ian) joined us along with a German student named Sebastian. We did not have music, but Alan (the musician from the "old" team) volunteered to play at practices although he did not want to commit himself to playing for us when we danced out in public. So we simply did not dance out that year! We spent all summer practising, apart from one occasion where we appeared in makeshift kit just to give Sebastian a taste of "real" morris before he returned home. Stuart (a dancer from the "old" team, who also played melodeon for Kickshins) volunteered to play for us on that occasion. The lack of regular music was a constraint, but there was also a feeling that we were not yet good enough to appear in public.⁸

In 1993 we managed to "borrow" a musician every other week from another local morris team. But at least things were beginning to come together and we enjoyed a successful season, culminating in a tour with Windsor that put the wind up Hammersmith! In 1994 we gained another dancer (Lee) and finally obtained regular musicians (Karen and Jane). Karen's boyfriend Steve joined before going to teach abroad. To show that we were back in business we entered the Morris Dance Competition at Sidmouth. We did not win, but it was a valuable experience. We gained two more dancers (the two Malcolms) and received an invitation to Sidmouth as a town team the following year.

Although there have been some changes in personnel since (Ian has gone, John and Tim have come, and Gareth has replaced Karen as our melodeon player), it is the core of that team which remains today. Although it is now eight years since the revival, we still refer to ourselves as the "new" team to distinguish ourselves from the "old" team of the 1970's and 1980's.

(To be continued -- how the team is moving into the next century!)

Jameson Wooders
October 2000

⁸ That attitude seems incredible now. I cannot think of too many sides who would refrain from inflicting themselves upon the public in this way!



USEFUL SOURCE MATERIALS (2)

Chipping Campden – by Keith Chandler

(A) *Being part of a reply Keith posted on the Morris Dance Discussion List (MDDL) in July 2000 – for wider interest. For anyone interested in following it up, see the list on-line: <http://web.syr.edu/~hytelnet/mddl/>*

The truth will out. Bruce Henderson's faith in the "oral history" he collected regarding a set of girls dancing at Chipping Campden during the second war is completely justified. I remember asking Don Ellis during the early 1980's and he confirmed it, but I cannot find any notes, and suspect it's on one of my untranscribed interview tapes. Born 1903, he had been one of the Boy's Brigade lads trained by leader and fiddle player William Denis Hathaway over the winter of 1909/10, after the grown-up dancers had refused to demonstrate the dances to Cecil Sharp. From then until around 1970 he was in every incarnation of the side (there were frequent lapses up to 1939, and only following the second world war was there sufficient enthusiasm/ encouragement/ motivation to field a side every year), although he danced less and less as the 1950's rolled on. His enthusiasm for the morris tradition, as well as the broader history of the town, was unbounded. I'm still not quite sure what I did, but after many years of hostility towards outsiders poking their noses into the whole shebang, he took me into his complete confidence, which amazed family members and then-current dancers alike.

Don's daughter Jean told me on 6 June 1982 that she had been a member of the girls' set. Being wartime, her father (in a protected occupation, building) was unable to get any men to do it, so trained a group of girls, 'to keep it going.' She was insistent that they did all the Campden dance repertory, which at that date numbered about five or six. On 26 June 1986 her sister Pat (three years younger) confirmed that they had both danced during the war. She was very young at the time and more than forty years on could not remember the names of the others, although she wondered if Vinah Hathaway and Noreen Plested (the daughter of the team's fool) had been in it. One of her friends who was in on our conversation thought that maybe Doreen Ingalls (née Feasey) had also done it, but neither was sure. Finally, on 3 December 1992, Dorrie Ellis (she married Don's younger brother Lionel, who had also been a dancer from 1920 and into the 1950s) confirmed the participation of Vinah Hathaway and added that Alma Davenport (née Hopkins) had been another.

I have the distinct impression that the girls' team was not active during every war year. In fact, the men's side did not appear every year during the 1930s; and the 1939 Evesham Journal report of the Scuttlebrook Wake festivities (at that period the annual local occasion most likely to have seen a morris performance) is notable for not mentioning it. In fact, a painstaking check of that newspaper's run by Craig Fees threw up only one wartime mention, in 1943, during the "Wings For Victory Week" fund-raising. On Monday 31 May there was, according to the prior announcement, to be morris dancing in the Square at 7 p.m., and the following Saturday between 3.15 and 6 p.m. was to be 'Parades, Morris and Country Dancing, P.T. Displays, Combined Dances etc. in the

Square" (very much like the present day Scuttlebrook Wake, in fact, which Heather Horner recently reported on in the MDDL).

So, four confirmed names and two possibles, just enough for a set. But who, I wonder, was the musician? The regular fiddle player, Bert Hathaway, was certainly in the Air Force throughout the war. I confess to not having been as assiduous in my pursuit of this material as I was in interviewing the men who danced before 1939 (all now dead). Not from any bias, simply lack of time and further opportunity. It's probably still not too late, though (and thanks for the reminder, Bruce). The women involved will only be in their sixties. In fact, I ought to get down to it right away...

(B) The following should pull together into a roughly chronological sequence most of the threads discussed in the recent 'speaking of Chipping Campden' correspondence.

The photo mentioned by Bob Collier is definitely 1896. There was no active team by 1912. The photo (there are two actually: one with hands up, the other with hands down) was taken by Henry Taunt on Whit Monday, 25 May, during the 'Grand Parade and Floral Fete' held that day in Campden. The Bidford Morris Dancers, ten years on from, and freed from the constraints of, D'Arcy Ferris' revival, were actually booked to perform (and did). I believe that this was the first time the recently-formed Campden side had appeared in public. Denis Hathaway (born in Condicote, not Longborough as Peter Klosky claims) had only recently married into the Taylor/Veale family. His wife's grandfather - Thomas Ramell Veale - had been one of the Campden dancers before they packed up, probably during the 1850s, and gave Denis some of the choreographic details and tunes. Using both these and some he remembered from seeing the Longborough dancers when aged about ten (i.e. circa 1877), Denis cobbled together a completely new set of dances that had not previously existed.

The man with the jig doll in the 1896 photos is William Taylor, Denis' father-in-law. On 12 September 1981 Denis' son Bert told me that Taylor dressed up so that he could go round with the morris dancers and 'give them a break' by performing with the doll. It was a proper jig-doll, which danced on a piece of wood, and Denis would play for it to dance. Taylor, however, 'was full of it...But he was never a dancer or clown.' Sandy Glover commented here, 'I'd think it would be very distracting.' Yes, it would, and that was the whole point. The old teams aimed to keep the crowd distracted while the men rested between dances, and this usually fell to the fool. But other means are recorded, including singing between dances at Adderbury, and the jig-doll here. Whatever anyone believes about the 'magic' of the morris, there's little doubt that (during the nineteenth century at least) one of the chief motivations was to get money. As Bert Hathaway told me on 5 June 1982, the pre-WWI dancers 'did anything they could to earn tuppence ha'penny.' This is the equivalent of one penny English and one and a half cents US, but would buy a pint of beer at that time.

What modification the dances underwent between 1896 and 1910, when Sharp notated them, we don't know, but given that they passed through several sets of dancers (the named team in 1896 is completely different from that which danced in 1906, and obviously different again from the pre-teenagers that Sharp saw) this had possibly been quite considerable. I remember several times during the extensive interviews I conducted with leader Don Ellis between 1982 and 1987 him mentioning that, given several lapses

in performance (circa 1911 to 1919, and 1921 to 1930), each time they got a side together again there was a problem remembering the dance details. Hardly surprising, then that a figure notated by Sharp, and mentioned by Peter Klosky, is no longer in the repertory. In 1930, when they restarted it yet again (Denis Hathaway died in 1926, so that was a severe loss of continuity), only four of the men had danced before, and they introduced at least four more. Fred Hathaway had been involved the longest, since 1906 at least. Don Ellis had been one of the boys in 1910-11, and was also in the 1920 revival. Don's brother Lionel and Bert Hathaway had previously only danced in public during 1920, although Bert remembered his dad teaching them (his older brother Henry had been another of the 1910 boy dancers) at home from early boyhood. According to Henry Hart, one of the dances Fred Hathaway tried to teach in 1930, and which they never got together, involved travelling forwards with a one, two, three, hop (every other dance, then as now, was a one hop, two hop) and then 'twist round.'

Given Denis' sources in 1896, this both looked (as Henry demonstrated it) and sounds strongly like a vestige of the processional Sharp notated at Longborough. Don Ellis, at that time the leader of the side, wrote to Maud Karpeles on 28 February 1968: 'We had six dances when I first learnt [*i.e. in 1910*], but since the early 1930's we have only danced five and I am anxious to discover the sixth if at all possible before I pass on. I have before me a copy of Cecil Sharp's notes from Clare College, but he apparently only took down five tunes from Dennis Hathaway in 1909 and four dances from the boys in 1910. I have a tune to which we have no dance and a dance with no tune. The latter I am not at all worried about, but I should dearly like to find out about the dance which he has got down as No. 2049 [*i.e. in his 'Folk tunes' manuscript*] and calls "Old Woman Tossed up in a Blanket".' (Fourteen years later the side 'reconstructed' a dance using this title, and danced to a variant of 'St. Patrick's Day'.)

The Guild of Handicrafts moved from London to Campden in May 1902. During 1982-3 I had extensive correspondence with Harry Osborn, who came from London with them as a boy, and later emigrated to Canada. He wrote on 22 April 1982, 'We moved to Campden with the Guild in May 1902 just before my eighth birthday + we left at the end of 1907...I can safely say that Morris dancing was still alive when we arrived as I saw it performed shortly afterwards, although it was not a frequent occurrence. I am certain that Mr Ashbee [*i.e. C.B. Ashbee, instigator of the migration to Campden*] had no part in it at all, as I never heard or saw any signs of his involvement." The book Steve Corrsin asks about is *The simple life*, by Fiona MacCarthy. In a letter dated 14 April 1982 she wrote, 'It seems to us [*i.e. herself and Alan Crawford, another leading authority on Ashbee and the Guild*] unlikely that the Guild was involved in a revival of the Morris dance if Ashbee didn't mention it, since this was just the sort of thing which he was keen on mentioning...' Vestiges of the Guild still exist in the form of workshops in Sheep Street. The Hart family was one of those that came from London and have been silversmiths there for three generations. As already mentioned, George Hart's son Henry became involved when they revived in 1930, and his son David during the 1950's. David is the leader of the current Campden side.

Peter Klosky is probably right in claiming that the Guild invited Sharp to Campden, but not in 1909, when he collected the morris tunes. On 13 January 1909 he gave a 'concert lecture' in aid of the Campden Nursing Association, but it was on 'English Folk Song', not morris. We need to remember that by this date Sharp had collected very little morris

material, but a huge amount of folk songs. Sharp's first Morris Book had appeared in 1907, but was based on what the Esperance Club had gleaned from William Kimber of Headington Quarry, and his viewing of the Bidford side in 1906, which later caused him some embarrassment when learning that those dances had been cobbled together from elements of various traditions (Ilmington, Idbury, probably Bledington, Lower Swell, possibly Brackley, possibly Ramsden) by D'Arcy Ferris as recently as 1885.

Sharp was already in Campden the day before the lecture (12 January), and it was then that he went into Ellis' basket shop where Denis Hathaway and some other of the dancers then worked. On 12 September 1981 I asked Bert Hathaway why the men wouldn't dance for Sharp. 'Well, they couldn't get the time off work. My father kept on working in his shop and whistled the tunes for Sharp to take down.' But the timing does not track. It was in April 1910, probably on the 30th, that he gave a lecture in the series 'Music and Folk Song' to the School of Arts and Crafts in Campden, and this was almost certainly via an invitation from Ashbee [I acknowledge my debt to Craig Fees for this information]. It was on that day he notated the dances from the boys' side. Between January 1909 and April 1910 Sharp had been in Campden on four occasions, collecting songs. So, he had ample opportunity to collect the dances from the adult set had they been willing.

Other stories in circulation relate to Sharp borrowing a pair of bell pads and never returning them (unlikely) or not buying the men any beer (more likely - Sharp was a teetotaller). But Sharp sometimes did pay his informants, and this was one such occasion. Denis Hathaway received half a crown (maybe about a day's wages at that time) for playing him the tunes. (Bert actually told me two different stories at different times: one was that his father whistled the tunes in the basket shop; the other that he went home and fetched his fiddle. Perhaps the one followed the other on the same day.) My strongest feeling is that this resulted in some jealousy/resentment among the dancers (among whom at this date were Denis' brothers Tom, Fred and Algy). Something similar happened at Bampton, where William 'Jingy' Wells got money from Sharp around the same date, and also at Headington Quarry with William Kimber, who was frequently his paid demonstrator at lectures.

Well, that was useful for sorting it all out again in my head anyway. Anybody wanting to follow any of this up in greater detail might like to look at two of my articles:

'The Archival Morris Photographs - 2: Campden Morrice Dancers, Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire, 1896', English Dance and Song 46, number 3 (Autumn/Winter 1984), 6-8 and 'Chipping Campden Morris Dancers - an outline history', The Morris Dancer 3, number 4 (February 1997), 111-116.

For more details of the pre-WWII side you could also look at my obituaries of three of the dancers:

Lionel Nowell Ellis, The Morris Dancer 2, number 4 (January 1987), 63-64; Henry Owen Hart, The Morris Dancer 2, number 12 (February 1991), 216-217; and Richard Merriman, The Circular [of the Morris Ring of England] 21 (September 1992), 10-11. There's also a forthcoming article, probably in English Dance and Song, on three generations of Hathaways playing for the Campden Morris.

Keith Chandler
September 2000

LETTERS

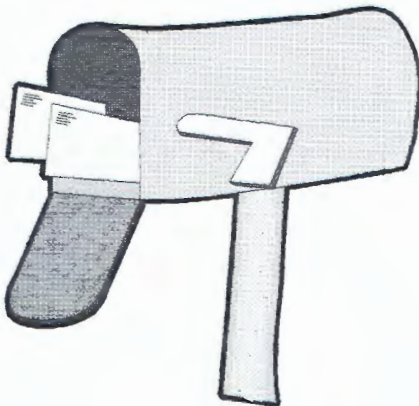
From Keith Chandler

History of the Morris:

“...I’ve been experiencing an unexpected renewed interest in the history of the morris....A mass of fresh morris-related articles have appeared or are due to appear. There are two fresh ones on the Musical Traditions Internet site (with a third one due shortly)..I would be glad if you would give the site a plug; www.mustrad.org.uk.....”

.....

Readers...take note!



From Norris Winstone:

On traditional teams:

During the last few years I have watched, live and on videos, traditional morris sides and have been struck by the following:

- their dances are simple in structure
- the conservation of energy
- the togetherness of the team (“team spirit”)
- all moves are very deliberate i.e they don’t “ooze” into movements
- the excellent rhythm
- the body lift before the beat
- not every dancer is doing exactly the same e.g hand movements, but it all looks right

Many dances composed by modern “revival” sides are very complicated!

.....

Food for thought, eh?

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