

Morris Matters

Looks like I'd better get out,
So you can get in...



CONTENTS OF VOLUME 22, NUMBER 2

The Return of the Blue Stots by Stuart Rankin and Chas Marshall	2
'Dance or Die', DERT 2003 - by Jill Griffiths	8
Festival Flyers	11
Sidmouth International Festival 2003	<i>11</i>
Towersey - the little village with the BIG ideas	<i>12</i>
Memories of Chris White, 1951-2003 - by Helen Mitcham	14
Pre-1980s Morris in North America - by Rich Holmes	16
Watch this space! - from Tony Barrand	22
Old or Young? - by Long Lankin	24

A report presented at the Association of Festival Organisers Annual Conference this year showed that over three quarters of a million people attend Folk Festivals in the UK in any one year, spending almost £17 million on accommodation, £15 million on tickets, £13 million on travel and overall they bring £77 million in to the UK every year. Of these attendees, 76% are repeat business, 92% buy CD's at festivals, 52% are women and 45% are under 35. Interesting isn't it! For more about festivals and Ales in the UK and elsewhere, read on.

*Morris Matters is published twice a year by Beth Neill
27 Nortoft Road, Chalfont St Peter, Bucks SL9 0LA
phone: 01494 871465
e-mail: Beth.Neill@care4free.net*

*Subscriptions are £6 for two issues (EU countries; or £8 outside these areas)
published in January and July.*

*Please make cheques or postal orders payable to **Morris Matters***

*Thanks as always to Jill Griffiths for help in checking text.
All morris-related articles, letters, cartoons are welcome!*

The Return of the Blue Stots

This article is based on research by the two authors who were both members of the Knaresborough Mummers. A similar article appeared in the Autumn 1982 edition of the regional folk magazine "Tykes News". Research has continued on and off most years since and the resulting information has been expanded into a booklet of over sixty pages carrying the same title, which has been published by Dockside Studios.

The old geographical county of Yorkshire has one of the richest and most varied traditions of folk drama in Britain. No other area of comparable size can show so diverse a heritage of differing performances, times of the year celebrated or costume worn; yet the county boundary itself seems to have had little significance, for records of particular customs ebb and flow between adjacent counties.

Yorkshire was also a major centre for the publication of chapbooks. William Walker of Otley might perhaps be described as a "Brand Leader" in this field, but other publishers producing chapbook play texts worked in Leeds, Bradford and Sheffield, which implies a widespread and substantial demand from the populations of industrial towns, recently moved from rural areas. Later these little booklets came to be sold and used in country districts.

These published texts formed the basis for many recorded performances in cities, towns and villages, even if subsequent transmission, as we shall see, reverted to oral tradition. In the Leeds and Bradford areas, plays based on these printed texts were performed by "Mummers" at Christmas time, but further west, along the border with Lancashire and the Lake counties, "Mummers" were known as "Peace Eggers" or "Pace Eggers" and performed similar plays at Easter. Easter "Pace Eggers" could once be found both in the mill towns of the Pennine watershed and in the villages of Swaledale giving performances virtually identical to those found in the North West - even including the Pace Egg Song at the beginning or end.

In South Yorkshire, many Christmas performances were similar to the short "Old Tup" plays of Derbyshire. While on the border with Lincolnshire and in the Southern part of the East Riding, the usual "Hero Combat" play shared a post-Christmas to Epiphany time of performance with the Wooing/Plough Plays of the East Midlands. Moving into North Yorkshire, the Longsword Dances (also usually performed after Christmas) were sometimes an integral part of complex plays often showing clear literary influences. Along the border with County Durham, Guisers performed at Christmas time. There were also some oddities, like the "Poor Old 'Oss" Christmas performances at Richmond with parallels to be found in Cheshire, Kent and South Yorkshire, and a small group of "Tar Barrel" plays in the vicinity of Pickering. These were performed before November 5th, to raise money for the purchase of pitch to be burned on Bonfire night.

In those parts of Yorkshire where post-Christmas performances were the norm, they became inextricably linked with, and then replaced, a much older custom - "Plough Stotting". There are records of this throughout Eastern England back to the Middle Ages, when, on the first Monday after Epiphany, ploughs were blessed in church prior to the farming activities associated with the Spring sowing of crops. In many arable farming districts of Yorkshire this was preceded by the plough being dragged

round the village by a gang of young farm workers, dressed in strange costumes, who took the place of the "stots" or bullocks normally used as draught animals. In the early 1800s they are reported in several Yorkshire locations as performing sword or other dances, details of which are now lost, as well as indulging in various types of rowdyism, exhorting money by none too good-natured menaces! In mediaeval times, money collected by the "stots" paid for a "Plough Light" to burn in the church throughout the year. The Reformation more or less stamped out that custom. In the 19th century money collected was spent on beer and food; the proportions of expenditure on these items varying according to the predilections of the individual teams.

In North Yorkshire dialect, "Plough" was pronounced "Pleaf", "Pleaugh" or "Plew". By the late 19th century "Plough Stots" had become corrupted via "Blew Stots" to "Blue Stots". The plough itself had disappeared from the custom, and for a period of at least 70 years (c. 1870 to c. 1940), teams of young men or boys, calling themselves "Blue Stots" and usually with blackened faces, are reported performing a distinctive version of the "Hero Combat" play. These performances were usually between Christmas and Plough Monday, and seem to have been confined to the arable lands of Yorkshire, running in a band between Tees and Humber.

Teams using the name "Blue Stots" are recorded at Coxwold, Dishforth, Ripon, Harrogate, Knaresborough, Raskelf, Marton-cum-Grafton, Clifford, Tadcaster and Thorner. In addition there are the following locations where the name used was "Plough Stots" or "Plough Boys" - Ampleforth, Thirsk, Sowerby, Tollerton, Stillington, Boroughbridge, Sherrif Hutton, Hutton Cranswick, the vicinity of Selby, Snaith and Bubwith.

Where details have survived, these performances share some of the following distinctive features:

- Post-Christmas time of performance – from Boxing Day through New Year to Twelfth Day.
- Face blackening by performers as a disguise.
- Beelzebub, a frequent character at the end of Chapbook texts, appears at the start of the play as a kind of presenter.
- Occasional alternative or co-presenter introducing himself with a variation of the "Bighead/Little Wit" lines which do not appear in local Chapbook texts.
- Fight between two characters, one or both of whom may have the title "King" (suffix George/John/William/Slasher). Rarely does St. George appear.
- Sometimes an un-named female character.
- A "Doctor" performs the usual cure, variously styled Doctor Brown or the Little Doctor.
- Four to six characters.

- Short plays - from a few lines to 3 or 4 minutes duration.

Taking these characteristics, and looking at other reported performances in Yorkshire where no specific name is given, the following places produce evidence of similar plays: Bowes, Arkengarthdale, Redmire, Guisborough, Richmond, East Harlsey, Tholthorpe, Arkendale, Killinghall, Nether Poppleton, Spofforth, Aberford and Monk Fryston. This gives a total of about thirty locations where the surviving details of plays and performances are sufficiently alike, and sufficiently different from other Yorkshire Traditional Drama to constitute a recognisable group in their own right - the Blue Stots' Plays.

The following text, which appeared in the Yorkshire Post in 1937, is typical of the type, but unfortunately no definite location was given for its performance:

"This version was taken down a few years ago from a family whose predecessors had acted it from memory for many generations. It comprised four actors, who blacked their faces and borrowed their 'properties' from the household wardrobe."

Beelzebub *In comes I, Beelzebub.
On my shoulder I carry my club
In my hand a dripping pan,
Think myself a jolly old man.
Jolly old man may I be
I've three sons here jolly as me
If you don't believe me what I say
Slip in King William and clear my way.*

King *In comes King William,
King William is my name
My sword and pistol in my hand,
I'm sure to win the game.*

Old Roger *Win the game you are not able
My back's made of iron,
My belly's made of steel
My fingers made of knucklebone
That'll make you feel.
Mince pies hot, mince pies cold
Knock a fellow down afore I'se ten days old.*

(Knocks down King William)

Who killed that man?

Doctor *You did.*

Old Roger *Who sends for a doctor?*

Doctor *No doctor to be had.*

Old Roger *Ten pounds for a doctor!*

Doctor *No doctor to be had.*

Old Roger *Fifteen pounds for a doctor!*

Doctor *No doctor to be had.*

Old Roger *Thirty pounds for a doctor!*

Doctor *I'm a little doctor*

Old Roger *Who taught you to be a doctor?*

Doctor *By my travels.*

Old Roger *Where did you travel?*

Doctor *England, Ireland, Scotland, Spain*
And back to Granny's back door again.
A little pig running up and down the street
With a knife and fork in his hand
Shouting "Who wants pork?"
I've a little bottle here
My grandmother gave me
A thousand years ago
Take a yard down yer throttle
Jack, rise and beg.

(King William comes to life)

All *I am an old roger with me rags and me bags*
For the sake of the money I wear these old rags
Me hat is an old one, me boots are all worn
Me britches are roven, me stockings are torn.

Although parts of the above are clearly derived from a common source with the Chapbook texts other elements shared with the Blue Stots' Plays are not. How did these come to be widely distributed? The following letter from Mr. George Upton in the Yorkshire Evening Post, 18th January 1923, throws some light on this:

"As a boy I distinctly remember in the early seventies (1870's) seeing this play performed by the farm lads and young farmers around the neighbouring village of Thorner. Rehearsals were generally held ... after the conclusion of the day's work, known locally as 'foddering up' time... The proceedings were often enlivened by discussion, or repetitions to the learner, of parts of the play not sufficiently known by the would-be actor. The parts were passed on from memory ... It was looked on by the

farmers and scattered residents of the countryside as an omen of luck to be favoured with a visit by the mummers - or to give them their local name, Blue Stots ... The custom was undoubtedly carried far and wide by the yearly change of farm servants at the Martinmas Hirings..."

Like so many other things, Blue Stotting was brought to an end in many villages by the Great War. It was revived briefly during the 1920s in one or two places only to die out again, but at Clifford the Blue Stots Play (or "Niggering" as it came to be called) continued to the mid 1950's. At Skelton-on-Ure it took the Second World War to break the tradition.

Tom Dearlove played the part of King George at Skelton in 1938 and 1939; it is interesting to compare some of his recollections with those quoted above of 70 years previously.

"It was traditionally acted by four boys, usually nearest school-leaving age (then about 14). Some weeks before, the lads who had performed it the previous year (now left school, and therefore men) would approach the village boys who were in the last year at school.

"Is't going Blue Stottin' this year?"

"Ah don't know it."

"Ah'll write it down for thee!"

And so the tradition passed on. The four lads met in Skelton village about 7 a.m. on Boxing Day morning, dressed in some of their father's clothes and with faces blacked." Their only rehearsal took place during the two-mile walk to their first performance at Newby Hall timed for 7.30 a.m.

In 1978, the Knaresborough Mummers, having searched in vain for a complete Harrogate or Knaresborough traditional text to revive for annual performance, decided to adopt the nearest known reasonably complete example, that from the Parish of Marton-cum-Grafton, and to attempt a revival. A copy of Mrs. Mary Hudleston's notes of an interview with Mr. William Curtis, a former participant, was obtained from Cecil Sharp House. Unfortunately, Mr. Curtis had died since being interviewed in 1962, and his daughter could add nothing to this information. As information about other Blue Stots Plays came to light during 1979, it became obvious that with the similarities between plays, and the supposed interchange of material via the movement of farm servants, it ought to be possible to produce a fairly complete reconstruction. This was eventually achieved by using a few lines from the nearest villages with recorded texts - Raskelf and Nether Poppleton - to fill in the obvious gaps in the Marton text as remembered by Mr. Curtis. There remained one outstanding problem, in that the Marton play ended with a dance while the collection was taken. Apart from a vague description of a cross-over step no details had survived. A simple dance was evolved incorporating this, and preparations were made to perform at Marton-cum-Grafton on the Saturday preceding Twelfth Night, 1980. Few details were available of costumes worn at Marton, but as jackets worn inside-out were known to have been favoured at other North Riding locations, these were decided upon.



Knaresborough Mummings outside the Joiners Arms in Hampsthwaite – on the annual Blue Stots tour.

photo:Chas Marshall

The villagers arranged various venues, including the Parish Hall, a large private house, two pubs - and a barn full of bullocks! Sadly, there were few surviving villagers old enough to remember the original performances, and those that were had been very small children at the time; however the general verdict was that the reconstruction "looked right" and no-one could suggest any specific changes which could be made.

Return visits were made to Marton-cum-Grafton on the appropriate nights in 1981 and 1982. Further tours added in subsequent years visited other areas where the Blue Stots plays used to be performed and this led to the collection of previously unrecorded plays from Haxby, Helperby, Skelton-on-Ure and Topcliffe. The winter Blue Stots tours thus became a regular fixture in the Knaresborough Mummings annual programme.

In 1982, members of Hornblower Morris from Ripon revived the Skelton Play and this revival has also continued to the present day. Other revivals have occurred in the villages of Clifford and Topcliffe.

Thus after a break lasting between 40 years to 70 years, several Yorkshire villages have seen the return of their Blue Stots.

*Stuart Rankin and Chas Marshall
April 2003*



DERT in Glasgow 4th-6th April, 2003

'Dance or Die'

DERT 2003 was held in Glasgow in early April. Teams from as far afield as Wareham and Newcastle flew/travelled by train and drove to Scotland for the event.

Unfortunately, two of Dorset Buttons forgot their passports and were not allowed to fly so could not compete! ¹

I had a fairly easy journey from Heathrow and took the opportunity to explore Glasgow the day before the competition took place. By the end of Friday, I had visited many places displaying the works of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, finishing with High Tea at the Willow Rooms in Sauchiehall Street, another monument to his extraordinary design talents.

The main base for the weekend was Henry Wood Hall, located near the Royal Crescent and not far from the futuristic Armadillo-style auditorium near the Clyde. We had a pleasant stroll along Clyde bank from our accommodation. The evening was spent meeting up with old friends, chatting and drinking before returning to the Eurohostel for late night drinks sold by the guy on reception!

This year's competition was a departure from previous years. Each team visited 4 pubs as part of the competition and were judged in each. This meant they didn't have to dance the same dance or use the same dancers. They were able to treat the

¹ These two were flying RyanAir and as a requirement needed ID such as a passport. Devolution has not required a passport to cross the Scottish border yet!

competition more like a standard rapper pub crawl and were able to respond to conditions and audiences accordingly. Unfortunately for the judges, though, this meant they had to mark every category and not just their specialist area. There were only 2 categories of entry: Premier and Open so that each team could dance traditional or evolved dances and had more scope for displaying their talents.

As a member of the audience, I found the competition much more interesting than in previous years. We were able to see the teams dance rapper in more natural surroundings which led to some highly entertaining and heart-stopping moments. All the competing dancers I spoke to remarked how good it felt and that the judging was almost incidental to the day's events. (In fact, one character forgot the judges so much that he stood in front of them!)

We returned to Henry Wood Hall in the evening and every team was given a chance to display. Then the judges gave their decision. The results were as follows:

Premier

1 st	Black Swan
2 nd	Newcastle Kingsmen
3 rd	Sallyport

Open

1 st	Northgate
2 nd	Pengwyn
3 rd	Dorset Buttons

Some of us went to a local pub afterwards where more dancing, drinking and chatting ensued before we staggered back to the Eurohostel.

The DERT weekend finished on Sunday morning with a couple of discussions and workshops. I sat in the cafeteria and listened to Aubrey O'Brien (well known Tommy) and Brian Kelly (well known Betty) "blether on" about their experiences, assisted by members of the group. What can you do with a fridge and 5 rapper dancers?

Our final port of call before flying back was the local pub with more dancing and chatting. Many thanks to Clydeside for a brilliantly organised weekend and good luck to Martin for DERT 2004 in Bath.

Jill Griffiths
April 2003



Festival Flyers

Sidmouth International Festival 2003

Morris at Sidmouth is as varied and stunning as ever....but do note that some teams are not necessarily appearing all week.

Cotswold is represented by the entertaining and athletic **Berkshire Bedlam**, the flexible virtuosity of **Hexham Morrismen** and the humour, control and skill of the **Outside Capering Crew**.

Rapper has the superb **Black Swan** and Longsword the hypnotic smooth tradition of **Grenoside**.

Clog is represented by the youthful exuberance of **Chiltern Hundreds** and the energy and verve of **Slubbing Billy's**.

Molly isn't neglected either: new to the festival are the creative energy of colour which is **Gog Magog**.

Morris workshops include some sword inspiration from the **Black Swan – Demon Barbers Roadshow** and some new thinking about Morris in performance from the ballet/Irish influenced **Stepback**. Complete beginners get a chance to try four different types of Morris on Sunday morning then go down to the Esplanade to watch dozens of teams dance out. The **John Gasson Jig competition** brings innovation, excellence and wonderful entertainment on Sunday afternoon and then in the evening the Anchor Gardens play host to non-stop high quality performance.

The venues include the Arena, the Showground South Stage, and Anchor Gardens and anywhere else where audiences are waiting to be entertained.

New morris advisors **Tony Forster** and **Jenny Slade** want your reactions and hopes - please tell them your ideas and hopes for the future.

And from the official pen.....

“The Festival prides itself in providing a wealth of top quality workshops throughout the week...”, for Season ticket holders only (but you can buy batches of 5 to use specifically for workshops). “This year the list includes the opportunity to get to grips with: European dance, Cajun, Appalachian, Irish set, Dutch, Playford, Contra, Scottish, Clog Stepping and Beginners Ceilidh”.

The unique show **Flame** promises to be a spectacular of English Dance featuring, amongst others, English Acoustic Collective, The Mellstock Band and Grenoside Traditional Sword Dancers.

The Festival Dance House will have the ceilidh bands: Token Women, Peeping Tom, Rodney Miller's Airdance, Random, Bedlam and Whapweasel. The Global Dance

parties will dance to Peatbog Fairies, Ti Jaz, Bayou Seco, Charanga Del Norte, Skokiaan and Meridian.

I delved into the programme to find about morris workshops but still not much detail – and went back to ask the organisers!

The workshops will be run as follows:

Bacca Pipes	Simon Pipe (Outside Capering Crew)
Beginners' Tasters	Tony Forster, Sally Wearing, Jenny Slade and Sue Swift
Border	Silhill Morris
Cotswold	Stepback Project
Molly	Gog Magog
North West	Slubbing Billy's and Chiltern Hundreds
Rapper	Black Swan

For further details contact:

E-mail info@sidmouthfestival.com

The Festival Office
PO Box 296
Matlock
Derbyshire DE4 3XU

Phone: 01629 760123



Towersey - the little village with the BIG ideas

Just when you thought it was safe to pack up the tent (after Sidmouth) along comes Towersey.... abstracts from the press release:

The 39th Towersey Village Festival takes place from 21st to 25th August 2003, just a few miles east of Oxford. It boasts a great Festival site with a bountiful selection of food and drink to please most tastes; it also has its own Festival camp sites and is within easy reach of the M40 and main line railway stations. The Phoenix cycle path leads from Thame to Princess Risborough via Towersey, so it is now possible to visit by bike.

There is a cracking line up in the Dance Tent, including the Old Swan Band, All Blacked Up and Hekety. Prego lead a late European roots dance band with bags of energy and skill, Whapweasel return with their unique blend of folk, rock, jazz and ska and the Simon Care Trio kick off the weekend with their powerful combination of

squeezebox, fiddle and guitar. Lunchtime ceilidhs feature GIB BC!, Monsieur Pantin and Pigs Might Fly.

The Towersey Arena is an open air theatre which holds spectacular music and dance displays and family entertainment. For only £4 (£1 for children) you can watch, among others: Hammersmith Morris, Pig Dyke Molly, Flag & Bone Gang, Maenads, Owlswick Morris, Towersey Morris Men and Ramrugge Clog Morris.

There is a dedicated youth venue, The Hive, with a daily programme of workshops and sessions, singarounds for anyone aged 12 – 25. The Towersey Children's Festival has Mike Jackson, Wynndebagge, Poppets Puppets, Dr Sunshine and Berzerkas Circus.

For further details contact

tvfpress@mrscasey.co.uk

PO Box 296

Matlock

Derbyshire DE4 3XU

Phone 01629 760345



And here we add a plug for **Direct Roots 2**; the new updated Folk Directory:
See www.direct-roots.com or sales@mrscasey.co.uk

Memories of Chris White, 1951-2003

Many of you will remember Chris, who died suddenly from a heart attack on April 7th. You could not forget his immense physical stature, but he deserves to be remembered for his contribution to the Morris. He started dancing while a student at Queen Mary College, London.

Holborn Morris - *Chris Whitehead's memories*

I think it started with Nick Pattenden, Mike Barraclough, Nick Beard, Mark Tompsett & me. Mike Blanford provided the music - so there was a connection with London Pride from the start. We all had the folk "bug" so there was also a folk club ("Haystacks") and a Historical Dance group.

I remember Chris's enthusiasm and his concertina playing - particularly "The Bells of St Mary's" played while swinging his concertina around. And Swaggering Boney - with Chris in the opposite corner - concentrated the mind wonderfully!

Headcorn Morris - *Dave Dye and Tim Bull's memories*

Chris joined Headcorn Morris in 1973 and the next year persuaded several of the side to go to Sidmouth. Attending the Roy Dommett/Tubby Reynolds workshops and watching Old Spot dance, they realised that there was much more to Morris than doing a collection of dances from the Cotswolds which all looked much the same. So, when he became the foreman in 1975, the side stopped doing all the dances they had learned and concentrated on Ilmington and Oddington. The side became much more interesting to watch but was still not what Chris wanted.

The Seven Champions Molly Dancers - *Dave Dye and Tim Bull's memories*

Chris wanted to do stuff that was even more distinctive and special. He was the moving force behind creating a sort of ceilidh band/mumming/dance "act" which included a couple of Molly dances in its repertoire. In the winter of 1975 Chris, with three other members of the side, went to a workshop on Molly dancing run by Russell Wortley at Cecil Sharp House. They realised that here was something they could make their own, and so the idea for the Seven Champions was born.

It took three or four years before Chris and the rest of the side felt they were getting it right. Chris's main contribution was the high knee stomping style and the almost militaristic precision of the dancing. This has remained a key feature of the side.

Tonbridge Morris - *Glenn Miller's and my own memories*

Chris founded Tonbridge Morris in 1989. He wanted to see if it was possible for men and women to dance together in the same style, and worked out a schedule of exercises in movement, which occupied half of each practice. He chose the Wheatley tradition as it was not well known, and created the dances directly from Sharp's and Manning's field notes. He was a passionate believer in the need to raise the standards of Morris dancing and never to forget your audience.

Tonbridge Morris still perform some of the dances devised by Chris in the Wheatley style. If you have any memories of Chris, please share them with us.

Helen Mitcham

July 2003



Pre-1980s Morris in North America

The following is based primarily on a number of messages posted by various individuals to the Morris Dancing Discussion List (MDDL) or to me directly beginning in the 1990s, supplemented by material from early issues of the American Morris Newsletter. It is not the result of careful scholarship! Nor is this a subject of which I have direct personal knowledge, having never seen morris dancing until the mid 1980s, so I must rely on the recollections of others. Little attempt has been made to confirm or correct the information given. Cave canem.

It's a well known bit of folklore that the earliest recorded attempt to bring morris dancing to America occurred in 1583 (ironically the same year that gave us Stubbes's well-known anti-morris rant) with Sir Humphrey Gilbert's attempt to establish the first permanent English colony in the New World in Newfoundland. The captain of one of Gilbert's five ships wrote, "Besides for solace of our people, and allurement of the Savages, we were provided of musike in good variety not omitting the least toyes, as Morris dancers, hobby horses, and Maylike conceits to delight the Savage people, whom we intended to winne by all fair means possible." The historian Samuel Eliot Morison notwithstanding, there is no record that any morris dancing actually took place. In fact, it is possible the morris bells were aboard one of the ships that had to turn back and never got to America.

Rhett Krause has documented some stage performances of something advertised as "morris dancing" in 19th century America, and Mary Neal's efforts to bring morris to America in the early 20th century. In the 1920s and 1930s it seems morris dancing was in widespread use in American elementary school physical education classes. Peter Hoover reports a 1912 book of folk dances, intended for use by physical education teachers in the New York City school system, that includes a version of Headington 'Laudnum Bunches'. And I have spoken with a woman who took part in some morris dancing as a part of an annual May Day event at a school in Syracuse sometime in or about the 1940s.

An American branch of the English Folk Dance Society (later the English Folk Dance and Song Society) was founded in 1915; it later became the Country Dance Society (and later, the Country Dance and Song Society). At dance camps sessions in Amherst, Massachusetts and, later, at Pinewoods Camp in Plymouth, Massachusetts (more irony: Plymouth was where the Pilgrims settled), CDSS has been teaching morris dancing for many years: at least since the mid-1950s at Pinewoods, and perhaps as early as the 1930s or earlier in Amherst. The Country Dance * New York web site's chronology (<http://www.cdny.org/chronology.html>) mentions CBS television broadcasts (!) of morris dancing, and morris classes run by May Gadd and Phil Merrill, in New York in the 1940s.

One 1950s American morris dancer was Israel "Izzy" Young, a friend of Bob Dylan's, who as of 2001 was living in Stockholm. He recalls American morris as being "under the total control of May Gadd". "There was the best side and the second best side and I got into the best side..." That apparently refers to the "A" side and "B" side at Pinewoods. John Dexter writes: "The Pinewoods demonstrations teams you mentioned were active at camp in summer and were always eagerly anticipated by

those of us learning the Morris." The Morris tour of Pinewoods by the two sides ("A" side and "B" side) eventually was taken over by the First rendition of the Pinewoods Morris Men, a club on paper only, put together organizationally by Nibs Matthews on one of his teaching visits to camp in 1964. Another early Pinewoods Man was Shag Graetz. For a good history of the first 25 years of the Pinewoods Morris Men, see <http://pinewoodsmorris.org/history.html>

Dexter's introduction to morris came at Pinewoods in 1965, where he learned a few dances from Peter Leibert. He recalls Gadd: "a wonderfully buoyant and crusty old Englishwoman who had learnt her Morris in London (I think), which means that she most certainly had contact with Sharp and/or his disciples. A product of EFDSS, she was very insistent that the style of dancing, both Morris and English country, be as she knew it to be correct. Some folks thought of her as intimidating, others were impatient with her insistence upon her ways. I always found her to be charming and beautifully peculiar in the English manner!"

The Pinewoods Men's first tour outside of CDSS sponsorship came in 1968 in Boston; this tour was repeated in subsequent years. Apparently they did two tours a year for some time. But they still were a CDSS-related "team" consisting of dancers from all over, not meeting and practising regularly. There was also morris being taught at schools such as Berea College in Kentucky. But these were not true morris teams either, in the sense of a more-or-less fixed group of dancers meeting weekly (or at least regularly) for practice, touring in the streets, and socializing as a group. In that sense, probably the first independent American morris team was the Village Morris Men in New York City, founded in 1967 or 1968 by Eric Leber, a musician and morris dancer who ran the dance weeks at Pinewoods for some time in the 1960s.

The idea of a CDS-independent morris side was not universally applauded; according to Dexter, "May Gadd and most everyone else (silly 'tho this seems now) was completely outraged that Eric would do this." Other dancers of the side were Roger Cartwright, Dexter, David Lindsay, Karl Rodgers, Howard Seidel, and Paul Skrobela; musician was Elizabeth Rodgers playing what appears to have been a Melodica. "The level of dancing," says Dexter, "a product of weekly practice and teaching by an expert dancer, was very different from that at CDS as you might imagine." They danced Bledington (with splitters), Fieldtown, possibly a few dances from other traditions, and "the High Spen rapper dance without flips but with all the figures." The team lasted two or three years until Leber and Cartwright both moved away.

In 1973 Cartwright put together the Pinewoods New Englanders to travel to England. The members were Cartwright, Dexter, Rodgers, Seidel, Fred Breunig, Ed Mason, Dick Van Kleek, Sam Rubin, and Andy Woolf, who played fiddle but did not dance. They attended Whit Monday at Bampton, the Thaxted Ring Meeting, practices of Chipping Campden, Headington, and the Oxford teams. They met Morris Sunderland, Ewart Russell, Walter Abson, Don Ellis, Michael Blanford, Roy Judge, Roy Dommett, Rev Kenneth Loveless and many others. This was the first American team to dance in England -- though not the first Americans. Leber had gone to England in the 1950s to travel and dance with English morris teams, as did Graetz in 1972 and perhaps earlier.

Dexter was on the Pinewoods New Englanders, and says, "My hair stood up in excitement while dancing in the processional at Thaxted. We witnessed the Thaxted debut of the amazing Garstang Morris Men in their Northwest clogs and purple breeches and hats totally covered in flowers; I heard Loveless give a fine and often humorous sermon in the church, etc., etc. In short, that experience shaped my attitude towards Morris, for better or worse, and gave me the necessary stuff to actually trick enough men in Binghamton to try this folly."

So Dexter, that winter, founded the Binghamton Morris Men, one of the first independent American morris sides and, at that time, the only one. Binghamton is a small city (metropolitan population about 267,500 in 1973) near the lower center of upstate New York. Dexter writes: "The truth is that was and continues to be a perfect location for a Morris team to develop its own way and its own style and personality being a long ways away from any other major urban center and, therefore, from outside influences like other Morris teams and even other Morris Men."

"We must remember that, in those days, there were no Ales or other gatherings of teams in our country, something for which I am now thankful. But I considered this to be a hindrance at the time, feeling 'young and stupid and having much to learn'... What did I know? I invited Howie Seidel, my Village Morris Men teammate, to come up and dance with us and to eventually become the first 'away' side member of the Binghamton team. Roger C. was frequently a guest dancer with us as well. These men, both of the previous generation, provided a certain valuable perspective to the fledging, inexperienced guys dancing with me. You gotta use your resources, after all, and these two men provided positive evidence of the attitude I was trying to inflict on my side at the time. Turns out it worked fine, as that side continues to this day to be unique in all the right and important ways".

Other teams followed soon after. Ring o' Bells was the first American women's team, founded by Jody Evans in New York City; they began in 1974, as did the Greenwich Morris Men (also in New York), founded by Jim Morrison. That same year saw the startup of the New Cambridge Morris Men (by Cartwright) and the Black Jokers (by Howie Lasnik) both in the Boston area. Part of the impetus for the founding of the New York teams may have been a visit by the Binghamton Men in the spring of that year. Also present for that tour was Breunig who, with his wife Dinah, soon after contributed to the formation of the Marlboro (Vermont) morris teams.

Likewise, the 1974 Pinewoods camp tour which included the Binghamton Men as well as the Pinewoods Men provided motivation for the formation of other teams. At around that time there was talk of turning the Pinewoods team into an umbrella organization, an idea that foundered on the issue of women's membership.

A few years later Pinewoods became a Boston-area men's team. Pokingbrook Morris and Sword started up in Poughkeepsie, New York around 1975, with Christopher Hodgkin its first squire and fore. They practised in a meeting room in the main building of the Oakwood Friends School. Pokingbrook's base moved north in later years to Albany, New York. Sean Smith was a founding member of Pokingbrook, and he recalls the short-lived Renaissance Fair held on the grounds of the Fox Hollow Festival in Petersburg, NY (east of Albany, Troy and Schenectady) during the mid-70s. I don't know if it featured morris dancing each year, but I certainly recall

performing there with Pokingbrook in '76 or '77. I'm almost positive Binghamton was on hand, as well as Dudley Laufman's team (both the adult and kid sides).

Peter Klosky first saw morris performed at the Fox Hollow Festival in 1975. Two teams were represented, New Phoenix ("a Dudley side? [with box player] Taylor Whitesides(?)") and New Cambridge. Klosky "was gobsmacked. They were incredible performers, hot as hell, just returned from their very heady & emotional tour of England. This was amazing stuff." The following year Klosky joined the Binghamton Men and returned to Fox Hollow: "In 1976, I recall New Cambridge MM dancing, including (though he has since strangely denied it) one Howard Siedel replete in red seat-belt baldric. I had been dancing with Binghamton for about two months & did some drunken pick-up Bampton with various NCMM and Bob Childs, Smokey McKean (and probably John Galler) of Eric Lieber's Strong Morris (those gents later destined to evolve into the Lord Hill MM). Also present from Binghamton were musicians Selma Kaplan and Maggie Ericson, and likely Ruth Mitchell, though she wasn't playing for BMM yet at that time. Mostly I recall it rained like blazes all the damned weekend, which seemed to be traditional at Fox Hollow".

One year, probably 1977 (though one correspondent thinks it was earlier), the Dartington Morris Men from Devon appeared at Fox Hollow. Smith remembers Nigel Chippendale as one of the side. As John Shewmaker tells it, Susan Boyer (now Susan Boyer Haley), niece of the late Bob Beers – who, with his wife Evelyn, had created the Fox Hollow Festival on land they purchased in Petersberg, NY- [had] attended the Dartington College of the Arts, in Devon, for a year... Near the College they liked to visit and perform at a certain local pub. One of the pub's regulars, a retired workingman, took a liking to these American girls (as they then were), and their music. This chap had a practice of saving as much of his retirement checks as he could, and using his savings to visit the U.S. in the summer... Hearing of Fox Hollow from Susan and Melissa, he visited Fox Hollow as well, volunteering as part of the festival crew.

When he returned home, he told the local morris team, Dartington Morris Men, of this wonderful Fox Hollow Festival. These men danced Morris, and with their wives also performed English Country Dance, in full period costume - well, of some period or other. The result of this connection was an invitation to perform at Fox Hollow, an invitation which was accepted. Some of the dancers were employed in distant places, like the oil fields of Saudi Arabia, and had to travel to Fox Hollow from quite a distance. Interestingly, we were told that later the Queen (or those acting in her interest), tried to engage the Dartington Morris and their ladies for a performance for the Queen, but the trans-Atlantic arrangements were already set, and so the performances at Fox Hollow (and in Canada, too, I believe), went as planned. These dancers also conducted brief workshops in Morris, and it was the first time that I, for one, ever got to dance morris.... The only other morris dancers at Fox Hollow that I remember from that year were Dudley Laufman's "Morris Minors," a team of short people from Canterbury, New Hampshire. Headington Quarry visited in 1976, performing on the Washington Mall at an annual folk festival held by the Smithsonian Institution. This may have been the first independent English team tour in America (as contrasted with the demonstration tours organized by Neal and Sharp six decades earlier).

Further south, near Washington, DC, Bluemont (Virginia) Morris was established in 1976 by Pinewoods veterans who brought in Tubby Reynolds for a Sherborne tutorial and Jim Morrison for additional teaching. Morris came more slowly to the west coast. A group called "The Anglo Folk Ballet" was founded by Richard Chase, meeting at the Unitarian Church in Claremont, California in the early 1970s; the dances were mainly Playford but with some morris and sword. The group also performed at a Renaissance Fair in Agoura. In 1973, after Richard had left, the group changed its name to Newcastle Country Dancers, and Doug Burger led some of the men to form Pipe and Bowl Morris. Holly Tree Morris in Victoria, British Columbia, began about 1975.

Berkeley Morris was founded in 1977 by Brad Foster, but was by 1984 still the only non-Renaissance Fair side between Portland, Oregon and Los Angeles, California. Bob Orser was involved in folk dancing as early as 1950 at the University of California at Berkeley, but didn't start morris dancing until 1981 when he joined the Merrie Pranksters, a group that included "a bit of morris and longsword" with their performances of Playford dances at Renaissance Fairs. He had seen performances of morris and longsword for a few years at that time, however. Orser says a now-defunct men's side in San Diego may have begun earlier, and the Sunset Morris Men in Los Angeles started a bit after Berkeley. Red Tail Morris, a women's side, started around 1983 as another Newcastle offshoot.

Women's morris was not the divisive issue in America that it was in England; although certainly some of the dancers of the early era opposed women dancing out, that sentiment largely died out early on. The issue of mixed morris provoked greater disharmony. The Marlboro Ale, held on Memorial Day weekend, began in 1976, sponsored by Marlboro Morris and Sword. In the early years all American teams were invited to the Ale, but before long that became infeasible and the invitation process of necessity became selective. Peter Masters writes: "Tony [Barrand] has told me it was his intent to use the power inherent in this selectivity to encourage the kinds of teams and kinds of dancing he wanted to see more of. This meant an emphasis on technically proficient teams, and, independently and quite dogmatically, the exclusion of mixed-sex teams".

As a reaction to Marlboro, the mixed sides established the Mixed Morris Ale, also held on Memorial Day weekend in New England until its cessation around 1995. (A third major American ale, the Midwest Ale, continues to take place the same weekend.) Masters observes that, although attitudes regarding team gender makeup have generally moderated since the 1980s, the mixed and single sex teams still tend to form separate communities: Teams that met at the Ales tended to invite each other for days of dance, or, considering the distances involved, weekends of dance. When dancers relocated from city to city, they tended to hook up with teams they knew. At this point, the two communities are remarkably isolated from each other, considering that we share so many common interests and live in close proximity. No American morris umbrella organization was ever formed. However, a publication, the American Morris Newsletter, began in April, 1977 under the editorship of Breunig. The first issue's "undoubtedly incomplete" list included 23 teams.

By April 1979 the list included 38 teams:

British Columbia: Victoria Morris Men,
 California: Berkeley Morris
 Connecticut: Mianus River Morris; New Haven Morris and Sword
 District of Columbia: Foggy Bottom Morris
 Indiana: Bloomington Morris
 Kentucky: Berea Morris Men; Woodford Morris Men
 Maine: Fiddler's Reach Morris; Strong Morris; Troy Morris
 Manitoba: Village Green Morris Men
 Massachusetts: Berkshire Morris Men; Black Jokers; Muddy River Morris;
 NewTowne Morris Men; Northampton Morris; Woods Hole Morris Men
 Michigan: Ann Arbor Morris
 Minnesota: Minnesota Traditional Morris
 New Hampshire: Moose Mountain Morris
 New York: Binghamton Morris Men; Buffalo Morris; Greenwich Morris Men;
 Hearts of Oak; Pokingbrook Morris; Ring o' Bells,
 Ontario: Forest City Morris Men; Green Fiddle Morris
 Pennsylvania: St. Peter's School; Three Rivers Morris Men
 Rhode Island: Westerly Morris Men
 Tennessee: Sourwood Morris
 Texas: Men of Houston
 Vermont: Marlboro Morris and Sword
 Washington: Pike Place Morris
 Wisconsin: Dodgeville Morris Men
 Regional: Mountain Morris Men; Pinewoods Morris Men

Jeff Bigler's Geographic List of Morris and Sword Sides notes the following American teams as having begun prior to 1980. (*Note that some of the dates differ from dates mentioned elsewhere in this article. Dates were supplied by team members and have not been verified. Nearly all North American teams are listed on Bigler's site, but most do not have founding date available.*)

1970 -- Canterbury Morris, New Hampshire
 1974 -- Greenwich Morris Men; Ring O' Bells, New York,
 1976 -- American Travelling Morrice, Many different locations
 1977 -- Berkeley Morris, California; Bluemont Morris, Virginia
 1978 -- Albemarle Morris Men, Charlottesville, Virginia
 1978 -- Ha'penny Morris, Belmont, Massachusetts
 1979 -- Bouwerie Boys, New York; Mianus River Morris, Greenwich, Connecticut;
 Rock Creek Morris Women, Washington, DC
 1970s -- Village Green Morris Men, Winnipeg, Manitoba (Canada)

Rich Holmes
updated July 2003

Thanks to Rich for revising the text and allowing publication of this review which originally appeared some 2 years ago on the MDDL

Watch this space!

In celebration of May Day and the acquisition of an important English and Anglo-American dance collection, the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC recently presented two programs on morris dancing and related traditions, in cooperation with the Country Dance and Song Society of America

On April 30, at the time of his lecture, "But America for a Morris Dance!", Dr. Anthony Barrand, Professor of Anthropology at Boston University, officially announced the donation of his collection to the American Folklife Center (AFC). The Anthony Grant Barrand Collection of Morris-, Sword-, and Clog Dancing includes videotapes and films in various formats of English teams seen on field trips between 1976 and 1982 and all teams performing at the Marlboro Morris Ale from 1976 to the recent.

In addition to being valuable in its own right, the collection complements the AFC's James Madison Carpenter Collection, which documents morris, sword, and mumming in England from 1928-1935. (See <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/carpenter/aboutcat.html>.) Tony's lecture, punctuated with seasonal and morris-related songs, was well attended by members of the Washington, DC morris community, who were able to recognize many of the dancers in Tony's footage and who took the opportunity to ask informed questions at the end of his talk.

On May Day itself, the Library's Neptune Plaza resounded with the sounds of bells, clashing sticks and the fluttering of colourful ribbons, as Tony hosted, "Bringing in the May", an hour-long program of display dancing from six Washington-area morris teams. Tony Barrand has researched and documented these dances for nearly thirty years. He teaches folklore at Boston University, and writes books and articles on morris-, sword-, and clog dancing. Apart from his academic work, he is an internationally known singer of traditional English songs (with singing partner John Roberts), and a dancer, dance teacher and teller of recitations. He and John Roberts have published fifteen recordings. In 1976, he founded the Marlboro Morris Ale, which brings some two hundred dancers to Vermont for Memorial Day weekend each year, and which has inspired many similar gatherings around the U.S. A number of English teams have attended Marlboro, among them Windsor Morris, Mr. Jorrocks' Morris Dancers, Kirtlington Morris Men, and Great Western Morris.

The Barrand Collection will be further highlighted by a documentary webcast on May traditions in the Carpenter and Barrand Collections. Curated and narrated by Jennifer Cutting², the webcast will be streamed from the Library of Congress website, www.loc.gov from the "Journeys and Crossings" page. Jennifer also recorded a two and a half hour oral history with Tony, incorporating questions from the Washington, DC morris community.

The American Folklife Center was created by Congress in 1976 and placed at the Library of Congress to preserve and present American Folklife through programs of

² Jennifer Cutting is a folklore specialist at the Library of Congress, a fantastic melodeon player, Bert Lloyd's last student, leader of the 1980's Washington-based folk rock band, New St George - and a member of Rock Creek Morris.

research, documentation, preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, public programs and training. It includes the Archive of Folk Culture, established in 1928, and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world. For more information, visit the Library's website at www.loc.gov/folkhfe/.

Tony's morris and sword materials (about 160 hours) have been digitized and will soon be available in streaming format at a searchable site on the web for people with high-speed internet connections. Stay posted!

[Adapted from the "News from the Library of Congress" (April 23, 2003).
Used by permission.]



Tony Barrand as "Mother" and Jennifer Cutting
Photo: Barbara Gorin of Rock Creek Morris

Old or Young?

Is it really a young person's pastime? As I get older it seems harder to get my leg up and round as you need to. I have less energy or stamina and usually have to pass up one in three chances to perform.

Of course while I have less energy than of old and the more difficult positions are now even harder, I find I have greater patience and appreciate the subtlety of the more intricate movements that brings its own satisfaction.

There are few textbooks on the subject, though there is probably more writing about it now than at any time in the recent past. Yet these seem to be of little value in actually teaching techniques, even with pictures the instructions are often confusing and books cannot get across the sense of rhythm needed to do it properly. I suppose that is why most people learn by experience as I did.

Although novices can learn together through a process of discovery it is probably more satisfying to learn with someone more experienced. In fact it seems to be one of the few areas where books have not replaced the direct passing on of skills and styles. The power of the oral tradition should not be underestimated!

As I get older I want to pass on and share the joy of the subtleties, the art of the fine detail. Young people have no patience for this: for them it is all new, they want to experience it all as quickly and as often as possible. Never mind the art of the performance - the faster and louder they do it the better.

This is the central problem - how do I get young people to want to learn from me and to appreciate the art of it.

But enough about sex, what about Morris dancing?

Long Lankin

Editor's note: If you like Andy's cover on this topic – do also take a look at his advert and consider using him for your publicity – he is great at capturing morris “lifestyles”.