

Morris Matters



CONTENTS OF VOLUME 21 NUMBER 1

Royal Preston Morris Dancers : A Brief History by Chas Marshall	3
Notice Board	9
The Molly Dance Revival by George Frampton	10
Pub Morris	24
Silver Ants - An extremely personal reminiscence of the ups and downs in the life of Redbornstoke Morris by Brian Mander	25

Morris Matters is published twice a year by Beth Neill
27 Nortoft Road, Chalfont St Peter, Bucks SL9 0LA; phone 01494 871465

Subscriptions are £5 for two issues (EU countries; or £7 outside these areas)
published in January and July. Please make cheques or postal orders payable
to **Morris Matters**

Thanks to Jill Griffiths for help in checking text and to Steve Poole for getting it
all printed out OK. As ever, all morris related articles, letters, cartoons are
welcome. My e-mail address is Beth.Neill@care4free.net

EDITORIAL

It's team profiles in this issue with a centre spread of both colour and black and white pictures. Many thanks to Chas Marshall, George Frampton and Brian Mander for supplying the prints this time. There is a good mix of modern and "early revival" traditions represented here - Cotswold, North West and Molly. I haven't seen the Royal Preston Morris Dancers profiled by Chas but I do hope I get to see them soon. And I confess that I never did see some of the early Molly teams mentioned by George in his article.

Some of the items I had hoped to include this time around will have to wait for the next issue, but a spin-off of one idea has been the development of a Bath City WEB site. I was amazed to see how much had been included in such a short time. Even if you weren't at Bath, the odds are you know at least 3 people who were in Bath City Morris (even if they won't own up to it!)...have a look at it! It's on www.ukppg.org.uk/bathcitymorris.html

Following a note from Keith Chandler in the last issue, I hear that Musical Traditions will soon be issuing on CD ROM, "Morris Dancing in the English South Midlands 1660 - 1900", being a combination of Keith's two Folklore Society volumes (updated gazatteer plus masses of material uncovered since 1993), also some previously published but revised articles and a never-published major work on the Forest of Dean Morris, along the lines of the South Midlands Gazatteer.

Rod Stradling runs the site Musical Traditions - have a look at it; it's on www.mustrad.org.uk. I found two excellent articles about Bampton written by Keith. Lots to discover, musicians and their instruments, collectors.....

Lastly - see the noticeboard page for a revived effort at the Guinness Book of records...I hope it gets off the ground (so to speak) this time round.

By now there is nothing new I can add to all that has been said and written about the New York event - but it did bring home how the sense of community runs through the morris world...e-mails flew round. Let's hope we all have a fine, peaceful dancing year ahead.

Beth

ROYAL PRESTON MORRIS DANCERS : A BRIEF HISTORY

As a part of the ebb and flow of morris dance tradition, individual teams may enjoy only a brief existence, though the dancing tradition continues almost oblivious to the fortunes of particular teams. On the Lancashire Plain, it is believed that the Preston Royal Morris Dancers enjoyed a fairly brief existence from about 1893 until perhaps 1901, although it can only be said with some certainty that the team definitely existed during 1893 and 1894.

Preston Royal Morris Dancers were reformed in January 1978 by the late Richard Boswell and Andy Anderson, themselves former members of other North West morris teams, including Garstang Morris Dancers, Horwich Prize Medal Morris Men and Leyland Morris Men. This reformed team was based on extensive research done by Richard's wife, Pruw, and some of her work has since been published - see :

Morris Dancing on the Lancashire Plain : The Preston Tradition (Printed and Published for the Morris Ring in 1981)

Morris Dancing on the Lancashire Plain : The Horwich Inquiry (Printed and Published for the Morris Ring in 1984)

A third book in the series which was in preparation with a title of "Horwich to the Fylde" has sadly remained, as yet, unpublished.

Pruw was an important figure within the North West Morris revival at the time and was associated with other prominent and trend-setting teams on the Lancashire Plain such as John O' Gaunt Morris and Garstang Morris Dancers.

The reformed Preston Royal Morris Dancers were as authentic as possible in costume terms; their costume being based upon photographs of the original team and an old kit in possession of the daughter of a dancer. One exception was the use of clogs instead of shoes; an understandable artistic choice by the revivalists. However in terms of repertoire, the reformed team differed in that it performed dances from several different towns and villages around the Preston area as opposed to just the one or two dances which were unique to Preston Royal. Most of the dances were collected by Pruw and expertly choreographed and arranged by Richard.

The dance repertoire has remained fairly static over the years and in 1986 comprised :

DANCE	COLLECTOR/SOURCE
Churchtown Processional	Pruw Boswell
Preston St. Ignatius	Pruw Boswell
Blackrod	Pruw Boswell
Coppull	Pruw Boswell
Fleetwood Polka	Pruw Boswell

Preston St. Walburge's	Pruw Boswell
Chorley Polka	Pruw Boswell
Blackburn	Neil Graham, Dave Middlehurst and Dave Nelson

This table is based upon details given to me for a performance at the Liverpool Garden Festival in 1984, when I was privileged to become an occasional member of the band.

It may be noticed by those familiar with the North West morris dance that there is a perhaps surprising omission in this repertoire, namely the Preston Royal Morris Dance. When Pruw first collected this dance it was believed to have been introduced into Poulton-le-Fylde by a dancer from Preston. At the time, Preston Royal Morris Dancers were thought to be the only team from the Preston area. Subsequently, further teams were found to be active in Preston at the same period and it became uncertain that this dance was the Preston Royal Morris Dance. As a result it was re-classified by Pruw as Poulton-le-Fylde. Some teams still, perhaps mistakenly, refer to this dance as the Preston Royal Morris Dance. However the revival Preston Royal Morris Dancers did include this dance in their original repertoire, but only briefly until the dance was renamed Poulton-le-Fylde.

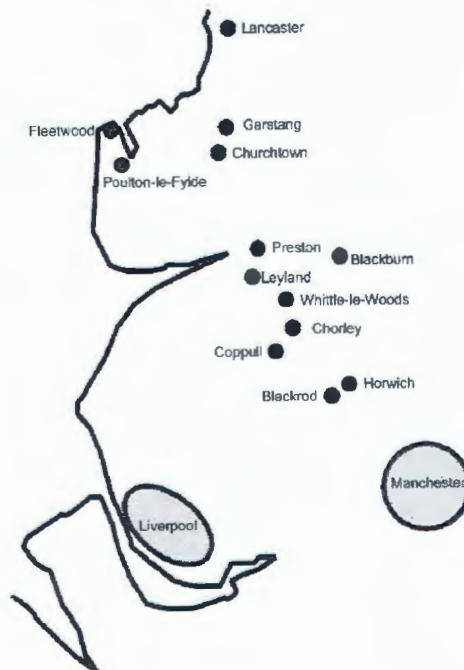


Figure 1 - Map showing the approximate location of the towns and villages mentioned within the article

There existed other dances which were collected from within the same area but never added to the repertoire. These included the Chorley Display Dance and another church based dance from Preston St. Vincent's. The St. Ignatius and St. Walburge's dances are also church based dances from Preston.

I believe that there is at least one strong personality behind every successful and well-regarded North West Morris Team. There were certainly a number of strong personalities within Preston Royal and perhaps inevitably there arose some differences of opinion. As a result of these differences, Richard (and a number of dancers who supported his opinions) parted company with Preston Royal Morris Dancers and formed the Royal Lancashire Morris Dancers in 1983.

These two teams, both grown from the same roots, operated independently and successfully for about 16 years. Over the years the original differences subsided as the teams' personnel changed and with the sad and untimely death of Richard in 1989. There became occasions when the two teams danced out together. More recently both teams found themselves short of members and decided to merge with the negotiations beginning towards the end of 1999.

The merged team had its first public appearance at the Great Northern Ceilidh in Preston on Saturday 25th March 2000, but this was essentially a mixed team with each dancer wearing his original team's costume.

The team costume is one fairly obvious issue which needed to be sorted out, but there were a number of factors all of which required careful compromise in order to reach a situation with which everyone was comfortable. The people involved went to some lengths to make sure that this was a merger and not a take-over.

Name of the Team. The merged team found it difficult to compromise between two so very similar sounding names, but settled on Royal Preston Morris Dancers. This was a subtle but important change.

A new costume has been devised and made for all the members of the amalgamated team. The team costumes were fairly similar in style, the main differences being the choice of colours and style of headgear. The new costume is largely based on the Preston Royal costume with a slight change of colour in the velvet and a more "Royal Lancashire cut" to the waistcoat. Bob Alty, the present leader of Royal Preston Morris Dancers, views the costume as "an attempt to maintain the authenticity of the original Preston Royal kit with some practical adjustments found to be beneficial from the Royal Lancashire kit". The team danced out sporting its brand new kit on Thursday 25th May 2000 for the BBC Music Live radio event - perhaps not the most suitable broadcasting medium for showing off a new costume!

The dance style and repertoire had many similarities due to Richard's influence, with only some very slight adjustments being required to bring the two groups of dancers together. One new dance was added from the Royal Lancashire repertoire, namely the Poulton-le-Fylde dance which was mentioned

earlier in this article. Also the Fleetwood Polka was extended with additional figures collected by members of Royal Lancashire Morris Dancers.

The Royal Lancashire Morris Dancers repertoire around the time of the merger was :

DANCE	COLLECTOR/SOURCE
Preston St. Ignatius	Pruw Boswell
Preston St. Walburge's	Pruw Boswell
Blackrod	Pruw Boswell
Churchtown Processional	Pruw Boswell
Coppull	Pruw Boswell
Fleetwood Polka	Pruw Boswell
Chorley Polka	Pruw Boswell
Poulton-le-Fylde	Pruw Boswell
Garstang Processional	Pruw Boswell
Duke of Lancaster	Based on a Basque dance and choreographed by Keith Greenwood to suit the style of John O' Gaunt Morris Men
Royal Lancashire Polka	Essentially a version of the Fleetwood Polka danced with mollies rather than sticks, choreographed by Richard Boswell.
Ashton	From Clitheroe Morris Men via Malcolm Baxenden

There was also a special dance in the Royal Lancashire repertoire during 1992 only. This was called the Preston Guild Dance which consisted of various figures collected, arranged and choreographed by John Musgrave. This dance was developed specifically for the Preston Guild of 1992. By way of background information the following details describing the Guild were taken from the Council Web site :

"The Guild, formed in 1179, was an organisation of traders, craftsmen and merchants. It had a monopoly of trade in the town: only its members could carry on craft or business. At intervals the Guild Merchant updated its membership lists to ensure people were not falsely claiming the right to trade. Members of the Guild had to take part in a public ceremony and swear loyalty to the Mayor and the Guild Merchant in order to be admitted or readmitted as members. At first these ceremonies were irregular and it was soon established that they were only needed once in a generation. So from 1542, Preston Guild took place every 20 years, as it still does today.

The Guild became a special opportunity for feasting, processions and great social gatherings. Even though by the 18th century the Guild had lost its importance as a regulator of trade, it still survived because of its celebrations and prestigious social occasions. For the last hundred years Preston Guild has

been a truly popular occasion enabling everyone to join the 'North West's greatest party.'"

Recently the team invited founder member Andy Anderson to teach them a version of the Horwich Polka which Andy used to dance in his days with Garstang. This item is new to all members of the team and at the time of writing (May 2001) is being polished up, ready to bring the total number of dances to 10.

Music. The dances are generally danced to a medley of tunes and each of the constituent teams had their own set of tunes for each dance. The musicians have been able to go through the joint sets of music and have "weeded out" some tunes and added others for greater variety. For instance the Coppull dance is now done to a medley of 4 tunes whereas each team originally danced this to 3 tunes.

Team officers. The only official positions are leader, secretary and treasurer. These have been shared as follows:

Leader - Bob Alty - originally Preston Royal
Secretary - Alan Salter - originally Royal Lancashire
Treasurer - Dave Nelson - originally Preston Royal

However there other essential tasks to be carried out within a morris team and it is important to mention these.

The duties of teaching dances and running practices are shared between John Musgrave from Royal Lancashire and Kevin Gillett from Preston Royal.

The principal musician is accordionist Bob James from Royal Lancashire.

A new team Logo has been designed by John Musgrave of Royal Lancashire which incorporates the red rose from Royal Lancashire logo and the lamb and flag from Preston Royal logo.



Figure 2 - Team Logo

Location of the practice. The dancers come largely from the same hinterland and practices were, at first, alternated between the two original locations in Preston and Whittle-le-Woods. But this did lead to some confusion and all practices now take place in Whittle-le-Woods. The dancers can also be found quenching their thirst in the nearby Royal Oak after practice.

By way of a conclusion, I hope further success can be built upon this already promising merger. This will help to ensure that the dances from the Lancashire Plain collected by Pruw Boswell continue to be danced in their local area and that people from around Preston and also further afield continue to enjoy watching them being performed.

Finally I would like express my special thanks to Bob Alty, Pruw Boswell and John Musgrave for their help in preparing this article.

For further information on Royal Preston Morris Dancers visit their Web site at

<http://www.royalpreston.co.uk/>

or contact

Bob Alty 01772 612445
Alan Salter 01772 601259

Chas Marshall
Harrogate
May 2001

NOTICE BOARD

MORRIS GUINNESS BOOK OF RECORDS

Part 1 (July 2001):

Pre-foot and mouth caught snatches of enthusiastic Morris minded people traipsing to the gym in their lunch break, jogging determinedly around the wet streets and cavorting along muscle wrenching beaches. Why? Because they all had their sights set on taking part in the Morris Guinness Book Of Records which was to have taken place on St George's Day last April. As the date gradually crept closer and the muscles grew stronger, the foot and mouth epidemic scuppered our plans. Hooray! Now I can start eating less healthy meals that would weigh me down. I can get on with sitting around listening to music and stash away the surgical spirits (to harden the skin on my tender feet).

But summer madness has hit us again and thoughts turn yet again to "put Morris into the public eye" and explore the possibility of another stab at the Morris Guinness Book of Records. The objective is to set a record of 26 miles non stop dancing (5 minute comfort break each hour).

Part 2 (January 2002):

Well, foot and mouth did for the Guinness Book of records. We had practised like mad till our muscles bulged At one stage - dancing along the North Morfolk beach we became trapped by the sea and had to crawl up a very slippery and crumbling cliff. I was yanked most of the way on my belly and looked a right state by the time we reached Sheringham. I am game to do it again this year..... we were going to do it in April last year and now it is planned for Sunday 21st April 2002, starting at 8:00 am.

We have already a number of willing dancers, support and music. Would you like to join us? The more the merrier. Come as a side or individual dancer. Come as a band or solo. Come as a catering crew or brewer of tea. Come as a marshal. Come as a driver. But most of all come with determination and comradeship.

The route has been set through the countryside of Norfolk (no hills) starting in Norwich at the Will Kemp's Leap wall. For further details contact Julie McKenzie at druid@hotmail.com or telephone 01508 470851.

P.S. The Alps (*keen readers will recall that, after the success of Kemps Jig 400 they were hoping to climb the Alps*) - well, we seem to have lost our film crew to France...will have to be put on the back burner.

THE MOLLY DANCE REVIVAL, 1982-90

Introduction

Back in 1979, I first witnessed the Seven Champions Molly dancers in action at the Sidmouth Festival. One month later, I watched them again outside a country pub in the Weald (or should that read the wilds?) of Kent. I recall being congratulated by a young bearded gentleman who rejoiced under the name of 'Pike' for finding the place, because many of the side had difficulty! This is not the story of the Champs - which I have summarised and/or spoken about at length elsewhere - rather how their benign presence influenced the future of this form of 'ceremonial dance' for all time (or at least the last twenty years, at any rate).

Parallels must be drawn at how teams such as the Gloucestershire Old Spot morris dancers influenced imitators such as Berkshire Bedlam and Mr. Jorrocks to attain new heights (literally) and athleticism in what is basically a recreational pursuit. Another parallel must be drawn at how the Shropshire Bedlams became the template for the so-called Border tradition - even Silurian morris, the one team that hitherto claimed the monopoly on this, had to adjust its policies and 'black up'. Before long, every other new team launched on the scene was a wannabe Bedlams border team. And why not? It is exciting. Everybody wanted to do it, but without migrating from their home district.

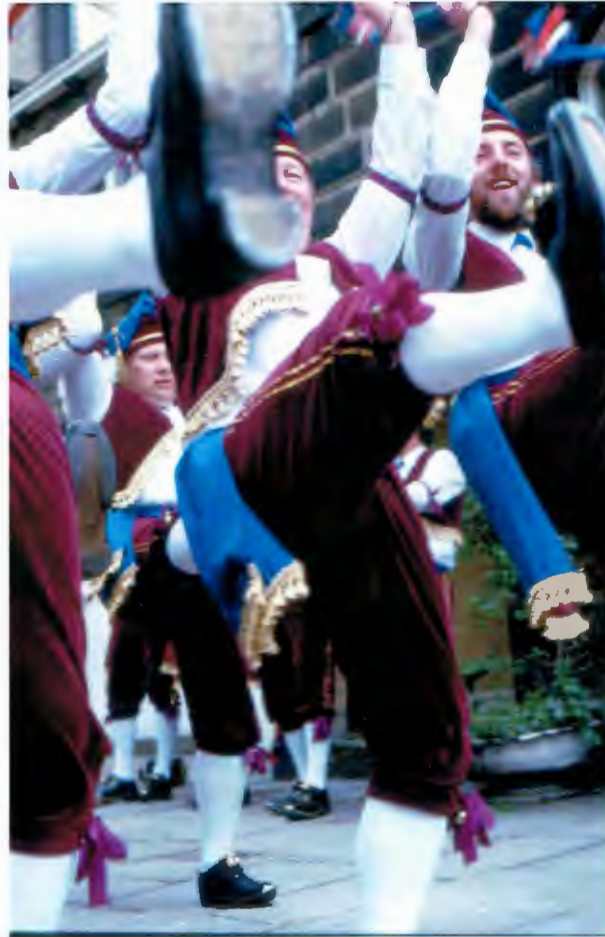
So, why did the comparatively obscure art of the Cambridgeshire molly dance take so long to claim its place? Or even, has it achieved this yet? Envoi!

The Revival up to 1982

In 1976, Russell Wortley was running workshops on Molly dancing at Cecil Sharp House and elsewhere. The dances taught were based on interviews with elderly participants and eyewitnesses recalling events earlier in their youth. To make any of this danceable, Wortley had to interpret many of the moves described to him to make the result appear somewhat less than bland. A number of members of Headcorn morris turned up and, from that, the seeds of the Seven Champions were sown. Another attendee was Steve Monk of Chelmsford morris, who was to become a founder member and musician for the Good Easter molly dancers. On Plough Monday in January 1977, Dr. Wortley led out the Cambridge Morris Men dancing for the first time as molly dancers at Comberton and elsewhere - a feature included in their calendar to this day.

One of Russell's colleagues was Cyril Papworth, the grandson of William Papworth, a one-time 'lord' of the traditional Comberton molly dance team. It is known that there were differences of opinion with Russell on the fine detail of performance. However, with Wortley's death on Plough Monday 1980, Cyril was viewed as the sole authority when teaching Molly dancing, either *per se*, or as the 'feast' (i.e. barn or ceilidh) dances identified as the sources of the same.

**Preston Royal Morris Dancers at Holmfirth Folk Festival,
May 1987**



**Royal Lancashire Morris Dancers at John of Gaunt Day of
Dance, 7 July 1984**



Photos: Chas Marshall

Royal Preston Morris Men at the Dome, Summer 2000



Photo: Kevin McGuinness (Lancashire Evening Post)

Richard Boswell at John of Gaunt Day of Dance, 7 July 1984



Photo: Chas Marshall

Preston Royal Morris Dancers at Sidmouth 1980



Photo: Ann Alty

Paddingtons Pandemonic Express July 1984



Seven Champions July 1987



Photos: Beth Neill

Cambridge Morris Men dance the Molly



**Wally Molly at Godalming
March 1985**



Photos: George Frampton

Redbornstoke at Whitchurch Winter Feast, 21 October 1978



Photo: Bucks Herald, Aylesbury

Redbornstoke at their 25th anniversary weekend dance, "The Motley Cap", for absent friends; Wrest Park 15 July 2001



Photo: Charlie Leslie

**Redbornstoke at Cheltenham Folk Festival in Marston Kit
5 February 2000**



**Redbornstoke at The Five Bells; Eaton Bray, Beds
2 May 1982
(also the day Bedfordshire Lace first performed)**



Photos: Brian Mander

The Old Hunts molly dancers learned their dances from Cyril, but it would take an alert eye to spot the difference in the subtleties between the versions that (say) Good Easter perform with respect to the former. From a personal point of view, this became manifest to me when asked to take part with the Cambridge men some years back. I had to muse whose version of 'Special Molly' I was to perform, having viewed all four extant teams in action at various times – the differences to me were significant.

At the same time, the Mepal Molly Men were establishing their own tradition based on discussions with Alf and Will Shelton, two surviving members of the Little Downham molly dancers from the 1930s. Once more, I have documented their story in these pages (Volume 16, Number 2). The Mepal youngsters I first saw at Whittlesey in 1984 now tower over me, sing double bass, and accompany their greying fathers around the Fenland villages on Plough Monday. Until two years ago, they also performed at Whittlesey on the Saturday, but now prefer to dance just one day in the year.

The Hinckley Bullockers from Leicestershire were formed in 1987, and are a composite of experienced dancers from the respective Anker and Anstey morris teams as well as a number of villagers from Stoney Stanton. They perform some of the Cambridgeshire dances as well as 'a travesty of a quadrille with ad lib stamping and shuffling' as noted in county archives. Their kit was based on detailed descriptions of nineteenth century plough teams logged in local history books, and comprise dark suits or jackets and trousers, high hats, and a sash worn from left shoulder to right hip. One of their number dresses as Beelzebub. Instead of using black face make-up, they redden their faces.

There was also a team around in the early 1980s, who called themselves the Debden Plough Gang, which was formed by Peter Penny. Although they advertised their presence in the 'Folk Directory' and other places for several years, Simon Ritchie commented to me that they, "never got past the first couple of practices" and did not perform to an audience.

The last case study to be mentioned at this point was described in this magazine in 1984 (Volume 6, Number 3) as 'Kesteven Women's 5th. Annual Tour of Sleaford' when they danced out as molly dancers before Christmas, giving notation of a dance for a set of eight performers they had written themselves to the tune 'Speed the Plough'. Some detail of the costume used is given (e.g. ribbons and blacking) with vague allusions to 'assorted noisy footwear'. Perhaps Sue Swift would be prepared to paint a fuller picture?

Seven Champions Workshop at Cranbrook, 1984

The memory plays tricks, so I shall tell this part of the story the way I remember it, albeit seventeen years after the event. In 1980, the Champs were running workshops on Molly dancing as part of Bernie Cherry's 'advanced morris workshops' at Sidmouth, first in the style that Wortley taught, then appending their own interpretation of the notation given. At Sidmouth in 1982, I was invited to join them (in the street outside the 'Mason's Arms', actually!).

One year later, I found myself palpably rehearsed, dancing in the Knowle arena watched by thousands of people!

At around that time, the Russell Wortley manuscripts must have become 'in the public domain' at Sheffield University, and Dave Dye and Chris White went there to find what lay therein and made a report at a workshop held at the George Hotel, Cranbrook in February 1984. I gave a short talk on the Whittlesey Straw Bear Festival – which was a nightmare, because I had not familiarised myself with the slide projector remote control in the days before 'presentation skills' management course possibilities had entered my vocabulary. To my surprise, the audience comprised a who's who of personalities (and heroes!) I had previously met in folk clubs or at festivals, including Sam Stevens and Anne Lennox-Martin, Dan Quinn, Trevor Bennett, and Alex Scott of Flowers and Frolics, Ralph Jordan, and Kerry Fletcher. Dave and Mandy Townsend were also there, having performed at the Seven Champions' Music Club the night before.

After the morning session, there was a short dance display in the street corner outside Cranbrook Church by the Champs and at least one of the other teams, an Essex side called Dagger Lane. All I can recall about the latter team was the wildness of their dancing, the preponderance of the colour black in their costumes, and that they threw down a large metal sword onto the pavement with a loud clatter right at the end of their dancing. I am thus indebted to Simon Ritchie for embellishing my faltering knowledge about this team which, I assume, is no longer with us.

Peter Billinge of Blackmore Morris had approached Simon in Autumn 1983 as someone who knew 'something about Plough Monday', from which the Good Easter molly dancers evolved. Peter had organised a "local molly team to give us a demonstration (at Chelmsford). This team was Dagger Lane, named after the press ganging area of Maldon, Essex, from where they came. The team was run by Mo Fitzgerald, the brother of one of the Chelmsford dancers, and performed very wild, disturbing and violent dances loosely based around one or two molly figures. Dances included 'the Great Braxted Wall dance', and part of their 'act' was fire-eating and blowing up cuddly toys with fireworks. They were a mixed team of about four, and I can't remember a musician – they might have had a penny whistle player or tambourinist..."

From the Cranbrook workshop alone, the folk circuit 'celebrities' mentioned earlier had formed themselves into an all-women London-based team styling themselves 'Urban Molly dancers' under the name Paddington Pandemonic Express. This team was convened in 1982 and celebrated their demise nine years later at a wake in January 1991! They initially blacked up, but shortly afterwards, decided in favour of blue make-up in deference to the ethnic population of the London district from which they took their name. Instead of hob-nailed boots, they wore black monkey boots; and for top hats, they wore soft pork-pie trilby hats with ribbons appended to them. The costume was completed by navy-blue corduroy trousers and pale blue collarless shirts – all designed to represent the garb of rail workers, at least in spirit. The idea for the Pads came about after discussions between Lesley Patterson and Su Evans-

Turner (a.k.a Su E-T) who wanted to form an all-women dance display team doing something other than Cotswold morris.

They approached Kerry Fletcher (then 19 years old) who had already gained some notoriety as a dance choreographer having taken part in the EFDSS's imaginative 'Everlasting Circle' show that toured the country at around that time – a sort of English 'Riverdance'. Like Champions, the focus of the performance was around the role of the molly, played by Kerry. I had first met her in her guise as 'Boris, the Bavarian Bear' in the Whitstable May Day procession in 1980. She also appeared with Ashley Hutchings's Albion Dance Band as one of their house dance troupe 'the Albionettes'. Quite clearly, here was somebody with the energy and imagination to choreograph the whole shebang given the chance. But, quite apart from the dancing, the other distinctive feature of this team was the band used to play for them, who rejoiced under the name 'Left Luggage', complete with melodeons, concertina, bass drum, cornet and euphonium – and what a splendid noise they made!

The dancing 'theme' comprised the railway. Most of the figures used were straight out of the 'Community Dances Manual' but twisted to suit their own style. There was a sort of syncopated 'turn single in file' figure called 'sidings' (not to be confused with the Playford evolution of the same name), and a poussette figure called 'shunting' which embraced the top couple processing to the bottom, often with Kerry wedged in between the moving partners as a threesome. The names of the dances themselves were often taken from railway or underground stations, such as 'Euston Square' and 'Turnham Green'.

Many of the tunes used were written for the dances, although 'Speed the Plough', 'Mad Moll of the Cheshire Hunt' and a splendid version of 'the British Grenadiers' played in E minor, were allowed out. With time, the team attracted experienced dancers into their ranks from in and around London, before folding – ironically, because of the difficulty of travelling into and around London. The last time I saw any of them was at the Whittlesey Straw Bear festival in 1992 [?] as a team calling themselves 'Black and Blue' led by Linda Fornell.

Another team to turn out in the mid-1980's was the Ermine Street Dancers from Cricklade in Wiltshire. Pete and Jackie Bromwich of the Seven Champs decided to move away from Kent, and after discussions with Rod and Danny Stradling, began a team who described themselves as 'street dancers'. The costume comprised pastel-coloured shell suits with training shoes, and the mixed team formulated wore face masks. Rod used a number of Italian dance tunes in the team's repertoire, possibly being influenced by the masking used in the north Italian carnival tradition, such as at Venice, or more likely Ponte Caffaro. The step was the brisk single-step that the Bampton morris dancers use. I witnessed their dancing on two occasions in 1987: once as part of Paddington's Plough Sunday celebrations, and the other time in a massed 'molly' stand at Sidmouth with the Champs and Pads.

The Mary Rose & Royal George street dancers from Portsmouth would never describe themselves as 'molly' dancers. However, the latter's style does merit attention, if only because the Champs allied themselves as their kindred

spirits at this time. Royal George use (and still use) face make-up. Nigel Churchill is their musician playing melodeon, presiding over a small team. One dance tune that does strike a chord in the mind of the author is their version of the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance played as a schottische rather than in 6/8 time. (Try it. It sounds quite spooky!) Their sister team, Mary Rose may be regarded as the forerunner of other women's clubs who dance the more flamboyant style, such as Loose Women from Maidstone, although one suspects that Martha Rhoden's Tuppenny Dish (the sister team to the Shropshire Bedlams) might provide the root template. Another display team which may be placed on a par with erstwhile street dancers such as these is Lizzie Dripping from Sheffield – with their unique 'rag doll' image (complete with bloomers and beauty spot) who perform a blend of north-west morris and step dance using tap shoes, best seen rather than described. But I digress.

One team who formed as a bunch of friends for one season only in 1985 was Wally Molly, who comprised members of Fleur de Lys morris from Godalming, Pilgrim morris from Guildford, and Knockhundred Shuttles from Midhurst. Their dances were based on those of the Cambridgeshire molly, definitely with a Seven Champions bias. Their version of 'Birds a'Building' included two concertina players dancing in the set, which draws the comparison with Champs who have four melodeon players dancing a reel in 'Mornington Crescent'.

Thinking of the 'swagger on' figure, by which Royal George usually make their entrance, brings to mind Dead Horse morris from Whitstable as being influenced by their style, at least in part. This team was formed in 1987 by members of the Whitstable Hoodeners who, by their own admission, were trying to weld together elements of Border Morris with aspects of Molly dancing 'as a general blackface morris tradition' reminiscent of a perceived 'Kentish' style. Both the morris team and hoodeners are still going strong as separate but intertwined entities, the latter during the winter season only, although they have been tempted out to participate in the local May day festivities.

In the meantime, the Cambridgeshire teams still celebrated Plough Monday and made their appearance at the Whittlesey Straw Bear festival. There seemed to be a resistance to 'expanding the repertoire' of the Molly dances and a wish to 'keep things traditional'. Without exception, all the local teams concerned only performed molly on or around Plough Monday and/or at Whittlesey, going out in other guises during the Spring and Summer months.

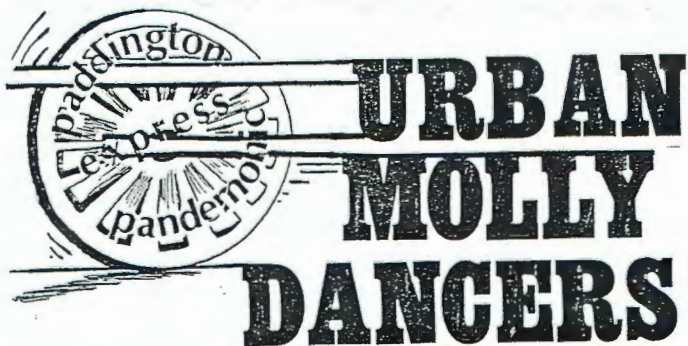
The Seven Champions were asked to hold workshops far afield. One such was held at Norwich in around 1988 under the auspices of Golden Star morris. It was perceived that those present wanted Dave Dye to teach Molly in the style of the Champions, yet a challenge was issued to those present to move the business on. One went thus: there were vestiges of a plough dance at Madingley, a village west of Cambridge. How about creating your own version? One year later, the Ouse William Morris dancers from Downham Market presented theirs at Whittlesey, actually using the plough drawn by the local Young Farmers Club. Some years later, they threw away the sticks and bells

and danced their own self-penned creations all year round, and now lead workshops in their own right.

This has been my story of the revival up until 1990. This date was selected because the East Anglian teams who survive today started to embrace the idea of writing their own dances to expand a limited repertoire based on figure-lead down-swing and change. This coincided with an implosion of interest in molly in the provinces after the initial impetus given by the Seven Champions and Paddingtons. That said, in a survey of morris and sword dance teams on the Internet conducted in November 2000, around 900 teams were listed, of which only 22 claimed to include what was thought of as 'molly' dancing in its repertoire, and not just in East Anglia. Still only a small number. However, on the day, one is led to believe the practice is universal at the Whittlesey Straw Bear festival. The next story of the revival is for Tony Forster, Gordon Phillips, Jon Hooton and others to tell.

[My apologies to anyone who may feel slighted by inference in this article. This was never intended, since I have tried to suppress any prejudices I still have in writing this draft, it being nine years since I was last involved with Champs. Thanks go to Tony Forster, for unintentionally giving me the germ of an idea for writing this article; Tony Ashley, for telling me all about the Hinckley Bullockers, albeit in a letter he wrote to me in 1989; Jon Brockbank, for detail about the early revival by the Cambridge MM; Simon Ritchie, for the evolution of the Good Easter team and the ethos of Dagger Lane molly; and to Kerry Fletcher for sharing her thoughts about Paddingtons (and Chris Walshaw for patiently listening to us reminiscing – Ah! Happy days!).]

George Frampton,
October 2001



AND THEIR GUESTS SEVEN CHAMPIONS
WILL BE DANCING

HERE OUTSIDE!

AT LUNCHTIME
12 - 2

ON SUNDAY
11TH JAN.



NOTICE

'traditional' Molly dancing
be happening.....

HERE

THE RAILWAY

SUNDAY 10 MAR

1-15 approx.

the new local side

WALLY MOLLY

will be dishing out
good luck and fun by vigorous dancing
in their disguise of black faces,
work clothes and heavy boots



SILVER ANTS¹

AN EXTREMELY PERSONAL REMINISCENCE OF THE UPS AND DOWNS IN THE LIFE OF REDBORNSTOKE MORRIS².

Twenty-five years is a life sentence. Indeed, with good behaviour we could have expected some remission. But then, good behaviour would not have been so much fun.

David Adcock was to blame initially. He had originally been introduced to the Morris by his music teacher³ at school in Loughborough soon after the end of the Second World War and he continued to dance in Leicestershire as an adult. When he moved to Bedfordshire in the late sixties he was keen to continue but, for various reasons, he was unable to practise with any of the possible local sides on a regular basis. After a few years of withdrawal, he proposed starting a new side at a meeting of the Parent Teachers Association of Redborne School in Ampthill. The school was very supportive. The inaugural meeting took place on 3rd May 1976 and Redbornstoke Morris was born. The side takes its name from the central hundred of Bedfordshire, between the River Flit in the south and the Ouse to the north – essentially, the brick-making plain.

In those days the organisational model for men's Morris was that of the typical Morris Ring side and the embryonic team slotted into this. In fact, we were encouraged a great deal in the early days by two local Ring sides, Bedford and Whitchurch, both of which have provided Squires of the Ring in the intervening years. However, despite their prompting, we never felt the urge to apply for membership. On the other hand, our repertoire was absolutely standard – a few dances each from Adderbury, Bampton, Bledington, Brackley, Bucknell, Fieldtown, Headington, Longborough and Sherborne – with a few other odds and sods. The foreman at the time would learn something one week at a Whitchurch practice and teach it to us the following week. We lapped it up.

But changes were in the air. In 1979 we had a change of kit, from whites with a green baldrick to green breeches and a red baldrick. This was precipitated by some of the side learning a bit of rapper, for which the baldrick was exchanged for a sash in the same colours. Although the rapper did not last long, we kept the kit until 1986, our tenth anniversary year. We also started to question the wisdom of such a wide repertoire and by the start of the eighties we were dancing only Badby and Bledington.

Looking back on the breeches years, we had lots of fun. The side grew and the diary became more and more interesting. But there were also problems – lots of arguments and acrimonious general meetings. We did not have a shared sense of direction and there were factions within the side pulling in different directions.

Practices became difficult too. A local Cotswold side folded and at least a set's worth of them joined us. We also agreed that some boys, who had formed a

Morris team, from a local middle school could attend our practices to sharpen their skills. In addition to this, some of the wives and partners of men in the side asked to come along to practices. We usually had five sets dancing on practice evenings, although two of them were not made up of Redbornstoke members. All this was very positive in its way, but we had not really thought out all the consequences or the strategies needed to cope with such large numbers. As foreman at the time I found it impossible to see what was going on and, in retrospect, it seems clear that we did not make much progress. Although the boys stopped coming after a season or two and the women formed their own side (Bedfordshire Lace) and also left, I think some damage had been done⁴.

By 1983 there were a number of us who were discontent with the standard of dancing and with the perceived casual attitude of the side in general. There were even a few of us who were thinking about leaving and starting a new side with a more serious approach. However, two members of the team had the idea that a group of us should develop an entirely new "tradition" for Redbornstoke in the hope that it would give us something to which we could all relate and pull together. So, on Sunday evenings during the summer of '83 ten of us met to put together a dance that was the first of Redbornstoke's "Amphill" tradition⁵.

This did help to prevent the side from splitting up, but there were negative aspects as well. We should have realised that those who had been left out of the process would feel upset. Nevertheless, the side survived. Amphill was adopted and a few more dances developed, but it did not immediately become the central unifying core that we had hoped.

Another problem was music. We had loads of musicians, who played as a band. They had differing ideas as to what was needed and some of them appeared to be bored with the basic melody and went off on flights of fancy – good music, no doubt, but not easy to dance to.

So our problems continued. In 1985 a number of senior members of the side left and in the AGM of that year the squire is reported as saying that it seemed unlikely that the side could continue, but we should nevertheless plan for the following year, our tenth anniversary.

We very nearly self-destructed, but the tenth anniversary year was wonderful; a real renaissance of commitment and enjoyment. There were a number of reasons for this.

The people who left were experienced dancers and could have been a grievous loss, but some of them had very strong, but contradictory, opinions on how the side should operate. We also gained a number of new recruits and, although they were new to the Morris, they were very enthusiastic. We had elected a new and very energetic Bagman and an excellent musician returned after some time away. We were also dancing Ducklington at this time; many current members look back on the Ducklington years as a golden age for our dancing. I'm not so sure personally, but the side certainly enjoyed it and that helped to strengthen the cohesion within the team. Another important factor was that we

had decided that for our anniversary year we would dance out with every "local" ritual team. When we sat down to write out the list, we were staggered by how many there were and so we ended up dancing with two or three teams at each of our weekly pub nights through that season. This helped to regenerate the feeling for the social side of the Morris that has been of prime importance to us ever since. All these factors combined to generate the most important features of all – we had a renewed pride in being members of the team and we had fun.

In some ways, this is the end of my story – fifteen years ago. Much of the positivity of that year has continued since and, generally speaking, we have been mercifully free of internal politics. Unlike some sides, we do not have a great deal of social contact outside of the Morris, but when we are together there is a very strong bond and a shared sense of purpose. Of course, it would be untrue to suggest that we have had no further problems at all, but we have been remarkably lucky⁶. On the whole, we enjoy one another's company.

One major factor in what makes Redbornstoke tick has been the continued development of Ampthill. In the early days, when we had only three or four dances in the style, we had considerable difficulty with it. So we cut right back to just the first dance and worked on that. The "tradition" then developed fairly organically; we have never pushed the pace. Because of this, we feel that it has gained an internal coherence that we very much enjoy. Our hanky dances have become increasingly complex geometrically, which keeps us having to think.

Another recent development has been a set of winter dances. For many years we have danced out on Plough Monday with a mummers group⁷ and some local Morris sides⁸. It is often extremely cold at night at that time of year and there is the danger of pulled muscles dancing Cotswold Morris with any degree of energy. One of the sides that accompanied us danced Border and so we did not feel that we could do that. We experimented with a fairly traditional style of Molly, but never really enjoyed it. After a few years of this, it was suggested at a general meeting of the side that we should develop a winter version of Ampthill with stepping that did not have the sudden muscular movements of Cotswold.

In October 1998 we arranged a Sunday workshop and sorted out the basis of a winter "tradition" that we call Marston. We had thought that, as the stepping sequence was arranged to have the same sort of punctuation as Ampthill, we would have all the Ampthill choruses to make a ready-made repertoire. However, we found that the vast majority of Ampthill choruses just did not feel right for Marston. Nevertheless, we all enjoy the feel of Marston and in the intervening years we have worked hard on developing a repertoire. This is still providing us with interesting challenges⁹.

In the last paragraph I mentioned a Sunday workshop. These have been a key feature of our diary for several years now. We usually have one or two a year to consider innovations. For example, in the Autumn 1999 workshop we produced three entirely new Marston dances and the following year two new figures and three possible choruses. In some ways, these workshops embody

an important aspect of what Redbornstoke is: we have ownership of our material. Many of us have been with the side for quite a few years and have been a part of the maturation periods for both Ampthill and Marston. In some ways they have matured to accommodate the way we feel about the dance. We also regularly deconstruct our dances and everyone has an input into the reconstruction. Having our own sets of dances is another brick in the wall of the team.

And music. As a non-musician I am acutely aware of the pivotal role that our music has had in the development of the team and in our enjoyment of the dance. This could be the topic of another article – by a more knowledgeable author – but I acknowledge the debt that the side owes to our musicians.

So, where now? For many years now, our summer repertoire has been Ampthill and one “Black Book” Cotswold tradition. This latter changes every few years. We have been dancing Bledington for a while and felt that it was time for a change. To what? Well, we have not thought of a name for it yet. Suffice it to say that we had a Sunday workshop last Spring to look at possible Cotswold steppings and figures.

The story continues.

Brian Mander
December 2001

¹ Redbornstoke Morris celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversary in 2001. Our rear baldrick badge shows a three-legged ant. Although our official badge is the one on the front of the baldrick, the ant has been used increasingly over the last few years as a motif for the side.

² I emphasise that this is a personal view and I recognise that I am a sharp critic and that other members of the team may be puzzled by some of the negative aspects of my analysis.

³ Mrs Johnson or Johnston, a lady “of mature years”. David remembers that she had had some connection with the Esperance movement, possibly through her teachers’ training college.

⁴ In the wider context, of course, there was a huge amount of benefit in the promotion of the Morris, but the side itself suffered.

⁵ Billy Bones.

⁶ Or, maybe, luck has nothing to do with it.

⁷ The Brafront Guizers started in 1980 as a sub-set of Redbornstoke. Five of the Guizers still dance with Redbornstoke.

⁸ Bedfordshire Lace continue to accompany us. Black Annis (not the Leicestershire version) and Ragged Rainbow are now defunct.

⁹ We have a separate kit for this – almost a negative of our summer one – all black with shoulder ribbons.