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Happy New Year!

There are various themes in this issue from dragons in Tony Lidington's reminiscence of the Night at Sidmouth and in George Frampton's visit to the Salisbury Giant to following in Kemp's footsteps one way or another in the articles by Julie Mackenzie and Sue Swift. Thanks to all the researchers and enthusiasts who steadily contribute articles; without you this magazine wouldn't exist! Please do write in about anything you feel is related to Morris – do you agree with what other people have said?

On a worrying note, how many times did you hear about the threats to music performances? Petitions were flying around. Let's hope bureaucracy doesn't hamper our tours in the future too much.

Beth

Hands on Music Weekends

Strings and Bows	1 st – 2 nd February 2003
Accordians	15 th - 16 th February 2003
Winds (brass, whistle etc)	1 st – 2 nd March 2003
Voices	15 th – 16 th March 2003

For further information contact Hands On Music Weekends
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Sidmouth's *Night of Dragons* – The Director's Cut!

The *Night of Dragons* had been in the planning for nearly a year, but it was with only 2 weeks to go that I knew I would be there – not just working on it, but directing the whole two-hour, outdoor extravaganza for a cast of 400 and an audience that could have reached 3000!

Sidmouth International Folk Festival has a long and proud tradition, with many participants involved for decades...with beards to match! My involvement has been as a performer over the last 8 years with *The Pierrotters* (Britain's last-remaining professional seaside Pierrot troupe) and *Poppets Puppets* (the bastions of nonsense in the kids' glade). However, directing large, spectacular events is a common part of my work – having created outdoor shows for companies like Welfare State International, Major Road and Opera North, as well as pantomimes for the Liverpool Everyman, Leeds City Varieties and Wakefield Opera House.

My work is very varied, but there is a common strand running through it all and that is trying to combine art with accessibility – or to put it another way, create good quality popular entertainment.

I believe that performances should reflect and reflect upon their communities: so the opportunity to work on “Dragons” with such a wide variety of multi-cultural influences, combining professional and participatory artists across a range of artforms, was an exciting chance to explore new forms of expression and have fun into the bargain.

So, I had a Chinese dragon, an African dragon, the dragons of fear in Samia Malik and Leon Rosselson's songs, a dragon band, a dragon choir, some Punjabi dancers (not sure what their dragon connection was, but they looked good), a St George and the Dragon (played in mumming style by Jim Woodland and Marilyn Tucker) and 100 morris dancers.

I have to say that I was quietly confident of the staging and management of all the above – but 100 morris dancers? I knew that Paul Wilson (the musical director from Wren Trust) had had meetings with Windsor Morris and I knew that John Tams had written a tune. This, I thought, bode well, for Paul had been working on the project right through and told me that Windsor Morris seemed a very sorted bunch and I had been a fan of John Tams ever since I saw the Albion Band in the Mysteries at the National as a spotty teenager who delightedly discovered that rock and folk could combine with theatre to create a life-affirming performance event. However, the thought of trying to co-ordinate 200+ jingling feet, 15 or more sides – each with their own vision and version of the dance and a posse of hobby-horses ready to cause mayhem, filled me with a mixture of concern, panic and delight...I must confess, the anarchist in me was smirking away!

The week of Sidmouth arrived in a blaze of sunshine and my early meetings with Windsor Morris and the Morris advisors were calm and smooth: the dance was set, the tune was catchy; we just awaited the one group rehearsal on Thursday morning...



Thursday morning arrived and the rain had begun. Nevertheless, nigh-on 150 morris dancers arrived to learn the dragon dance. I ineffectually tried to marshal events through a microphone whilst the real organisation was done in old-fashioned, low-tech style with the authoritative voices onstage of Pauline Woods-Wilson from Windsor Morris and Sue Swift. In our 2-hour rehearsal, the dance gradually took shape, changed a bit, then we changed the musicians' locations, then had a chaotic run-through, a quick re-think, a bit of re-direction, another run-through and there - we'd done it...well, at least everyone was onstage, the music had fitted and everyone *said* they knew what they were doing! We agreed the next meeting as the interval of the show, with everyone in costume, ready to perform for the audience.

Friday night arrived: the rain had been torrential for 2 days. The camp-site was a squelchy quagmire and the arena was a muddy toboggan run. I had descended rather inelegantly on more than one occasion down the scoop of mud that called itself the auditorium and my clothes were caked in a way that I remember from my footballing days at primary school. The day was both long and arduous with the competing demands of hundreds of performers, tired technicians, the kind of rain that would float an ark never mind dowse a dragon and the pressure of time. Nevertheless, we started within 5 minutes of our advertised time and at the interval, I could see the morris dancers preparing, so all seemed to be going to plan...



The performance of "The Serpent Dance" was a triumph! I found the combination of different sides and their winding, rhythmic dance interpreting John Tam's catchy tune really quite moving. It was a triumph over the elements, it was a triumph over logistics, it was a triumph of community participation in a project that combined many kinds of performers and many kinds of cultural backgrounds into a single, enjoyable, spectacular event. As "The Serpent Dance" wound around the stage, it united sides, it joined the old and the new, it insinuated a positive aspect of the dragon mythology. It sounded and looked beautiful and, for me, was one of the most successful elements of the production. This success was only possible with the help, support and work of the many professional and participatory people on the project, to whom I should like to extend my thanks.

The last word should be with the hobby horses who, as the last dancers left, poked their heads around the side of the stage to cock one last snook at the crowd...the anarchist in me continued to grin!

Tony Lidington
20th September 2002

Riding the George in Salisbury

On the two occasions I've visited my brother-in-law who lives near Stirling, one cannot help but admire the overt patriotism of the Scots. From every public building – and even many private ones as well, the saltire or lion rampant flags are flown. Until this year's football World Cup, such things were inconceivable south of the border. The word on the street was that to do so indicated affiliation with right-wing political groupings. Thus, St. George's Day, April 23rd, is seldom celebrated. But it's also William Shakespeare's birthday, our national poet! What's up with us?

This is the story of one place in England associated with morris dancing that has successfully fostered a revival of St. George's Day custom – almost by public acclamation. To set the scene for the story and as to why it's me who's telling it and not anyone from Sarum Morris, we need to go back twenty years to find me, wearisome of watching too many indifferent morris dance teams in the Guildhall Square at Salisbury as part of the Folk Under Aries festival. I took refuge in the Library, and decided to look up the local newspaper to see how the 1953 Coronation was celebrated in the City, with its pageant giant, St. Christopher, and hobby horse companion, Hob Nob. The article generated from that interest appeared in *'English Dance & Song'* in 1984, where it was underscored with the message that these morris dance supernumeraries only ever came out at public events like the Queen's jubilees, coronations, royal weddings, victories at war, and the like.

I confess I completely overlooked that the 2000 Millennium celebrations might have been once candidate for a gigantic outing, but earlier this year I e-mailed Salisbury Museum to ask whether Giant and/or Hob Nob would be discharging their customary civic duties for the Golden Jubilee. Okay, I was looking for something to do to celebrate the event, and my historical interest decreed that I ought to be there. However, I was not over-surprised to be told that letting the Giant out of the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum is now impossible because the room where he is kept no longer permits its passage, i.e. it was moved in, then they built the dividing walls between the galleries about it. I was also alerted that a new Giant had been built, but to the curator's knowledge, there were no plans to take that out either!

Further e-mails to like-minded people told me a little more about this new Giant, and how he became part of a new custom called 'Riding the George' as part of the new St. George's Spring Festival. Thus it was that twenty years after my first visit in 1982, I found myself once more in the Local Studies section of Salisbury Library trying to find out more about this custom armed with second-hand knowledge that the new giant was built in or around 1994. More of that later.

In fact, 'Riding the George' was revived six years earlier in 1988. History tells us that the custom was extant in 1455, although I have so far being unable to find who exactly researched and masterminded the event. (I suspect that Folk Animator Gary 'Ticklish Allsorts' Nunn might have had some role in this if only because he was then based at the St. Edmund's Arts Centre). The newspaper account of the inaugural custom actually held on Saturday 23rd, April, tells us that the Charter Trustees were responsible 'at the suggestion of the Salisbury Civic Society' and that 'records show that on St. George's Day, the townspeople joined the Guild of St. George, which later

became the Salisbury Corporation, the Giant, Hob Nob, mummers, archers, jesters, and members of other guilds in a grand procession through the city with banners flying.' One assumes that the Charter Trustees were set up (or evolved) following the previous year's celebrations for the 800th. Anniversary of the founding of New Sarum (modern day Salisbury). Photographs show this august body dressed up like a quintessential mayor-and-corporation type of body. All pomp and lots of circumstance.

Now let us bear in mind that Saturday is Market Day. I wasn't there – in fact, my interest in this is so recent, I have never yet been. One has thus to imagine what actually happened. The event in 1988 began with a service of commemoration at St. Thomas's church near the market and Guildhall Square itself. There would have been some kind of procession to the area in front of Guildhall where the public festivities were to take place. Traffic along Blue Boar Row would not have been stopped, since the event was largely self-contained and low in profile. Pivotal to the function was the enactment of a mummers' play featuring George and the Dragon. In this, a 'terrifying fiery twelve-foot green and gold dragon dragged a damsel to his lair', whereupon St. George came 'to save the citizens of Salisbury' and 'slew the monster after a fierce battle.' The day ended with a 'great feast in the Guildhall' where more entertainment took place.

Now something significant must have taken place, because there was a public clamour for the event to continue the following year on Sunday 23rd. April. A committee was set up to organise this on a yearly basis, and it has been celebrated every year since then - usually on the Sunday before April 23rd. The contiguous Market Square was to be closed off somehow, because the cast was enlarged to include the giant Christopher that was built and maintained at the Salisbury College of Technology, a replica of Hob Nob, morris dancers, and led by the City's Charter Trustees. The George and the dragon play comprised children from St. Martin's Junior school who played townsfolk, and the 'damsel' was to be played by the local beauty queen, Miss South Wiltshire. In the first years, St. George was played by a hired actor wearing armour who might ride in on a horse.

For two years, 1991 and 1992, the play became the responsibility of a local school, La Retraite, with narration given by the school deputy head. In 1991, the canvas dragon was actually made by a student as part of her GCSE coursework, and was 'so large that it had to be brought to the Market Square in a furniture van'. The students themselves had made banners to represent the mediaeval guilds in the procession from St. Thomas's church led, as always, by the Charter Trustees in their civic regalia. Christopher the giant and Hob Nob were certainly present that year, and La Retraite school dancers performed a maypole dance.

1993 was the prequel to the pivotal year in the event's short history. Adult actors were once more recruited, performing before 'packed crowds'. The procession was said to have comprised the last public outing of Christopher Mk. II which, I am told, was starting to fall apart by that time. This giant was wheeled along on castors, rather than carried, thus one assumes the city roads thus didn't render him amenable to regular use. The Sarum Morris dancers once again took part with a replica of Hob Nob that they had made themselves. There were also stilt walkers, jugglers, and an array of children, singers and musicians. There were also standard-bearers carrying

banners representing the mediaeval city guilds that were made by the wife of the Mayor-elect. A scripted play was written, and performed by the Studio Theatre, with additional dancing by the Colton dancing academy. The selection of photographs that appeared in the 'Salisbury Journal' included 'Granfer' – one of Derek Moody's Dorchester giants – with Christopher nowhere to be seen. This is curious, judging by the newspaper text. Had Christopher already fallen apart, and a local-ish substitute recruited?

1994 was the pivotal year alluded to earlier, if only because Derek Moody galvanised other owners of processional giants from all across the country to participate in the event. Not only that, the Sunday event was expanded into a two day affair. The Salisbury Civic Society had commissioned retired engineer Jeremy Turtle to build a new giant to replace the College giant, helped by Mike Pringle and his brother. The mayoress herself donated the 25 metres of red fabric used to clothe the 13 feet tall colossus. Eight other giants from around the country 'with names such as Fergus, Dragon, Angus McCoatup, Bellever, Lister and Listerine' took part, according to the newspaper text. The event not only incorporated Salisbury city centre as a venue, but a parallel event including a jousting tournament that also took place three miles away at Old Sarum. The Sunday procession was led by the Charter Trustees in their finery as always, along with 'dancers, drummers, knights on horseback, mediaeval foot soldiers, town criers, and towering above them all, eight giants – including Salisbury's 13-foot Christopher III'.

This event effectively saw the foundation of the British Isles Giant Guild (BIGG), who have their own website and e-zine newsletter. Their own account of 'Riding the George' in 1994 displaces some of the hyperbole often encountered in newspaper reports. The full cast list of giants was actually Bellever from North Tawton, Bran from London, Caroline Moore and Granfer each from Dorchester, Lister from Exeter, and Nathandriel from Huddersfield. Christopher Mk. III was described as a 'standing frame giant, designed to take apart for transport and storage' being 'light, stable, and firm and responsive when carried.' I am given to understand that he lives in the aforementioned St. Edmund's Arts Centre when not in use, although whether whole or in pieces I cannot say – Christopher Mk. II could not be deconstructed and stood whole in the main hall at the Technical College. Only the Hastings Jack in the Green May celebrations can boast any similar festival using processional giants in this country.

The following year, the BIGG giants were once more used with similar effect. The roles in the mummings' play were taken by students of Salisbury College, as they have been taken mostly to this day. The key players in the play were St. George, the dragon, Miss Sarum, although a total of seven players were cited in 1995. At other times, actors such as the green man, Slasher, and an impish fool have taken part. There was also a choir called the St. George singers, and children from the Salisbury Dance Studios who participated, as well as the Sarum Morris dancers. In 1996, the BIGG giants were once more to the fore, although a brisk wind jeopardised the procession of some of the more fragile characters.



Photo: George Frampton

In 1997, the festival was returned to the Salisbury community once more, and slimmed down in size (i.e. BIGG was no longer involved). A motorised gigantic multi-coloured inflatable dragon brought traffic to a halt 'looking like a beast straight out of Jurassic Park'. This dragon was 70 feet long and 20 feet high, and was accompanied into the city by four knights on horseback.

The photographs in the newspaper make it look pretty impressive. However, this was not the dragon to be slain by St. George, which was a 'much smaller green-coloured dragon' taking centre stage to menace the damsel in distress.

In 2000, with Easter being late in the year, it was decided to hold the festival on Easter Monday, which also happened to be on 23rd. April that year. On this occasion, the Cathedral Close was used for the entourage to convene – more or less on the same spot where the Great Wishford Oak Apple Club congregate on May 29th. each year. The newspaper reported that the colourful procession was led by the city's mace bearer and robed Charter Trustees and included replicas of Christopher, the city's ceremonial giant, and Hob Nob, morris dancers, and minstrels, who were blessed in the Close by the Bishop of Salisbury before setting off. For the first time, photographs were possible of the giant processing through the High Street arch of the Close into the city centre. The Museum authorities also tell me that Christopher was used as part of the Millennium celebrations.

This brings us very nearly up to date. In making my enquiries, I was told that Christopher Mk. III was not to be used as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations, No-one seems to be interested in taking him out. Come to that, there is nothing in either the 'Riding the George' newspaper reports in either 2001 or 2002 that suggests he was central or peripheral to, or even took part in the function – although the Spring Festival was still as popular as ever with the dragon meeting his match at the sword of our patron saint. It seems that the Civic Trust have delegated one of this year's performers Jonathon 'the Jester' Russell (featured in the photograph) to find interested parties, and one hopes that, in future, someone will once more revive the Salisbury Giant's perambulations and continue a custom going back over 500 years.

George Frampton
September 2002

The Black Face of Morris¹

Back in May the BBC “Countryfile” programme ran a feature on the Rochester Sweeps festival. It was noticeable that the presenter chose to appear dancing with a North West Morris side, but was there any significance in it? Certainly the feature showed a black-faced border side but no reference was made to it and if I recall correctly they were not even named.

The festival had nearly featured on a popular children’s television programme back in 1997. However, the producers were worried that, with people seen blackening (or blacking-up) their faces, the item would be viewed as racist by most of their audience since it had echoes of the old Minstrel shows. The event organisers rejected this interpretation pointing out that there was a long tradition pre-dating the “black-faced minstrel” image. In my view however the event organisers missed the point: the concern of the broadcaster was not what the performer intended but how it would be interpreted by the viewer.

Anyone’s perception of an event will be influenced by his or her own past experiences and cultural legacies. Unfortunately racism and specifically the “black-faced minstrel” image is as much part of our legacy as Morris dancing and is probably the more readily recognised by society at large. I used to dance with a “black face” border side and was often only too aware of the comments from some sections of the audience: certainly some people made a connection with the black-faced minstrel, which was often difficult to dispel without risking a nasty argument.

There are three basic questions at the centre of the issue:

- How central to the tradition is the blackened face?
- Is there a racist element to it?
- Should the performer bear any responsibility for the interpretation or misinterpretation of the performance?

In his introductory section to *The Roots of Welsh Border Morris*², Dave Jones makes the point that blackening the face was a way of gaining anonymity. However it was by no means universal even to Border Morris as a read of his booklet shows. In some cases only some of the side had blackened faces, there is for example a reference to Pershore where “*only the fool seemed to have blackened his face*”³; in the comments on Shrewsbury and Upton-On-Severn there were instances where none of side had blackened faces (including a photo of an Upton side in the 1920’s⁴); illustrations of the Brimfield dancers of 1909 show that white patches were left rather than a fully black face, while an illustration of outfits prior to that show faces

¹ This article is based on one that originally appeared in *The Unicorn* magazine in 1998 (Issue No 61 Jan-March 1998).

² *The Roots of Welsh Border Morris: the Welsh Border Morris Dances of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire*. Dave Jones 1988

³ *ibid* page 33

⁴ *ibid* page 44

unblackened⁵. In a large number of cases there is no reference one way or the other that the side blacked-up.

On the basis of this evidence, and Dave Jones researched widely for his material, it cannot be argued that the fully blacked face, as such, is central to the Border Morris tradition, though it does form part of it. What is central to the tradition is that the dancers and musicians were in disguise but there are other ways of achieving it: some sides use colours other than black, some go in for more ornate face painting while others wear masks. We cannot argue that there are no alternative ways of disguising ourselves.

The racist issue is more problematical but the question is not whether the practice is of racist *origin* but whether it has been *influenced by racist attitudes*. The main difficulty is that Dave Jones relied mainly upon oral evidence and the notes of Victorian and Edwardian collectors: we have little or no evidence of what the practice was before the mid-19th century. We thus cannot simply do a comparison of what the practice was before and after the “black-faced minstrels” started to appear in music halls (from about the 1850’s onwards). However, there are two key references in Dave Jones’ booklet: regarding dancing in Aston-On-Clun he comments that the dancers referred to it as “going niggering” and similarly at Onibury the locals recalled “niggering”⁶. We thus have to acknowledge at the least that racist views have had an impact on the development of the tradition for both performer and public.

It is argued by some that the tradition comes from the use of charcoal or soot to disguise the face. Yet the result of using these is a “dirty face” appearance rather than the solid blackness achieved using theatre make-up. I would argue that the current fashion for a solid black face is based as much on the black-faced minstrel tradition as upon any earlier one.

The increasing use of the term “blackened” rather than “blacked-up” also shows that Morris dancers are becoming aware of the racist element in the latter term and seek to avoid using it. Most however have not adapted or changed their practice or sought to explain it to the general audience.

I have no objection to Morris and Molly dancers (or Mummers) disguising themselves by blackening their faces, but they cannot do so without regard to the audience and its perception of what is being portrayed. Living in a multi-cultural society is not a matter of being able to do what we want simply because it is *traditional*. Blacking-up may have been a harmless form of disguise in the past but to put forward such an argument today is either naive or disingenuous since it ignores wider social change of which the performer cannot be ignorant. This *traditionalist* argument of “*doing what we have always done*” also does Morris dance a disservice in that it seeks to separate and isolate it from wider society.

Nor is it sufficient to take the line that “*we know what we mean and if others see a different meaning that is not our fault*”. Such an attitude shows a total disregard for the audience: Morris dancing has no automatic right to survive and it will not if the

⁵ *ibid* page 14-15

⁶ *ibid* pages 7 & 11 respectively

public are alienated from it or if it becomes associated with a particular set of political beliefs (however incorrect that association is).

This is not an issue of petty minded "political correctness": If blacking-up within the Morris tradition is, or is seen as being racist, we risk alienating not only our audiences but also future participants. It is time that "Black faced" Border and Molly Sides reviewed their position and thought deeply about the tradition they claim to be continuing. If they do opt to continue blacking-up they should consider seriously the extent to which they put the face paint on and how they portray and explain themselves to their audience.

As performers they must also take some responsibility for any resulting misunderstanding.

Long Lankin

Editor's Note; since I knew I had this article to publish, I asked if one of the few North American Molly Sides would like to comment on the blacking up issue on the other side of the Atlantic; Bob Dupre kindly replied by e-mail:

Handsome Molly was founded (as were many other molly teams) when we saw a video of the Seven Champions in 1993. At that time we thought the Champs "were molly" so we tried to copy everything they did, including blacking-up. After Elaine Bradtke showed us videos of the Whittlesea Straw Bear Festival, we realized that there was a lot more to molly dancing than the Seven Champions and they were not even "authentic". We have spent the past eight years or so trying to become ourselves. That has included the abandonment of blackface.

I still believe that, for at least some historical molly sides, blacking-up was the rule, but we have abandoned blackface for practical reasons. When we did wear blackface, we felt that people accepted our explanation that it was not an attempt to ridicule anyone, but rather a cheap, easy means to disguise your self. What we realized, after a few years, was that many people of colour would not stay to hear the explanation. We would arrive at a dance venue to find a multiracial crowd, but by the time we got to our introduction all the non-white people would be gone. We decided that we were not gaining anything by insisting that race was not involved, if we offended and lost part of our audience in the process.

Now we each wear whatever we wish on our face. The only rule is that it must be bold and so "work" at a distance of 20 feet. Most of us paint on masks in a colour of our own choosing. Some of the masks are black, but none covers the entire face.

Personally, I like the look of teams with whole black makeup, but it carries too much "baggage" here in the States. Right or wrong, innocent or not, it offends too many people and alienates audiences unnecessarily. I see no reason to get people upset because some old guys somewhere wore black makeup for some reason.

Bob Dupre
November 2002

How Many Steps Does it Take to Dance the Marathon?

OK – so we met up at the pub the night before as all valiant Morris people do and chattered about Morris matters. After a pint or two the topic flowed into feet, thighs, hips and Morris Dancer's Knee. Towards closing time and a goodly dose of depressing ourselves about the stupidity of the daunting task the following day, we realised that we had to be up bright and early the next morning, so we had another swift nightcap to perk our courage up.

Sunday 21 April 2002 dawned with glorious sunshine which continued throughout the day. Shakespeare's Revenge got off to a cracking start wending their way along the near deserted streets of Norwich. The few young people still rolling around hung over from a night on the town the previous night either thought they were still under the influence or cursed the procession for the jangling of the bells.

It was good to finally dance into the country side with the cows for an audience. We thought those cows really appreciated us as they galloped across the field to greet us but then we spied the farmer in his truck and realised we were not favoured at all. The route took us so far into deepest Norfolk it seemed like we were on safari. At high noon - which was not yet half way into the jaunt - our blistered feet began to take over senses and although the views of rural Norfolk were delightful all we wanted to see was the inside of a bath tub.

Every hour for five minutes, we were allowed to stop and water. The distance was measured and the time noted. That just about took up our five minutes which only gave us just about enough time to grunt at each other.

Dancing, dancing, agony, agony. This was basically the remainder of the day. The musicians spread themselves amongst the dancers to encourage each other along. They were suffering as well. The fiddle player began walking on tip toe to take the pressure off her blistered ankles. The squeeze box player had his shoulder pushed back into place from time to time and the whistle player had gob dribbling in a fine trail for the dancers to pound over. Shakespeare's Revenge were desperately trying to pretend that joints and muscles were not screaming to stop.



Finally at about 4.15 pm at the top of a hill we spied South Walsham church in the distance and we also spied the long, long road ahead of us to get there. The Ship, which was our destination, was over the road from the church. The musicians struck up a perkier tune and a spring came back into the stepping.

Hooray – we were at the pub. The Golden Star Morris ran to greet us. But, alas, we were told that we had to carry on out of the village and turn around and return to get the full distance. Boy, oh boy, were those last few hundred yards a killer. South Walsham must be the longest village in existence. However, in true Morris fashion we staggered to the pub and fell exhausted onto the bar to mutterings of how we will never do anything so silly again.

Throughout the day our marshals bombed backwards and forwards like fluorescent demented bees on their push bikes. They performed a splendid job which gave the procession a clear road ahead with no worries of crossing junctions, tripping over waste bins or skidding on cow droppings.

The Morris Sides taking part in the event either marshalling, verifying or performing were:

Bedford

Coventry

Golden Star

Hands Around

New St George

Yare Valley.

They all participated in a fine piece of Morris history.

Answer:

It takes 49,285 steps to dance the Marathon

It also takes 8 hours, 6 minutes, 15 seconds

Julie Mackenzie

October 2002

Postscript:

Julie confirms that this long-distance dance was recognised and the record has been validated; a certificate has been awarded but the name of the side was spelt wrongly so it had to go back!

Classical English Morris

A promise of the solo morris gig of the year appeared unexpectedly on my answerphone in June 2002. Richard Mallet, community officer of the London Philharmonic Orchestra had just had a bright idea but was getting nowhere fast. As part of the LPO's education programme, a number of schools had been busy working on the contents of a teacher's pack on orchestral music. For several months, children aged 9-13 years had been clapping, shouting, singing and playing themes and rhythms provided by the classical English composers Elgar and Walton as well as others such as Prokofiev and Bernstein (West Side Story). The culmination of the term's work was to be two concerts in the Royal Festival Hall where some 2,000 - 3,000 young people would be incited to riotous celebration of their national musical heritage.

As part of the exploration of English music, the composer Brendan Beales had been commissioned to write a few pieces of music as a build up to the climax of the programme. Brendan's research had uncovered the colourful history of the Shakespearian actor William Kemp and without much further ado, put together Kemp's Ayre, Kemp's Jig, Kemp's Hey and some entertaining dialogue featuring a good old fashioned slanging match. For the concert there was the singer Ann Louise Staker, the actor Matt Sharp, the conductor David Angus and the orchestra... but there was something missing. Finally with less than two weeks to go, the idea suddenly burst to the forefront – where does one find a morris dancer at short notice!

Some people complain that you can't move in the countryside without having your peace shattered by the sound of jingling bells and clashing sticks, however, morris dancers aren't that easy to find when you need one. Richard tried The Globe – after all William Kemp was one of that other William's actors (until he was sacked for endlessly ad libbing on stage) but they had little to offer. The second bright idea was to remember having seen a copy of Direct Roots somewhere and once found it was no trouble to locate someone to find a suitable morris dancer.



Say yes and think afterwards is a good way of forcing action. The teacher's pack duly arrived and a CD with the music for Kemp's Hey (confusingly the piece called Kemp's Jig was not the music for the dance). The sequence was novel. Once translated into 6/8, it was as follows: A 16 bars, B 8 bars, C 16 bars, D 8 bars, E 16 bars, F 16 bars, G 14 bars including several grand flourishes in the last section. The speed was 100 beats a minute, about the speed of a fast Figure Eight from Eynsham. It could have been danced at half speed but that would have been 50 beats a minute, less than the slowest ever performance from the Ducklington dancers.

Alias William Kemp had to be able to cope with an orchestra, lots of noisy children, have virtually no time to choreograph and learn a dance, add in some fun aspects, manage with one short rehearsal in a different venue, acquire a suitable Kemp look-alike costume and be available at short notice on a weekday for the concerts. Pressure or what!

Laurel Swift, who seemed likely to fulfil the criteria, given a concerted effort from both of us (especially Sue - cheers Mum!), managed to do the job. Scouring the charity shops of Leicester produced gold punjabi trousers and a red velvet top to add to a set of golden bells, a golden scarf, a baggy morris shirt and a high black hat with ostrich feathers stuck in the side (red, white and blue to reflect the current success in the World Cup and the Queen's Golden Jubilee).

The famous line drawing of William Kemp as in the Nine Daies Wonder was suddenly reincarnated! The dance put together was loosely based on a Princess Royal jig originating from Albion Morris who claimed it to be the 1950's taught style of Bampton (oldish - but alright - not quite 1599). The addition of hockles, galleys, flourishing bows and a cartwheel provided enough entertainment to completely distract the orchestra and of course the audience loved it.

As it seemed possible that this was something of a first time and rare Morris event, Richard obtained the necessary permission to video the dance for archival purposes.

For many years, there has been an interest in taking the morris to a wider stage and to particularly get away from the bad press some morris performances have provoked in the past. Having been involved in the Whistlestop (morris only) shows, the Mary Neal Show and Flashback (a celebration of Cecil Sharp meeting the morris) at Sidmouth Festival, the next phase had been hard to imagine. Helping to organise a morris jig for an orchestra hadn't seemed like an option but turned out to be a good forum for a positive message!

So thanks to all involved, particularly the LPO for their enlightened approach, Richard for his facilitation, Brendan for the venture into morris dance and music, Chiltern Hundreds for freeing Laurel from her commitments for the rehearsal and of course Laurel for a memorable performance.

Sue Swift
September 2002



Morris dancers' prayer

Dear Lord which art in heaven,
 We pray that you may keep
 Our venues free of rain and
 Our campsites free of sheep;

May our bells be ever shiny,
 Our ribbons ever bright;
 And make sure our tents don't blow away
 In the middle of the night;

Let the pubs be full of laughter,
 Music and good cheer;
 But most important of all
 PLEASE LET THEM SELL GOOD BEER !!

We pray for good audiences,
 And decent B&Bs
 That do good eggs and bacon;
 And we beg you, Lord, please

Let our clog rubbers never fail,
 Our mollies never grey
 Give us short processions, Lord,
 And at the end of the day

When we're hot, footsore and sticky,
 Else freezing to the bone;
 Make sure we remember, Lord,
 Before we start to moan;

The toddlers copying our dance steps
 The fun and joy in what we do:-
 For morris should never die
 And we hope you know that, too.

by Eloise
 1st September '02

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(poem inspired by a tour with Chiltern Hundreds...)

English Roots Tour 2002

The advert:

“Folkworks English Roots features artists at the forefront of the English tradition, all active in researching and sourcing repertoire while carrying the music forwards. Waterson:Carthy have been working on new material especially for this tour and the collaborations between all of the artists are almost limitless. This promises to be an entertaining evening exploring some of the big themes of English music, land and love, sea and ceremony – interspersed with some of the most athletic and exciting bursts of Morris Dance with attitude from Dog Rose.”

I’m writing this review on a mild morning in December remembering my impressions of the cold winter’s evening on 25 November 2002 when I went to see the “English Roots” tour, organised by Folkworks at the Reading Hexagon.

The audience was small, the hall cold so the musicians had a hard job to break the ice but Norma Waterson managed it with a beautiful opening number which she started off as a solo and gradually brought in the other members of the ensemble. Martin Carthy’s easy style of chatting between the various members of the ensemble comprising of Norma Waterson, Eliza Carthy, along with Chris Wood, Tim van Eyken, Robert Harbron and Dog Rose Morris and the audience soon gave the evening an easy folk club flavour.

Norma looked, sounded and acted every part the grand dame of English Folk, fully in command and lived up to her expectations. Norma’s voice was powerful with her belief in the oral traditions of England and her enthusiasm shone through.

Eliza too has great stage presence and appeared confident except she tugged at her clothes all the time, which was distracting. This may have been through nerves or just because her clothes were too tight. However, when Eliza sang, her wonderful voice filled the Hexagon and as well as singing solo numbers, she also accompanied herself on the violin.

The “family” would be hard to fault in their performances alone or together. Unfortunately the same could not be said about the other performers, whether performing solo numbers or slotting in and out of each others’ arrangements, whose voices and playing were all on one level rather than being multifaceted.

In my mind, a song is the spoken word set to music and I believe more attention should be paid to what is being said and how. If a performer is singing about a happy event then they should portray this mood and emotion - the same being true if the song is sad - whereas what was happening was that every song was sung in their own style, with no change in mood or emotion.

Dog Rose Morris put on a powerful display of full of vim and vigour. Their stick dances in the second half were great. Not only did they dance well but also because they looked as though they were having fun and were interacting between each other and the audience, their joie de vivre came across, their performance sparkled and the

magic of the Morris could be felt. Unfortunately, this could not be said of their hanky dances in the first half, which is a pity. Dog Rose Morris danced with plenty of energy but no enthusiasm, which gave the impression that they did not care and were going through the motions of dancing. Performers should realise that if they do not appear to enjoy themselves nor will their audience.

Dog Rose Morris should be aware that - whatever emotion they portray - that is the feeling the audience picks up. Consequently impassive faces can be interpreted as being aloof and bored, whereas I suspect they thought they were looking cool. Therefore, to Dog Rose Morris, still put in the same vitality but interact between yourselves as well as with the audience and you will add another dimension to your performances.

My appraisal of the evening was one of enjoyment and it is hoped that another tour will be forthcoming showing other aspects of "English Roots".

Denise Allen
December 2002

Postscript:

Thanks to Derek Schofield for pointing out that Norma Waterson was cited in the New Year Honours as being awarded the MBE; for services to (folk) music. Our congratulations!

A Previously Unrecorded Morris Location

There is hard evidence that more than one hundred and fifty communities in the south Midlands fielded a morris side at some point between 1660 and 1900. These range from major towns such as Cheltenham (Gloucestershire) to hamlets consisting merely of a few houses, like Field Assarts in Oxfordshire. For many years I have been saying, both in print and to anyone who would listen to my ramblings, that I saw no apparent reason why every community in the area might not have had a dance set at times.

By 1993, when my chronological gazetteer was first published, the core location dataset was substantially codified. During the intervening years much further research has been undertaken, but the geographical spread has remained more or less stable. When working on the republication of the gazetteer - in CD ROM format from 'Musical Traditions' early in 2002 - I reassessed every primary source. As a result, Weston-Sub-Edge was excised, but Farmington and Down Ampney were added (all three in Gloucestershire). Evidence for activity by a Farmington set in 1711 had appeared in a household account book from Sherborne Manor, while Down Ampney was found in one of Alfred Williams' published articles.

During the past two years a major ongoing project has been to thoroughly check the pre-1914 local newspapers between the dates of May Day and Michaelmas. Two decades ago, when the morris research was paramount, I did this for the few weeks around Whitsuntide and the week after Abingdon June Fair, and uncovered numerous reports which expanded our understanding of the phenomenon. My interests have since broadened - to include, for example, social dance musicians, dancing booths, Gypsies as carriers of traditional culture, and sweeps' performances on May Day - but this checking activity has in addition thrown up further material on the morris, some of it very exciting. Highlights include a contemporary obituary of James Simpson, aka 'Jim the Laddie,' the Sherborne (Glos) pipe and tabor player who drank himself to death when returning home from a morris tour in 1856, but not exactly under the circumstances as reported in our previous major source, a piece in the *Birmingham Weekly Post* in 1884.

Reports of two separate performance occasions by the Bucknell (Oxon) side in 1866 - one giving the names of three previously unrecorded dancers - belies the evidence from one of the old participants to Cecil Sharp's ear, whereby there was a lapse between circa 1863 and 1872. And the reproduction of a notice spotted in Ock Street, Abingdon (Berkshire) in 1885 pinpoints the transitional date of the important role of 'Mayor of Ock Street' from Thomas to William Hemmings (father and son), in addition to giving the span of morris activity of the former, dating as far back as 1840.

These contemporary reports are clear-cut, unambiguous, and relatively easy to spot as the eye ranges over the page. Others, especially during the period following the virtual abandonment of performance in the majority of communities, are less so. A 1900 report on the death of Private Thomas Harwood, of enteric fever in South Africa

during the Boer War, for example, offers the information that, 'He was a well-respected character in Eynsham, and a prominent member of the Mummers and Morris Dancers.' And at a treat organised for the older residents of Shipton, Milton and Ascott (all -under-Wychwood, Oxon) in both 1888 and 1889, the entertainments included 'the old Morris dancing by several aged men causing much amusement.'

The source for the previously unrecorded location, the *raison d'être* of this piece, is similar in tone and circumstance. *Jackson's Oxford Journal* for 30 June 1906, page 8, gives the following:

ODDINGTON.

FEAST DAY-

On Monday the annual feast was held...The barn was cleared for dancing...John Watson, an old man of nearly 80 years, and at one time one of the Morris Dancers, caused amusement by a hornpipe.

This is not the Gloucestershire village to the east of Stow-on-the-Wold, where the existence of a morris set has been known since Sam Bennett of Ilmington took former Oddington dancer Charles Taylor to the Esperance Club in 1910, but rather a small village on Otmoor, half a dozen miles to the north-east of Oxford. It sits snugly between two other known morris locations, Noke and Charlton-on-Otmoor, on the western fringe of the moor. A much-lauded pipe and tabor player, 'Old' Tom Hall (circa 1818 - 1890), lived locally and played extensively to many dance sets in the villages around, including Charlton-on-Otmoor, Headington Quarry and Wheatley.

John Watson, named in the source as having been a dancer, was baptised on 20 December 1829, the son of a labourer. His activity as a dancer is likely to have occurred around 1850, although the duration is unknown. He married a woman from another morris community, Souldern (Oxon), and laboured on the land until the date of the 1901 census, at least. Among his other cultural activities was that of mummer, being named by James Joseph Price to American collector James Madison Carpenter about 1933 as one of the 'old hands.' Price, born 1856, ascribes a date of circa 1870 to his learning of the play text, but adds that he first heard it when a 'boy,' recalling having been 'a bit afraid' of the mummers, who wore false faces. His recollections, then, probably refer to the 1860s. Certainly Price's older brother Josephus, another member of the group, was of a suitable age, having been born in 1843.

John Watson - morris dancer and mummer - was buried in his home village on 28 September 1910, aged eighty-two.

Highlighted by this recent discovery is the fact that many further references clearly remain to be found within this major body of source material. I hope to bring them to your attention at the appropriate time.

Keith Chandler
November 2002

LETTERS

From Norris Winstone:

Thank you for another interesting Morris Matters;

On Other Tunes

I have tried all sorts of different tunes but eventually find that the original fits the dance best. However, these three songs are especially good if played in Hornpipe rhythm:

“Five Foot Two, Eyes of Blue”
 “All by Yourself in the Moonlight”
 “Sweet Georgia Brown”
 and they will fit, for example, Bampton Highland Mary.

I am afraid that modern pop music is unmelodious. But songs from the ‘60’s back are not too bad. Dick Hewitt used to step dance to “The Loveliest Night in the Year”

Some years ago we⁷ danced “Upton Stick” to Mozart’s Horn Concerto, played on a French Horn by Nick Barber of White Rose.

On Wet Weather

Brollies in lieu of hankies in Ilmington
 Black Joke for a wet weather dance?

(Ed: presumably Black Brollies only, Norris?)

On Dancing Style:

Anything that can be done to smarten up the Morris (or any other dancing) is good. I have witnessed some exceedingly sloppy, “anything-will-do” dancing in the past few years.

Shergold’s Bampton smartened up their side discipline and stepping after someone told them they looked untidy.

Wheatley now dance much more vigorously than when I first learned it.

Weavers⁸ now end an outdoor Morris and Longsword display with a country dance and include the audience – it goes down very well! They came about quite by chance but now include “(Norfolk) Long Dance”, “Oswestry Square” and “The Flying Scotsman”. I never call them ones and twos in a long set or say anything about progression but it all works out.

⁷ Kemps Men

⁸ Weavers are a mixed Morris team based at North Walsham ; the early non-dancing musicians played tunes straight from Bacon without any concept of phrasing for the morris. I got involved on a “One-off” basis but have been teaching them for about 6 years on and off! As their knowledge was limited I introduced them to Molly, Longsword and other morris traditions; they got hooked on Longsword . They also dance their own North Walsham dances with such names as “Herrings Tales” and Pigeon on a Gate”

