

Morris Matters

PUB MORRIS

Ahh! Pink! And Sidmouth
is soon... I'll have to
invent a new team!



Contents of Volume 21, Number 2

<i>Bath City Morris and a fine pair of EARs</i>	2
<i>Sidmouth International Festival 2002</i>	7
<i>The John Gasson Memorial Jig Competition</i>	9
<i>“Room, Room, Ladies and Gentlemen...an introduction to the English mummers play.”... 11</i>	
<i>Grandson of Morris On</i>	13
<i>Long Lankin’s Beginners’ Guide to Folk Dance</i>	14
<i>Towersey Village Festival</i>	17
<i>Wantage Weekend 2002</i>	18
<i>A New Reference to Morris Dancing at Spelsbury?</i>	22
<i>Direct Roots 1</i>	24

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This year has been a funny one for weather – does your team have a strategy for winding up a dance if there’s a downpour once you’ve started? After Kirtlington we felt we should have one. Fortunately when we danced on the Golden Jubilee day the weather held out for a long, long procession. We would otherwise have got very, very wet. [We did all take bin liners with us in case it rained early on, as we had rather a long wait before the procession started and nowhere to leave umbrellas or waterproofs].

Thanks to Jill Griffiths and Steve Poole for their help in checking text and solving computer glitches. All morris-related articles, letters, cartoons are always welcome, especially from folks who haven’t written for the magazine before. My e-mail address is Beth.Neill@care4free.net

Bath City Morris and a fine pair of EARs

When you look at it, how come Bath University had a morris side at all? It appears that around the mid '60's a local chap who didn't even work at the university (he was involved in sales for AGFA) by the name of Eric Anthony Reynolds¹ - aka Tubby, to those who grew to know him as one of the influential figures in the growing morris revival - suggested running ceildhs at Bath Students' Union and these were a success. He got good morris sides to dance at the ceildhs – one of the first sides seen there was Chingford Morris men. University funds paid for the bands at ceildhs so they were of a high standard.

Following on from the ceildhs, in 1967 he had the notion of teaching some of the lads morris dancing. The activity was registered with the Students Union as the Folk Dance Group. This was because morris dancing was not the sole interest of those who attended the meetings, notably the various girls attached in various ways, whether through interest, morris men, musicians or whatever. So at Freshers' week there was a new, daft option to take up – and they did! Apparently not many of those who turned up to try the unknown activity fell by the wayside as socially it was such good fun – although it was rumoured that those who didn't stay the course did marginally better in their exams – morris could take up quite a lot of time! Every Wednesday was practice night and also some Sunday mornings for the keen ones, who were thus able to be first in the queue at the Bar when it opened at 12. They danced out most Saturdays. The posters for performances were created by Tubby making a screen print and running copies off by hand.

When not dancing they were quite active in other ways – members of Bath City Morris stood in 1975/1976 in the Students Union elections for Treasurer, Transport Secretary and even President. Melanie Fuller declined the office of President, Jill Coleman was leaving the University anyway - although the 200 and odd that voted for her as Treasurer hadn't realised that; her opposite number was quite worried! Adrian Ayley became Transport Secretary which meant they had unlimited access to University minibuses ... very useful for a Morris team.

The team was supplemented right from the start by some staff members already at Bath including Mike Harrington, Martin "Country Gentleman" Horler and Dave "The Box" Rushton – and later by others who formed Apley² Morris to continue dancing outside term time; these included Phill Butler, Tom Randall and Robin Pollard. As for music - well, not many students had an instrument, so there were Mike Harrington on guitar, Tubby on pipe and tabor, or fiddle³, Andy Allen on fiddle and Dave the Box – on box. Instruments were funded by the Folk Dance Society. There was also a team box which got handed around to anyone willing to try. Many musicians would never have dusted up their piano grade 5 or rusty violin

¹ With his wife, Elisabeth Agnes Reynolds (also known as Betty) it was noted they made a fine pair of EARs

² When Apley formed they suggested that as they now wanted to dance Fieldtown, Bath City should stop dancing it (... they didn't stop).

³ It is noted that he played concertina before the fiddle and still does – at home. Apparently the attraction of the three-holed whistle is that it can be played while driving at the same time! In 1969 he entered a folk competition playing pipe and tabor and came second. It is not recorded how many entered. He has honed up his skills since then and has been known to run workshops on playing.

skills to create the new music needed for the Morris if Tubby had not inspired them with his fiddle playing. John "Instant" Rowlands (1971 intake) recalls he got his own melodeon finally in his fourth year. The women later recruited Dave the Box as their musician, to whom many of the more light-hearted moments may be attributed, and they got by using tunes that merely 'fitted'. For instance, 'Keswick' was danced initially to the tune of the Magic Roundabout!



The format of the evenings initially was Morris and then social dancing. Every week at half past nine, morris dancing would stop and social or country dancing would begin - the girlfriends during the morris sessions were to occupy their time with folk-like pursuits such as corn dolly making! Around 1971, Tubby's wife, Betty Reynolds, felt that it was time the girlfriends had something more interesting to do, so she provided the impetus for the girls to start dancing too. Betty learnt two or three dances at Sidmouth from Roy Dommett (of whom more later) and passed them on to the Bath City Women that year. Two dances, Whiteladies, Aston, and Runcorn from the village of that name, were performed at Bath University Ceilidhs much to the amusement of most of the men. Looking back, this was not too surprising as they were danced in ordinary clothes and one of the dances in question was particularly monotonous.

When Val Parker joined the Folk Dance Group – initially through her interest in Dave "The Fool" Rannie - in 1971, she suggested they should wear some sort of kit. So, they created an easily obtainable kit which initially was short black skirts (this is the early '70's) white blouses, a red sash instead of baldricks and bells and ribbons around the wrist, to mirror the men's kit; they later added a floppy hat. Then, they went to the other extreme. Upon discussion they found that a generally 'olde worlde' style with longer skirts was considered suitable to the dances. Val took a trip to Cecil Sharp House to look at some of the photographs in Mary Neal's book and sketched a few examples of how these earlier morris women had dressed. They all seemed to be based on the ordinary working clothes that would have been worn at the time. In the text of the book, it was said that the dancers wore bells on elastic round their ankles, so they decided to adopt this feature along with aprons, white blouses and straw hats and wore long coloured skirts with white blouses. The men meanwhile wore black breeches (created by cutting trousers off), black and red baldricks, white(ish) shirts⁴ and socks and black(ish) shoes. Elegance was not a strong point – but they were students!

As for repertoire – this pre-dated the Black Book so everything was standard repertoire as danced by Ring teams. Martin Hewitt from Bampton came to Bath in 1972 and taught some Bampton dances – with the result that Bath didn't do it quite like the traditional side. By about 1974 Tubby, together with Roy, started to look at specific traditions – they taught the men Ducklington over one season and then took them as a demo team to a Ring instructional in 1976 at Cecil Sharp House. The men mostly danced Cotswold with a little bit of rapper and longsword for fun.

The women's repertoire was, as noted above, very limited to what Betty had been able to learn and then teach. Soon after she joined, Val also began a search for dances with the help of Dave, who was by now sympathetic to the cause. Whether he was genuinely won over, or had merely adopted an 'Anything-for-a-Quiet-Life' policy, she was never quite sure. He borrowed

⁴ John Rowlands recalls that for his first dance out his shirt was green as he didn't possess a white one

a copy of one of the Morris Books of Cecil Sharp's from his tutor at Bath and they found a dance which seemed to be what they were looking for. This was 'Maid of the Mill' as danced in Ilmington. Betty's enquiries around this time to Roy Dommett about dances done by women in the past proved fruitful and they were provided with the version of 'Maid of the Mill' danced by the women of Ilmington earlier in the 20th century and a completely new dance known as the 'Keswick Stage Dance'. They learnt 'Maid of the Mill' with Tubby's help, he being the only person present who knew the tune. The women first danced out informally in 1972 – the dances included 'Maid of the Mill' and 'Constant Billy', Adderbury.



To get around the still limited repertoire, Betty invited Roy to run a workshop. In March 1973 they held their first women's Morris workshop for members of Bath City, Cardiff and Cheltenham (who became England's Glory); Roy not only taught dances, but showed films of present day North West Morris including some examples of 'Fluffy Morris' as danced by girls in Lancashire. He also gave a talk on female involvement in morris generally.

In 1975 was held the inaugural meeting of the Women's Morris Federation (WMF) which had been driven by the efforts of many Bath City Women, but was organised by Somerset Maids since the Bath students were away during the summer. About a dozen sides attended including Cardiff Ladies, England's Glory, Somerset Maids and Windsor. During the weekend Roy and Tubby taught some dances thought to be less contentious for womens' teams i.e. avoiding traditional or much-danced ones like Bampton and looking more to ones like Ilmington where there was a record of women dancing it at some stage. There was also a coach tour; one bus broke down! Betty became the first President of WMF – rather a figurehead role; Helen Parsons from Cardiff was the first Secretary. Val did some of the groundwork in responding to press coverage and researching constitutions...and continued this after she had left Bath!

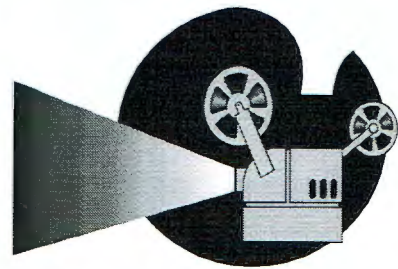
The Reynolds', whilst busy working full time and raising a family in a ramshackle house, provided a "home and family" for many students. Two of their boys, Jim and Simon, danced with Bath City Morris and went on to morris careers elsewhere – both first went to Hammersmith then Jim moved to Nottingham. Simon still dances with Cottonmill Clog. Dominic didn't dance after leaving home. The girls, Clare and Lizzie, didn't dance.

Those students that are mostly remembered by the Reynolds "kids" are the Morris folk who spent time with them as they invaded the house, ate, drank and danced. There were some, of course, who passed through the hospitality of the household and took much for granted but in the main, most remember Tubby and Betty as Big Kids themselves at times and loving the interaction with the next batch of students entering the university. Not only did they put up all those students – they also hosted the guests from the local folk club run at the Hat and Feathers in Bath on a Friday night – and booked them for a ceilidh on Saturday. So the students got to see Martin Carthy, John Kirkpatrick, Fred Wedlock and the like. A good education all round.

After the ceilidhs there would be a mass exodus, 5 miles out of Bath, to Timsbury where Tubby and Betty lived – and policemen became accustomed to stopping cars on the country road around midnight to be told by the students, "We're going out for tea and cakes".

So where did Tubby get his Morris knowledge and how did he link up with Roy Dommert? Tubby initially lived in Nailsworth and danced with Gloucester Morris men. He moved to Bath in 1961 and they lived on a houseboat at Saltford for 6 months before moving out to Timsbury. He started dancing with Bathampton Morris Men and the young boys Simon and Dominic appeared out in kit (as cute kids). He was also involved with Hereford Morris. Around the mid '60's, owing to differences of opinion within the team, Tubby moved back to dance with Gloucester. In 1984 he moved to Wootton Bassett with a new job and got more involved with Sherborne, with whom he had started dancing even from his home in Bath. And he still plays with them.

But back a few years...In 1963 Tubby had been told that it was worth going to Bampton to watch the dancing at May Bank Holiday – and there he met a man filming on an 8mm cine⁵ - and thus was born a long friendshipboth shared an interest in promoting morris and a sense of humour. A morris weekend at Halsway Manor began with Nibs Matthews as Leader in about 1964. Subsequently Roy ran the weekend and eventually Tubby played fiddle for it.



In 1970 and 1971 Tubby and Betty went to Sidmouth where Roy Dommert was teaching workshops and Tubby was asked to help by playing the music for Roy. This was probably the cementing of the “double act” – although Tubby himself notes that he and Roy probably only met once or twice a year – it’s just that’s how we all saw them, as a very good partnership teaching morris with all the fun that goes with it.

Through John and June Rowlands, who were living in New York, Roy and Tubby came to New York in 1978 for instructionals to the Ring O’Bells women’s Morris team⁶. They stayed with June and John, one on the sofa bed and one on the living room sofa! Tubby was also invited to Pinewoods English Week around 1980 to teach the morris. His sense of fun never failed and he solemnly taught such classics as the Hartley Lying-Down Dance⁷. The participants weren’t too sure if he was serious or not. I think he also taught some straight dances (including Sherborne). He did get invited back so his teaching must have gone down well. Roy also taught at Pinewoods.

One memory held by those early BCM members was the trips to Letterkenny Folk Festival(s). It seems that the Letterkenny folks had asked Bill Rutter for contact with some folk groups in England and he put them in touch with Bob Bradbury of West Somerset Morris who set up the contacts. The whole Reynolds family went for the first few years and the younger members remember long journeys in crowded cars! Simon in particular recalls that up to then they’d gone as a family to folk camps in England each year and at last in 1969 he had reached the age of 12 – he would be allowed to stay up till 9 o’clock this year...and instead they went off to

⁵ Apparently when the batteries run flat (as they were prone to do) the film records slowly so when it’s played back the dancers seem to go rather fast!!

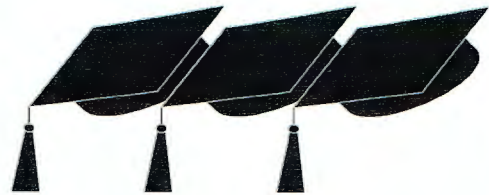
⁶ The first women in the USA to dance Morris

⁷ For the uninitiated, this entails lying on the floor, performing such figures as back to back and hey by writhing around on the floor. Probably best not done in whites.

Ireland. However, in Ireland it can't have been too bad as his Dad notes that he acquired two girlfriends and stayed out all night... By 1971 they were travelling by coach as Bath City Morris. The trip was funded by the Letterkenny International Folk Festival. Bath City Morris were the English morris team while other teams included Polish dancers from Trowbridge! In 1973 the women went along too.

Letterkenny was only one festival frequented by Bath City Morris. They remember also going to Bromyard, Lacock and Brighton. Other fond memories were of the "Albert's Out of Town" ceildhs – held at Bath each February as an alternative to the folk events at the Royal Albert Hall. The other early memory is both the men and women being invited to dance at Bampton through the invitation of Martin Hewitt.

Once the students moved on – what happened to them? Well, I was surprised to find that very few actually started a team of their own – but thinking about it they didn't have that much experience – just lots of enthusiasm. So they joined existing teams on the whole. Hammersmith Morris in London was an obvious mecca – having been founded by Hugh Rippon in the '60's. Apley has already been mentioned as a team formed by Bath City members, then there was Strand on the Green formed by Sarah Jarrett (1972 intake), Queen of Herts formed by Val Parker and Talgarth Morris in Wales formed by Adrian Ailey (1973 intake). Several characters emerged out of Bath City other than those already mentioned – think of Sally Wearing (1972), former Morris Federation Meetings Secretary, then Morris Federation President and until 2001, morris advisor for Sidmouth Festival, and Jeff Dando (1975) now resident in Bampton and sometime musician for Rogue Morris.



Bath City Morris itself has folded – the last dance out was held in 1995 or 1996; there was a 30th anniversary reunion in 1997 and the last ceildh was held in 1998.

This set of impressions and memories was compiled by Beth Neill, having gathered with John and June Rowlands, Jill Griffiths (née Coleman – 1972 intake), Val Parker and Simon Reynolds one night and left them talking. I also had recourse to the Bath City Morris WEB site, for which thanks to Steve Bazire (1973 intake) and Fiona Frank (1974 intake) who has set up an e-mail group to try to keep everyone in touch and an unpublished manuscript⁸ written by Val in the '70's when it was all fresh in her mind!

And just a few days after getting them all together – who should we see at Kirtlington as part of Sherborne Morris but Tubby Reynolds as one of their musicians.

Beth Neill

⁸ "And the Ladies go Dancing"- written sometime in the mid '70's by Val Parker

Sidmouth International Festival 2002

Lots of goodies are lined up for the festival this year as you can see from the official Morris On leaflet. As in recent years, morris dancing plays a special part in the plans with a major show and prominent spots on the Arena Theatre Stage. We're sure there'll be something new and spicy to revive that passionate spirit of the morris we all know and love. In particular, don't miss Grandson of Morris On, the Dragon Show and other Arena performances. Orion Longsword, Witchmen, Three Spires and Pig Dyke are completely new to the festival and complement the return of all time favourites like Bacup, Windsor, Newcastle Kingsmen and Hammersmith. Also confirmed is the return of one of the star teams from Italy – Ponte Caffaro - definitely not to be missed.

This year is our last year as morris advisors and we'd like to thank our replacements Tony Forster and Jenny Slade in their new roles, in anticipation of all the effort and enthusiasm they'll put into the tasks ahead of them. Don't hesitate to feed them your ideas and hopes for the future – they'll be there to listen and make things happen.

We became involved in the festival in 1989, a time when the morris part of the programme was beginning to look as if the golden era was seeping away. Having decided to put in writing our voluminous complaints about the timing of the workshops and other bits of the morris programme we'd taken exception to, we found ourselves precipitated headlong into doing it ourselves. Of course, it's not that easy to get it right. We have tried to present a mixture of traditional and revival, all the possible types of morris, black and white shoe, male, female and mixed teams, big and loud, small and precise. We've been rewarded by performances from the heart strengthened by the professionalism of dedicated hard work that give morris and the festival the good name it deserves.

It's hard to pick out the special events but we did manage to engineer the set dance competition that was nothing if not controversial - who could ever forget the Fez Heads' sand dance - or the arguments that raged all night afterwards. The morris party was introduced to get the morris arguments off the streets into a more convivial atmosphere. From the animal-like games of the first party in the Black Horse to the delicacy of Swan Lake in the Anchor gardens – this has certainly bought out another side of the team performances. Morris only events made it to the main stage in the form of Whistlestop, and the Mary Neal show and Flashback were unique as well as memorable. There have been some great moments but as organisers, most of our time has been spent running around backstage, desperately hoping it looks all OK out front.

Helping to plan the morris programme for the festival is always great fun, a pleasure that we've been able to enjoy for the last ten years. Starting with encouragement from Eddie Upton, the artistic director Alan Bearman has been supportive to everything

(well almost) we've tried to do. We have to thank Derek Schofield of course for the endless source of enthusiasm for the programme and Tracey Rose and Seven Champions for the excellent John Gasson Memorial Jig competition.

Throughout our ten years, the teams and individuals who have helped us, responded to our requests, exhausted themselves for the festival and leaned endlessly on the bar with us at LNE, have been numerous. In our retirement, we will remember you all with affection (whilst still leaning on the bar at LNE...).

Sue Swift and Sally Wearing

Morris Advisors

And from the official pen.....

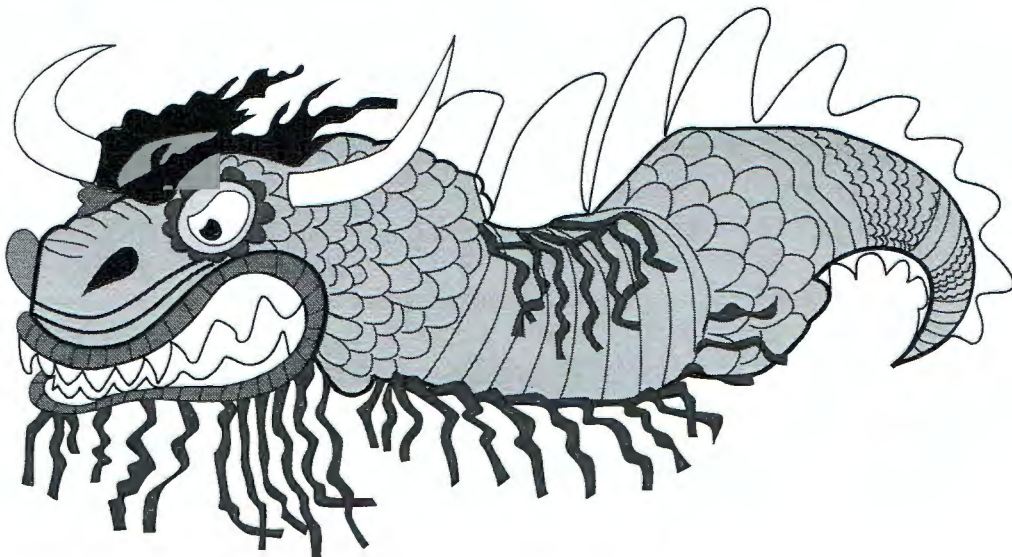
“The Festival prides itself in providing a wealth of top quality workshops throughout the week. This year the list includes the opportunity to get to grips with everything from percussive dance, harmony singing, Dragon building, old time music, Dutch dance, Morris, Storytelling and much more. By popular request this year we are introducing a Workshop Season ticket for those who have other commitments during the week but would like to take advantage of our excellent range of top class workshops.”

For details of tickets etc. contact:

The Festival Office
PO Box 296
Matlock, Derbyshire
DE4 3XU

Phone: 01629 760123

E-mail info@sidmouthfestival.com



The John Gasson Memorial Jig Competition

Looking back and Looking forward

When we started the Jig Competition the aim was to improve the standards of and promote excellence in jig dancing because we felt that this was a good way to honour John Gasson's memory as he had been an excellent jig dancer.

Over the years the Jig Competition has had its high and low points and recently we had been looking at ways to take the competition forward and give it new life. The idea of having double jigs was very good because it gave people the chance to have a go at the jig competition if they were too scared to compete by themselves. Hopefully they will then graduate to the single jig when they feel confident enough. I was happy with the first year of the double category and hope that it will go from strength to strength.

The Audience Appeal prize I feel is very much needed. Too many dancers forget that they are dancing to an audience and in some way they need to acknowledge this. Sadly when the judges are awarding the prizes there are often not many entrants under discussion for this section.

We dropped the Innovation Prize because we felt that it had run its course and as we are limited in how many prizes we can have, it was time to have the double jigs instead.

In the early years our entries were as high as 26 but this was too many. The lowest, I think, has been 9 (but they were of an excellent standard) and we considered discontinuing the competition but instead we looked at what we could do to improve it. We are always open to suggestions and criticisms.

We must not forget that the musicians are as important as the dancers in the competition. We have had a wide variety of instruments including a cello, drums, pipe and tabor, melodeons, concertinas, violins, electric guitar and voice. Most impressive are the dancers who provide their own music as well.



There is often contentious debate about what should/should not be allowed in the competition but it is interesting to see different interpretations. I am especially pleased to see the younger entrants and of course Harriet Vail was the youngest entrant that we have ever had and she went on to win.

The judges are to be admired for taking on the challenge because it is a very difficult task. When we are putting together the judging panel we try to balance the different

views on the interpretation of morris. Our judges this year are: Cherry Simmons, Mike Wilson Jones, Sally Wearing and Jethro Anderson. By having a continuation judge and having the winning jigs of the previous year demonstrated at the beginning of the competition we hope to maintain standards. We do have a rule that says we do not have to award the prizes if we do not think that the standard is good enough but I do not believe that we will ever need to use this rule.

Our thanks to our sponsors who are The Seven Champions, Pete Collinson, Daryl Hurtt and Chris and Tracey Rose.

Thank you to everyone who has supported the competition over the years – I hope that you feel it has been worthwhile and that your dancing has improved because of it. 15 years ago I do not believe that jig sides would have been booked at festivals but they are today.

The best thing for me about the Competition is seeing dancers improving over the years. Listening to what the judges suggest (we try to make all feedback constructive), working on this and eventually winning. They really deserve to win and it means that the Competition is achieving its goals.

For entry forms:

Email: chris@ewell.demon.co.uk

or contact Sidmouth Festival Office.

Tracey Rose



“Room, Room, Ladies and Gentlemen...an introduction to the English mummers play.”

Newly published by the EFDSS in conjunction with the Folklore Society, is this 120 page, glossy-cover paperback⁹, number one in the ‘English Folk Arts Series’. Written by Eddie Cass and Steve Roud, with photographs from Doc Rowe’s collection, *Room, Room, Ladies and Gentlemen* aims to provide an introduction to the mummers’ play in England from both the “scholarly” and the “practical” point of view. Organised into five sections, the booklet introduces the History of the English Mumming Play, describes Mummers and their Performance, and gives a Guide to Performance and Sources of Information before ending with the Play Texts for nine complete plays.

Section One, *History*, does not attempt to be anything more than an introduction. Having tried to define a Mummer, it tackles the inevitable ‘pre-Christian fertility’ origin theories head-on to state the facts as they are known and the inevitable conclusion that such customs came into being around the early eighteenth or perhaps late seventeenth centuries. In this respect, the *History* is satisfyingly plausible and leads easily into a description of the heyday, and subsequent decline and revival, of the plays. The clash between scholarship and practicality is most obvious in this section: there are no sources cited and no reference given for the books and play titles quoted, which we found very frustrating. We would also have liked to have seen more of an attempt to place mumming in context with other related customs such as Wassailing, First Footing, etc. Their absence is understandable, however, if the target readership is understood to be busy teachers looking for resources to support a hectic curriculum.

The next section, *Mummers and their Performance*, is the real focus of this booklet. Here the authors describe the different types of play found (the hero-combat, the wooing play and the sword-dance play), the times of performance, the characters found, the costumes, and the venues used. They also go on to discuss who performed such plays and make some attempt to describe their attitudes and motives. Practicality is master here too, with the emphasis on describing what is known about the traditional plays and players. Photographs and quotations convey something of the excitement and mystery of past performance. The style is relaxed but confident, every paragraph serving both as a source of informed data and as inspiration or example for prospective participants.

Section Three, *A Guide to Performance*, is clearly aimed at teachers, providing pragmatic advice both on aspects of performance and on the adaptation of traditional texts for the school group and modern cultural context. Although sometimes

⁹ Cass, E. and Roud, S., *Room, Room, Ladies and Gentlemen ... an introduction to the English Mummers’ Play*, London (EFDSS): 2002. ISBN 0-854181-85-7.

Grandson of Morris On

I'd heard about this CD production before I received the review copy, so was very keen to hear it. In case any of you out there who weren't around and excited by Morris in the '70's, there were two LP's (yes, before CD's were around!) named Morris On (1972) and Son of Morris On (1976), both produced by Ashley Hutchings and they got played again and again in my enthusiasm for my new hobby or maybe it should have been defined as a way of life in the way it took over. So, I listened to this new CD and then dug out the old vinyls to see how they compared. Initially I was disappointed by how little "true" morris (in my view) was on it, but it has grown on me after several plays.

I recall when I used to listen to the earlier records that I could happily have dispensed with the doggerel; I just wanted to hear the morris tunes – and I felt that even more so this time. There are some great tunes on there, newly written – but I'd like to know which morris teams or individuals are using them. Why all the new songs? By all means include Adderbury or any other team who actually sing as part of their repertoire but some of the other songs seemed contrived. It has the air of a concert performance, with gaps to give the performers time to rest or change kit – but this wasn't a live show or anything (it will be at Sidmouth but I think that's an afterthought).

I like the touch (used on the LP's) of using live teams to dance to their established musicians, albeit with some embellishment on the tracks; in this case the performers were Adderbury Morris Men, Stroud Morris Dancers and Outside Capering Crew. According to the notes they all turned out in kit – for the sound recording. Quite right too. It would have been nice to include pictures of the teams (posed or even dancing; tricky to achieve a good shot but I can wish) in the booklet. I would rather have seen pictures of those dancing on the record than the posed artistes.

The last song, "This is the Morris My Friend", suggests in the lyrics that this disc could be one way to ensure the survival of the morris – also that it is still handed on from father to son. How many dancing father-and-sons (or mother-and-daughters) do you know dancing morris?

It's a good source of tunes and it would probably sound great played loud driving off to a morris tour early in the morning. So buy it, enjoy it and get to see the show at Sidmouth if you're there.

Beth Neill

"Grandson of Morris On" is obtainable for £12.99 (P&P in UK 50p; £1.00 Europe and £2.00 rest of world) from:

Talking Elephant records	e-mail:	talkelephant@aol.com
	Website:	www.talkingelephant.com
8 Martin Dene Bexleyheath Kent DA6 8NA	phone:	0208 301 2828

Long Lankin's Beginners' Guide to Folk Dance

One of the biggest problems for the newcomer wanting to perform folk dance is to decide which style of dance to learn. The plethora of sides and styles can be confusing for the beginner so I have decided to offer some timely advice to guide the would-be dancer towards an appropriate choice. You will notice that I have avoided discussing issues such as "Ring, Federation or Open" or the relative merits of men/women only versus mixed sides - these are not issues for beginners. In fact these issues ought to be carefully hidden from them until they encounter, (if male) their first feminist side and (if female) their first Ring side. In this Beginners' Guide I focus on the questions and issues of most importance to the new starter.

Cotswold Morris

There are many traditions but these can be simplified to two basic types: stick dances and hankie dances. There is a definite, though informal league amongst Cotswold sides and the determining question in selecting a side to join is do you want to dance to keep fit or are you willing to keep fit to dance? Most sides either wear breeches or "whites": the choice is either feeling an idiot on your way to and from a dance-out or constantly having to wash your outfit, not an easy one, that. However it is probably easiest to join a Cotswold side simply because they are the most common (in the sense of being the most frequently found rather than their habits - but there again.)

Border Morris

As a style Border Morris is gaining in popularity, the problem is that so many sides have adopted it because it is different that it is now commonplace. It is reputedly the easiest of the Morris styles to do but the hardest to do well: the style is more relaxed and many take this as an excuse for sloppiness. It can also attract the less capable dancer who, while good for participation, can be a problem when it comes to public displays. Do not attempt Border Morris if you have any preference for cleanliness or if you object to wearing make-up, the necessity of the latter makes the former difficult. On the other hand it can be therapeutic: with the rag coats many sides wear, dancing can be like jumping around in a sauna.

North West Morris

Also known as Clog Morris and if you want to walk down the street sounding like a carthorse this is the style for you. Personally if I had wanted to parade about with a fruit bowl on my head I would have become a Carmen Miranda impersonator (ask your parents). However if you find you do not like it, the clogs can be used for gardening and the short batons make useful dibbers. It can be spectacular to watch, but watch a side that specialises in it: a number of sides have this as a "second string" and it usually shows.

Garland Dancing

This is Clog Morris without the fruit bowls - instead you raid a garden and carry off the flowers tied to beanpoles. To balance all the misogynists you find in the other traditions this style of dance tends to be women only, though it is probably thought too soppy for feminists.

Molly

This is Border Morris without the sticks and the same points apply. However it has possibly more in common with contact sports than dancing and could more accurately be described as “Synchronised Wrestling” (but without the referee). If you are in any way fussy about who touches you steer clear of this style. On the other hand the traditional dances were very poorly recorded so most sides make them up (sometimes as they go along), this makes it a good choice for new groups with little experience.

Rapper

Originally a North Eastern tradition, the only good thing about it is that it can be done indoors. It is most like that children’s game where you hold hands in a circle and keep looping in and out, over and under each other until you have formed a big knot - only it is done to music. If you have a thing about “personal space”, suffer from body odour or are particularly attached to your fingers avoid this tradition.

Long Sword

Sometimes considered as “Rapper for Wimps”, it is not that common and its rarity gives it an added value. It is perhaps due for a revival possibly by those who are bored with Border and Molly and want something more disciplined and less sweaty (but are too old for Cotswold).

Step Dancing

It is arguable (at least by me) that there is little difference between the various forms of step dance: each having been influenced heavily by the others. They have thus developed subtle differences in dress, footwear and outlook. I will deal only with the three main domestic styles and I acknowledge that many areas have their own variations.

Clog

There are two dangers in Clog dancing: one is falling off; the other is kicking your own ankles. On the other hand they are one of the few groups able to clear Morris dancers away from the bar (simply cry “*Mind Yer Feet!*” and wade straight in). Performance styles tend to vary between the discipline of Irish dancing, the exuberance of Appalachian or the showmanship of Tap Dance (or any combination thereof). Whichever you chose somebody is bound to criticise.

Scottish / Highland

Rare amongst step dancing in that it is more associated with men than women. The only restriction is that you need to have a decent pair of knees and the right shaped posterior so that the kilt hangs properly. Large inheritances are useful to pay for the outfit and there is added *kudos* if you actually have a family tartan. However this is step dancing for connoisseurs, not the average clodhopper, if you are no good somebody will quietly suggest you try clog dancing.

Irish

If you enjoy dancing with the whole body - forget it - this is dancing from the waist down only! If, on the other hand, you want discipline this is the one for you. Until recently this dance form was particularly associated with little girls in stylised dresses, though there is now a *Post-Riverdance* trend to wear *little black numbers* (as they say in the fashion trade). It has become *de rigueur* for men to wear open silk shirts and tight black trousers so knees and posteriors are again an important issue.

Country Dance

There is a school of thought that claims this is really social dance and should not be done as a display except by primary school children - the adult displays I have seen recently would support this view. I am in any case loath to upset the fundamentalists by including it here except to lament the lack of interest in the Playford dances, which seem to have been hi-jacked by Early Dance groups (this is a reference to the musical form *not* devotees of lunchtime dances).

So, there it is: a complete run through of the various British dance styles you might find performed at any folk festival. I recommend you use this guide when you get asked awkward questions by members of the public or even by friends. If none of this appeals suggest they take-up Line Dancing (Appalachian step dancing for the pedestrianly challenged).

Long Lankin

1 This article originally appeared in two parts in "*The Unicorn*" folk magazine Nos 64 & 65 (Oct-Dec 1998 & Jan-March 1999 respectively).

Towersey Village Festival

In case you haven't yet been – why not try Towersey this year: Towersey Village Festival first took place in 1965 and was a one-day celebration to raise money for the village. 38 years later it now lasts for 5 days and is still going strong, proving that this is a little village with plenty of big ideas that knows how to celebrate. In 2002 the festival boasts an international guest list with top name family entertainers, musicians and dance bands. The organisers will open the gates to the visiting campers on Thursday 22nd August, start the music playing and complete the programme with a grand finale on the evening of Bank Holiday Monday 26th August.

The festival used to be called a weekend event; now it is almost a week. It offers 5 nights of camping for only £12, over a dozen concerts, 10 dances, 8 arena shows, a tremendously busy Children's festival and one of the best and most popular festivals on the community arts scene, regularly selling out its season tickets. Visitors can also drop into the showground which offers an array of food, craft and market stalls with everything on offer from wall hangings to burgers and is itself a great family day out.

The list of artists en route to Towersey grows throughout the year; the Kate Rusby Trio will fly in from a festival in Denmark to be on the Towersey stage on Monday evening. All the way from Scotland are two of the finest musicians on the traditional music circuit – fiddler Aly Bain and master accordion player Phil Cunningham. From the Highlands and Islands, Blazin' Fiddles burst in with their spectacular show of explosive fiddle styles. Other artists include the Irish quartet, The Josephine Marsh Band, the English Acoustic Collective (featuring Chris Wood, Robert Harbron and John Dipper), John Kirkpatrick, Last Night's Fun and Ian Bruce.

For details contact:
Festival Office
PO Box 296
Matlock, Derbyshire
DE4 3XU

Email: towersey@mrscasey.co.uk

Phone: 01629 760345

Wantage Weekend 2002

Wantage Weekend 2002, held 8-10 March, will hold a special place in history. Roy Dommett began this event almost 20 years ago as an opportunity to bring together morris enthusiasts of all ages and levels, sending them home with heads spinning from the whirlwind of information (and liquid refreshment) and with bodies aching in places they never knew existed. The aim has always been to encourage a deeper understanding of morris through lectures, discussion, and above all, participation. History, contemporary context, traditional repertoire and choreographic opportunities all play a role in the event. The well-attended meetings have been organized and run by Tony Forster, along with others from the Morris Federation and Open Morris, with participants pitching in wherever necessary. Roy's unsurpassed knowledge was the main draw, but the camaraderie and depth of discussion throughout the weekend was an obvious enhancement for all who attended.

Roy attempted to retire from teaching at Wantage recently but found himself back at the helm, calling the event a retrospective look at previous Wantage weekends. This year, however, he was finally able to arrive after the starting time on Saturday, teach just one of the many workshops, and sit back to watch and chat for the rest of the day, regaling us with a topic of choice in the evening. He and Marguerite relaxed and enjoyed themselves, and we welcomed Roy's contributions as much as ever. Meanwhile, Wantage 2002, ably run by Adrian Williams et. al., turned participants' brains and muscles inside out as much as in previous years. Perhaps more so, as the 9 workshops involved 8 different teachers!

The weekend began on Friday with participants gathering for supper at the nearby Ridgeway Youth Hostel, after which tables were moved into every available corner and the dancing began. This workshop was led by Brian Mander of Redbornestoke with music by Adrian Williams, and focused on the dances of Ampthill, Redbornestoke's invented tradition. The style was Cotswold with a slightly borderish flavour, its figures emphasizing the explosive jump in the second bar. For example, in "Sphincter" (imagine what you like) the set closed in for the big jump in the centre. Creativity figured highly: one of the dances used a hymn tune, with what Adrian called an "extra beat" to make it fit; another dance was choreographed for 5, in tribute to the team's late fool, with geometry adjusted accordingly. The biggest problem, as always in the Youth Hostel, was space; however, quiet negotiation and tag-team demonstrations kept 6 sets' worth of dancers out of each other's way for the most part.

Saturday's Lain's Barn sessions opened with a Kirtlington workshop led by Tim Radford, with music by Jan Elliott. At this point I should at least acknowledge the pitfalls of reviewing a session one has played for. I beg the reader's indulgence for attempting the task from such an intimate point of view.

Tim's session, called "Reconstruction and Deconstruction," focused on two dances: Trunkles, the only collected dance with a complete notation; and "The Scottish Dance," Tim's most recent composition in the style. Teaching Trunkles as an introduction to any Cotswold tradition takes a while, and the task was approached methodically, with plenty of repetition

and some comfortingly solid aesthetic rules. Dancers in #1 and #2 positions soon learned that there was no rest for the weary, as tops led the way in all the figures.

The Scottish Dance was demonstrated on a stunning group of guinea pigs; unfortunately this is missing from the video footage as the tape ran out. This dance retains Kirtlington's essential stylistic features, but adds variety within the tradition with changes to basic elements such as figures. According to Tim, the pun on the notorious Shakespeare play comes from the gruelling mix of physical and intellectual challenges in this dance -- not from any resemblance to Highland reels!

After a mid-morning break, Mr. Dommett entered the fray with a set of Basque hoop dances, to cheerful polkas played by Sue Swift. He had come armed with mini-garlands cut from garden hose, in imitation of the wooden "hoops" used in approximately 200 Basque towns, each of which has its own distinctive dance. The elaborate costumes and the festive atmosphere had to be imagined, as we worked through complex set-shifting geometry at ever-increasing speeds, striking garlands every which way. (I was glad I had brought gloves -- hosepipe hits hard!) We focused mainly on these intricate dance choruses, with Roy increasing the musical tempo till we were weak from dashing about and laughing so much we could hardly see.

After a hearty lunch we continued with a workshop led by Jameson Wooders and Jerry West. Entitled "Beyond the Black Book," it focused on Berkshire Bedlam's Fieldtown-based Heel and Toe dances. Several collected traditions include such dances, though modern teams often avoid them. Berkshire Bedlam has taken the opposite approach, inventing new dances to provide variety within the team style. We learned the basic movements through the aptly named "Coconut Dance," then twisted our brains with a dance in waltz time inspired by Adderbury's "Sweet Jenny Jones." We were then assigned the task of making up a heel & toe dance in 5/4 rhythm. It was interesting to note that no two sets came up with the same basic step, and particularly amusing to see how elements of the previous sessions crept into the choreography.

After a tea break came "Bordering on Morris," led by Martin and Val Day of Elephant Up a Pole. Val got a band together to give a good thumping sound for the rhythmic single stepping, while Martin taught two of the team's border dances. The first incorporated some interesting square-based geometry in the figures, and the second, a more elaborate dance, brought home the risk-taking aspect of morris; in one figure, for example, dancers moved down the set in pairs, sticking while stepping. One in each pair had to move backwards, blindly trusting the Lain's Barn's floor to hold everyone comfortably, which of course it did.

There followed a spectacular feast, during which an afternoon meeting between Roy and the Morris Federation (et. al.) continued in high gear. Organizing Roy's enormous archive was the topic at hand, and several projects were initiated or furthered by this important meeting. The rest of the participants enjoyed conversation and entertainment in the form of video footage from the Sidmouth festival and other dance events along with books, photos and a racy morris calendar (!) there was even an impromptu rapper set using hosepipe -- what else? -- for swords.

The evening continued with a talk by Roy himself. His presentation ranged far and wide, from the history of morris in all its variety to a theoretical relation between morris sticks and Victorian policemen's truncheons¹¹ (and on to batons as badges of office in general). It ended with a lively discussion about creativity and the use of influences from outside the English folk traditions -- a tidy transition from the discussion back into action, as chairs were moved and dozing participants roused for Saturday's final session

Led by Sally Wearing with music by Sue Swift, the theme was "Old Dances/New Tunes." The aim was to practise standard Cotswold dances to their collected tunes, and then adapt the movements as necessary to other tunes from widely varying sources. Being both a dance musician and an ethnomusicologist I took great delight in this, and thought it followed well from the 5/4 heel & toe inventions. Bucknell's "Bonnet So Blue" was danced to a Swedish tune in 12/8 time, and Ducklington's "Lollipop Man" to an Irish reel and a slip jig in 9/8, after which we discussed the relative merits of the tunes as far as style, emphasis and other points. Not surprisingly, the collected tunes were deemed best, but it was a good lesson in tune selection for new choreography.

The only point I thought was missed was one made on Friday, when Adrian described adding a beat to a hymn. That is, the process can work equally well in reverse: the tunes themselves can be adapted to make them more "morris-like," as many choreographers and musicians have discovered. Nonetheless, this session was a real mind-stretcher, as evidenced by the cacophony of counting heard round the room. Sue's shouts of "Now!" at appropriate junctures in the phrase were also very helpful.

The party at the Youth Hostel went on till very late and got very silly. (So what did you expect?)

Sunday began with the tea and coffee disappearing a bit more quickly than it had on Saturday, but when we arrived at Lain's Barn we were ready (or at least upright). Tony Forster opened the day with a session on the Molly dancing of his team, Pig Dyke, with music by Robin Griggs. He began with a rare collected dance that highlighted three distinct formations: hands around, triangles, and swinging partners. This was followed by a Pig Dyke dance in which those formations became a base for new choreography. Triangles, for example, became first a zigzagging hey and then a double triangle with an hourglass shape. The invented dance was exciting and well constructed, though difficult enough to make a decent performance nearly impossible in the allotted time (at least for this addled brain).

Two workshops remained. John Lewis of Great Western led the first of these, with volunteer musicians from Pig Dyke and Pigsty. Entitled "repertoire and performance," it included two dances from opposite ends of the morris spectrum.

First was a dance familiar to many of us: the Bampton jig Princess Royal. Having explained that each Great Western foreman taught the dance differently, John brought the point home via some confusion in how it actually goes. Thus many of us fell to performing it the way we

¹¹ Jan actually used the word "billy club" but we English call them truncheons!

know it, with interesting results and occasional near-collisions. To his credit, John had thought to organize us in pairs facing pairs across the room, making good use of the limited space. Next came a Shropshire Bedlam dance entitled The Raddled Tup. Deliciously difficult, this gem combined 4, 5 and 7 beat sticking phrases with creative geometric figures, giving some of us vertigo when the sets were turned sideways for demonstration. Thanks once again to musician Sue Swift for shouting "Now!" at the starting beat of the complex introduction.

This final workshop of this extraordinary Wantage Weekend was led by Tim Radford (who was apparently given two slots because he had travelled the farthest). He had contemplated teaching "Scrambled Bampton" in the contrasting styles of the village's three teams, but opted instead for the tradition of his home team, The Adderbury Morris Men. His aim was to run the workshop as he would a team practice, going through all the figures and incorporating a "movement theme" for the event. In this case he taught two handkerchief dances containing a unique two-footed jump in the chorus. The first, Haste to the Wedding, was a collected dance; the second, Betty Windsor, involved new choreography to a tune composed by Adderbury fiddler Chris Leslie. The weekend ended fittingly with the Adderbury recessional dance, "Shepherds Away," in which all participants joined into one long set, sang heartily and danced their way to a well-deserved rest.

Congratulations are due to Adrian and his crew, who put on an extremely well run event. In addition to the organizing and communication, Adrian lugged a carload of supplies so heavy he had to overpressurise his tyres to transport it to Lain's Barn. He made all necessary announcements, using a whistle to support his voice as it gradually succumbed. He put out of his own pocket for drinks, trusting the honour system to repay him. And he videotaped the sessions throughout the weekend.

The Morris Federation also helped in myriad ways, from Sally Wearing's contributions of video footage and equipment to the large array of books and materials on display. Others too numerous to mention pitched in to lug tables, clear dishes, tidy the self-service kitchen, etc.; and we all helped to consume nearly all of the liquid refreshment, so that Adrian could put the air pressure in his tyres back to normal for the drive home!

Adrian had contemplated teaching a workshop himself during the weekend, but by the end he had used up both his energy and his voice. His focus would have been "Recreation of Morris from the Past," so we look forward to that next time. In addition, there were more volunteer session leaders than there were workshop slots, so there is certain to be plenty of material at hand and plenty of motivation among participants for the next variety-filled Wantage Weekend. Till then, we can absorb and apply the understanding gained this year: traditions, repertoire, composition, music & dance relations, teaching styles ... as always, the more you look the more you find. Thanks to Roy and to all who have helped carry on this fine tradition.

Jan Elliott.

A New Reference to Morris Dancing at Spelsbury?

Research into Morris dancing is riddled with tantalising historical snippets which may or may not be relevant, but which are generally impossible to prove either way. Evidence relating to the village of Spelsbury, located in the Wychwood region of Oxfordshire, offers an interesting case study, in that a set of female morris dancers in contemporaneous performance with a male set is confirmed, almost certainly during the period 1815 to 1825. The female side disbanded around this date, but the male team continued for some time.

During an ongoing systematic checking of the local newspapers I recently spotted familiar Spelsbury surnames in Magistrates Court, as reported in the *Oxford Chronicle and Berks and Bucks Gazette*, 13 May 1854, page 5.

CHADLINGTON DIVISION PETTY SESSIONS, TOWN HALL, CHIPPING-NORTON, MAY 10

John Hiatt and Edward Harling, labourers, for assaulting Jas. Benfield, at Spelsbury, were each fined, with costs, 7s. Paid.

Thos. Bowell, of the same place, for assaulting Jas. Curwood, schoolmaster of Spelsbury, fined, with costs, 20s. 6d.

Thos. Bowell, for assaulting Edward Sturdey, fined, including costs, 20s. Paid.

The above persons with others, viz., John Hiatt, Thos. Bowell, Edw. Harling, Chas. Rooke, Henry Tooley, Jas. Knight, and Jos. Sheppard, were also charged with trespass, and were dismissed on payment of 3s. each.

This prompted me to cast my net more widely, and a report in Jackson's *Oxford Journal*, 13 May 1854, page 8, provided further details.

CHIPPING NORTON

A group of young men, who have been a source of considerable annoyance in the parish of Spelsbury, were charged before the Magistrates, on Wednesday last, with assaulting several persons, and with trespass and wilful damage, on the night of the 1st instant. The following are the particulars:- John Hiatt and Edward Harling, for assaulting Jas. Burfield, were fined 7s. each; John Hiatt, for assaulting Eliza Mayo, was fined 40s.; John Hiatt, Edward Harling, Thomas Bowell, James Knight, Chas. Rook, Henry Tooley, and Joseph Sheppard, charged by Mr. James Curwood with trespassing on his premises, and wilfully damaging his property, were fined 20s.; Thomas Bowell, for assaulting Mr. James Curwood, was fined 20s.; the same, for assaulting Edward Sturdey, was fined 20s.; he was also charged with assaulting Thomas Hitchcocks, but this case was not proved. The whole of the defendants were severely reprimanded by the Magistrates, but in consideration of a letter

from their Clergyman, and of the probability of their not knowing the consequences of their misconduct, the fines were levied accordingly.

Thomas Bowell was aged 27 at that date, Edward Harling 23, John Hiatt 22, James Knight 18, Charles Rook 18, Joseph Sheppard 17 and Henry Tooley 20. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the evidence is the fact that three of these were sons of dancers in an earlier female set: Hiatt of Elizabeth Fowler, James Winter Knight of Mary Knight, and Rook of Charlotte Cross. In addition, Bowell was also a surname associated with an earlier incarnation of the Spelsbury Morris.

The criminal activity occurred, perhaps significantly, on the ancient holiday of May Day, about five weeks prior to Whitsun (Whit Monday being 5 June that year), and may perhaps conceal either a public performance or a practise session. 1854 falls within the well-documented transitional period of perceptions regarding the morris, with the old recreational forms being rapidly eroded during that decade. Dover's Games at Chipping Campden had been forceably terminated two years earlier; and much closer to home, the annual Whitsuntide Hunt in Wychwood Forest was imminently about to be enacted for the last time that very year.

I believe that these reports may refer to activity by a Spelsbury Morris set. At this late date, however, we are unlikely ever to know for certain.

Keith Chandler
June 2002

NOTE:

All the material then available was analysed in my article, '*Morris dancing at Spelsbury: an analytical essay*', Oxfordshire Local History 1, number 7 (Autumn 1983), 2-13. The primary data were later summarised in my book *Morris Dancing in the English South Midlands, 1660-1900. A Chronological Gazetteer* (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, for the Folklore Society, 1993); which has recently been republished (with its companion volume and many other articles) in CD-ROM format. Further details may be found at: www.mustrad.org.uk.

Direct Roots 1

Direct Roots, the major guide to folk, roots and related music and arts published in June 2001, still has several months shelf life and is now on offer to clear stocks at only £10 (was £17.50) including postage and packing in the UK (for overseas rates please call the number below).

This is your opportunity to get your hands on literally thousands of contact addresses in the folk and roots music scene. Buy one now; it will keep you going for some months and has special articles that will not be repeated in the next edition.

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