

Morris Matters

could you fix my heel please???



CONTENTS OF VOLUME 23, NUMBER 2

EDITORIAL	2
MINISTRY OF SILLY WALKS	3
ADVICE WHEN STARTING A CLOG MORRIS	5
Roy Dommett	
ONE MORE.....	9
John Lewis.....	
BLACK SWAN WORKSHOP.....	10
Brian Mander	
BELLE ISLE MARCH	11
Roy Dommett	
VENI, VIDI, SALTAVI - DERT MMIV	13
Jenny Major.....	
GREAT GRANDSON OF MORRIS ON.....	14
Malcolm Major	
MARLBORO' ALE 2004	15
Sue Graham	
A POSSIBLE REFERENCE TO BAMPTON AND BLACK BOURTON DANCE SETS IN 1835.	17
Keith Chandler	
HOLIDAY READING	19
Roy Dommett	
NOTICEBOARD	21
MORRIS BAITING	22
Long Lankin	
WANTAGE WEEKEND WORKSHOP 2005.....	23
SIDMOUTH 2004	24
Tony Forster	

EDITORIAL

Welcome to Summer – or did we miss it? We had a wonderful June and since then have been almost rained off on several occasions. Still, we have news of several events coming up so let's hope that we get the second half of summer very soon. Morris has had a funny press over the past year, from the report overheard on the radio that a woman confessed to an irrational fear of morris dancers (I didn't hear this one myself – did anyone else?), to saying that "our folk festivals are appealingly insane (citing Britannia CocoNut dancers) and the suggestion that since morris dancing was banned by the Puritans, this is a good reason for it to continue. And we still meet people when out morris dancing who ask, "what country are you from?" and are amazed when we say "England".?

Morris Matters is nearly 25 volumes old (a little longer than that in years!) as the first issue came out in 1978) and it has been suggested that I compile a "Best Of Morris Matters" volume to celebrate the fact that we are still here! Do you agree and if so, what would you like to see again (or what did you miss)? Remember some of the early issues were typed up and literally cut-and-pasted, so they may be more legible when reprinted.

For now, thanks as always to the regular contributors – especially to Roy Dommett for making yet more of his immense collection of morris knowledge more widely available. I received two CD's for review; "Great Grandson" (which is reviewed in this issue) and "Dancing Days" by Chris Leslie. This one I had mentioned in the last issue as being a thoroughly enjoyable listen for anyone who likes a morris tune played well by some excellent musicians. Both are available from Talking Elephant – see review for details.

On anniversaries – Sidmouth is 50 and Towersey is 40 – I wonder how many people reading this have been to all of either of them? I started at Sidmouth's 23rd (I think) – and haven't missed one since. I can't believe it may not be there next year ...

Enjoy the season.

Beth

MINISTRY OF SILLY WALKS

Department of Country Pursuits

Section of Jumps and Capers

*37627 Birdcage Walk
London, EC1 HOHO*

Tel: Ansaphone available to record insults

Our Reference: KP%(h

Fax: Messages can be sent to The Tower

Your reference:

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (73/2004/b) dated 1st April 2004

In pursuance of the latest obligatory EC directive, Her Majesty's Government is seeking a representative entry for the equal opportunity traditional dance section during the next World Games. The Cabinet Office, in conjunction with the Treasury, had agreed that this should be coordinated by the Ministry of Silly Walks, herein to be known as the MinSW, with one group to be selected from several finalists, following heats to be held at suitable regional centres, which are to be established, with the usual delays, throughout the United Kingdom.

ANNEXE - Rules set by the MinSW

- 1 There should be a minimum of ten distinct and preferably identifiable figures ¹.*
- 2 Each dancer is allowed to exhibit their own individual sequences of steps ².*
- 3 The competition is to be judged on the basis of originality rather than quality.*
- 4 The entries must conform to local and national practices and prejudices.*
- 5 Attempts at bribery will be penalised if not successful.*
- 6 The group will smile at the official adjudicators at appropriate moments.*

SCHEDULE 1 - Applicable EC Regulations

- 1 The performance ³ to be at least 2.33 minutes and no more than 3.68 minutes long.
Any exceedence of these limits will be associated with the dancers being shortened or lengthened in compensation.*
- 2 The performance will be constrained to a rectangular floor ⁴ area of no more than 3.5×10^3 hectares.*
- 3 The performance will be limited to a group of between 5 to 10 persons plus at least one accompanist⁵ with a portative musical instrument.*
- 4 The persistent incorrect playing of wrong notes will be penalised.*
- 5 The combined waistage ⁶ will be less than 8 meters.*
- 6 There is to be no discrimination⁷ on the grounds of disability, race, colour, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual preference or marital status, in that order.*
- 7 The following hand signals will be observed: ABCDEFGHI, as defined in the official encyclopedia of intercultural gestures.*

SCHEDULE 2 - Bye laws from the Local Rural District Councils

- 1 *The internationally recognised rules and regulations for all sports that are customary on the local playing fields will be observed, with the following exceptions,.*
 - a) *keep off the grass,*
 - b) *no bodily contact below the waist,*
 - c) *all droppings to be retrieved immediately and placed in an approved receptacle,*
 - d) *avoidance of nakedness⁸, except in the heat of the moment,*
 - e) *straight lines⁹ are only to be formed parallel to the pre-marked boundaries.*
- 2 *All required services are to be paid for in advance.*
- 3 *Participants may use their customary tools or be hand operated.*

DEFINITIONS

1. *A figure is defined as a sequence of movements that fit to one or more musical " phrases.*
2. *A step is the transfer of weight from one foot to another, or the same, with or without the other foot remaining in contact with the floor. For greater understanding consult the Morris Federation "Glossary of Terms" ¹¹.*
3. *A performance is defined as an attempt to be entertaining, mischievous or unlikely.*
4. *A floor is defined as a flat surface constructed at right angles to the local direction of Gravity, which may be used at the dancer's discretion for support between leaps and capers.*
5. *An accompanist is defined as one who goes along with what is going to happen.*
6. *A waistage is measured exceptionally in non metric "hands" up until 2004.*
7. *An absence of discrimination is to be demonstrated through the content of what is offered.*
8. *Nakedness is the state at which sexual differences ¹² may be observed.*
9. *Straight Lines are those things which foremen are forever seeking at practices.*
10. *Euphemism.*
11. *Copies may be obtained at some small expense.*
12. *Classes can be arranged for those who are unsure through your Technical Officer*

ADVICE WHEN STARTING A CLOG MORRIS

CLOGS

The whole point of clogs is to hear the clear sound so one must practise in clogs to get the stepping together. Normally one needs two pairs, with rubbers for indoors and irons for outside. Note: the team must be equipped for running repairs when out. Clogs are commonly used in Cheshire dances nowadays, even though it was done by girls in plimsolls and so was quite different in character.

The clog affects posture; it reduces the flexibility of the foot compared to other dance forms. It allows variation of the level of noise. It encourages stamps not jumps, so that there is no spread in time for the body rise and therefore no need to "stretch" the tune as for Cotswold Morris.

STEP

In the hop step it is usual to raise the knee high, perhaps till the thigh is horizontal, shin vertical. The leg is not pumped up and down but the knee is held up a while especially travelling. The polka step has a characteristic change of balance - from standing on one foot it is "hop, hop, change, pause," the change being a switch of weight-bearing foot. The differences in the step arise from the use of the free foot, tapping the ball of that foot on the first "hop" either beside the carrying foot, in front of it or with the foot crossed over it, or perhaps using the toe, and maybe with a wide swing of the foot, either backwards or to the side before the change of weight. Minor variations arise from the height reached by the knee of the free leg and, when tapping across the foot, where the crossing of the legs is done between ankle or knee. Each team and even each dance has its own way - often without realising that there are so many possibilities.

MUSIC

From the start, the music must be right. The two rhythms used are "jigs" and "polkas". The 6/8 jigs are played like "100 Pipers", what the Irish would call "single jigs", because of the basic skippiness, and are frequently used for dances with hop or skip steps. The polkas, properly in 2/4, are frequently more exaggerated in rhythm than Cotswold Morris but not quite as the 19th century ballroom dance like "Can't you dance the Polka" where the hop in the step was much more exaggerated. The polka rhythm is "t1 2 3", and it is very important that it is played exactly as the team like to dance it. The underlying beat for the stepping is not to be sacrificed for the sake of the melody. The tune is played to have a clear phrase ending for each dance movement. The tune repeats are chosen to fit the figures, not to suit the musician. The melody may be changed at each figure if one must. Marches are also used, e.g. "Men of Harlech" or "British Grenadiers", not in strict tempo but to the stepping.

Beware of country dance players whose playing is inevitably too fast and too decorative, with no concept of phrasing to the dance, or of having to fit to body movements. They must understand that, as fiddle and banjo styles can be regional, so playing for morris can be different from anything else. A side drum is helpful, as the music can be overwhelmed by the noise of the clogs, but in turn it must not dominate. Heavy on beat is deadly - it drives the dancers into the ground. Off beat is emphasized to give the dancers a lift - as can be heard on good records with a snare drum.

The music is slower than one might expect because of elevation in the step and covering ground with the usual polka step. To travel it may be better to use skips than polkas - or slow down so that in certain figures the dancers have time to move. The dance should be in control, not the musician. Putting the tallest dancers in the positions which have to travel furthest may solve some problems.

Good dancing needs good music. In practice sessions, play exactly the required rhythm and only the necessary notes. One should practise to music clear enough to be heard against the clogs but not the full band - it is better to have separate band practices. Older North West sides would practice to one instrument, often a concertina, and keep the rest including drums for major performances.

The standard NW tunes are well chosen. Tunes must fit the club style for the dance so it is often difficult to find the "right" tune. Do not ignore a good tune just because it is well known.

STYLE

The size of a set is larger than Cotswold - desirably stick tip to stick tip spacing, rather than finger tip, both along and across the set. Movements can take twice as long compared to a Cotswold dance. Because of the greater size and the polka step, greater numbers are involved, traditionally 12 or 16 or even 24. The numbers are important for the effect created – and determine the room needed for practice. Many dances are adapted for 8 but at great loss of impact and it is to be deplored even if unavoidable.

The arm movements are more definite than in Cotswold morris and to obtain the required appearance it has to be standardised for everyone in each dance. The slope of the arms, the plane of the arms, the orientation of the implement needs to be fixed for every figure with perhaps general rules for turns, stars etc, for both arms, not just the one in the middle. This detail is often the major observable difference between dances from the same area. It is also this fine detail which is difficult to collect and so is not always available.

No notation gives enough definitive detail and the leader may well have to make arbitrary decisions on where to hold sticks, when and why to shake bells. Another example is a reel, on which precise beat to pass, how far apart, what happens at the ends, how wide are the loops. All these become the individual team's interpretation.

REPERTOIRE

A traditional team would have its one or two dances. A modern dance troupe will need at least 4 or 5 and perhaps up to 12 depending on what can be kept in reasonable practice. For variety the dances should include ones based on walk, skip and polka stepping. The patterns or figures should be recognisably different and the implements should vary. If garlands are carried, the dances should use the garland rather than having it as a decorative feature. Avoid the trap of teams from the Basque country or Provence - they appear to have one family of steps and figures but a wide range of implements so that their "different" dances have no variety.

IMPLEMENTS

These range from very flexible to rigid and there is usually one for each hand. Slings were common in the Manchester area with a length chosen not to hit the chest. They can be knotted handkerchiefs, bound cotton waste or covered corks on a string. They can be rotated vertically in front of the body or in planes parallel to the forearms, "inside" and "outside", or horizontally above the head in "twists". As sticks are not hit they can be painted and made of dowelling or broom handles. They are held at the end or the middle and have bells and ribbons or streamers on the ends. The ribbons may be to dampen the bells. They are waved, shaken or rotated from the wrist to make the bells ring and the ribbons flutter. The sticks can be developed into carnival wavers and, if two-ended, become "fluffies" or "pom-poms", formerly made of crepe paper but now often of thin coloured plastic sheet. Intermediate are short sticks held by loops of leather or ribbon on the end. There are no traditional rules for garlands with regard to size, rigidity or material.

ROUTINES

There are a basic set of "glossary" figures - outside, inside, reels (chains), forward and back, cross over, hands across (star), partners turn, arches etc. Most dances draw on these with only subtle differences. To be effective a dance must have at least one original figure even though the rest are basics.

Dances are better with a structure. First with some repetitive element such as a walk-up (up-street) and perhaps a "step-&-turn" figure, once thought to be characteristic of the older dances in the Manchester area. The other figures should have some natural order of increasing complexity, becoming more exciting by more travel or by developing variations on a theme. Random sets of movements are entertaining only up to a point. Dances "by the yard" are difficult to enjoy unless very well done or the movements are technically complex so that the audience appreciates the achievement. One can incorporate complex movements not found in other English traditions, especially those requiring 8 or more dancers to be done at all. Remember written notations are not a good starting point as they are often ambiguous, incomplete or need interpretation. If you want it right, try and see it danced or get it taught by someone who knows it. Of course, you may be wanting your own interpretation in which case the written notation is just a tool.

THE PRACTICE SESSION

Start each session with (a) stretching - it avoids "tightness" and restrained dancing and its baleful influence on style and (b) stepping practice, both stationary, and very important, travelling. One may have more than one travelling step, e.g. a hornpipe. Getting everyone to do the same is a problem. Use mirrors, reflections in windows, standing close or holding hands and repeating sequences many times. For people who have a coordination problem, break each movement down to one thing at a time and do not put it all together too quickly while they grasp it. Letting them loose in a set too soon will just throw everyone. Use walking through as an effective way of learning the patterns, 2 walks per polka step and no hand movements. The Carnival girls have a simple practice step which is a step, then a tap of the other foot in front, changing weight on the next step etc.

A team needs an agreed signal word for stopping immediately, like Whoa! When stopped do not drift about but wait for the instructor to sort it out. The leader has to decide if it was a one-off mistake, a genuine confusion, bad or wrong teaching. They need to recognise that some movements are difficult to recover from and one may have to go back to some earlier point in the dance. Some errors, like mistakes in steps or arm movements, do not impact on the set and can be left till an appropriate moment for comment. Have a policy that mistakes will be reviewed, that there is nothing personal about it, just to sort out why and for everyone to benefit.

The team needs to agree what to do if there is a mistake in an interacting figure like a reel or grand chain, either to stand out or trying to recover. The danger is one dancer falls out of the correct pattern and throws the rest.

The leader may have a problem with other people helpfully teaching, arguing with each other or post-morteming when the leader needs to teach. There is no real harm in this but everyone must recognise a signal when it has to stop.

NOTATIONS

Write a full notation of all the detail you have agreed. A leader has to decide how much effort is put into dealing with a technical difficulty before it is changed or deleted. Persist with difficult dances for a reasonable length of time - really difficult ones can take a couple of practice seasons. Try difficult dances to different tunes, for better lift, or even different rhythms and stepping. Discard what is unpopular, proven to be beyond you or difficult to get a set up to do, at some proper time like the AGM, when it can be a consensus - just letting it drop out could be offending some of the side. Have an AGM, ask everyone to comment in an environment free of risk to the club. Prompt all the team to make constructive comment about the dances and difficulties. One can run a club just using common sense but some thinking about it and remembering that it is all about people will help.

POINTS AT PRACTICE

A leader for each dance has to be trained, agreeing what signals and when, use of voice or whistle, and where from if it is a long set. Should a separate conductor be used and should they face up or down and use arm signals for control?

Practice as you intend to dance out. Entrances and exits during a show and changing implements need organising and practice to avoid time wasting. Any slackness or laziness inside will carry over outside, Do not let the team get casual over forming up. It is easier to integrate newcomers into a clog side than to a Cotswold side, as there are fewer technical difficulties. It is not for exhibitionists as there is little room for self expression. One usually finds a newish side does a dance well the second time through. To get everyone to remember the dance, run through it beforehand slowly - if you dash into it and get it wrong that confusion has to be removed, as well as the uncertainties that pre-existed. Initially designate places in the set to people and practise it hard from there before trying somewhere else. Have a chart of who should dance each dance - and from where - when going out so that there is no hesitation in public performance. It is worth having a register of who was there and learnt a dance and who has done what position. For the same sort of reason leaders should watch who is late arriving,

early to leave, has a long break in the bar and misses key sessions, because you may find yourself depending on them when they can not do it.

Experience suggests that new material is best introduced at the start when everyone is fresh rather than after a hard session, for example, working up a show, To get in all that is desired one should have a rough plan for the evening. Do not imagine that the best way of learning a dance is to keep at it till it bores. Most people find that last week's problems can disappear when properly learnt a second time round, so work on it a bit and then make more progress the next practice. Take time to be sure that the patterns are understood by everybody and remember those watching do not pick it up as well so bring them in for repeats. Eventually everyone should learn the dance from every position in the set. Clog morris is quite different from Cotswold. The pattern comes first and the style is worked up later.

SUMMARY

Some advice has been offered based on experience. These suggestions and solutions are not necessarily for all teams but the issues have to be met somehow and the chosen alternative must have its own justification.

Roy Dommett
©1985

ONE MORE.....

In the corner sits the dancer
His back against the wall
His muscles ache
His knees are cracked
But still the music calls him back
He lifts his eyes, looks across the floor
And asks his heart for just one more
Just one more dance and then

John Lewis

BLACK SWAN WORKSHOP

What would be your idea of a good workshop? Would the material be firmly rooted in the tradition, but with an exciting and innovative twist? Would the tutors really enjoy and understand their subject and put it across with clarity and excitement? Would they be arguably the best side in their genre with a fierce pride in what they do – and deservedly so? Would they be current national champions? Would you have a great day with fabulous people? Would you be challenged, but at the right rate to cope?

Well, I'm afraid you missed it! That is, unless you were at the Black Swan workshop in Nottingham last January.

I have been dancing Cotswold for thirty years, but I am a Rapper novice. So when Insword, with whom I doodle, announced that they were going en masse and I ought to go too, it seemed a good idea.

I arrived early to the Indian Community Centre in Basford, which was already fairly full of dancers with quite a range of experience but all of whom seemed keen to get as much as possible from the workshop. After a leisurely coffee and a chance to catch up with friends, Black Swan demonstrated their dance. Very impressive: slick sword handling, machine-gun stepping, well constructed figures, full-on in-your-face attitude and pride – and forward tumbles! Fortunately, they let us off doing these.

The teaching was done cumulatively, a figure at a time. Black Swan demonstrated the figure and individual members of the team then visited each of the “student” sets to help untie the Gordian knots that occasionally occurred. The focus throughout the day was amazing. Despite the fact that most people knew the majority of the others there, on the whole social chat was restricted to coffee time and lunch break. This is a testament to good pacing: challenging enough to keep people concentrated, but not so difficult that anyone needed to give up.

Gradually the dance was constructed through the day and at the end of the afternoon all the learner sets gave very creditable performances. More importantly, I am sure that everyone went away with greater appreciation of stepping, sword-handling and figure construction. To finish the workshop Dan said a few words about attitude: Black Swan have self-belief and pride. They practise hard on all aspects of their performance and believe that it is worth watching. I can only agree whole-heartedly.

What a great day! Thanks are due, of course:

- to the Morris Federation, under whose aegis the workshop was set up
- to Whip The Cat who did all the organising, including lunch and a superb buffet and tour for those of us who wanted to strut our stuff into the evening
- to all the members of Black Swan who were excellent teachers and an inspiration.
- Special mention should be made of Roger, who fiddled seemingly almost non-stop all day.

Brian Mander
June 2004

BELLE ISLE MARCH

There is a well known morris tune commonly called Monk's March presumably named after General Monck, later Duke of Albermarle. who restored Charles II to the throne in 1660. But this is not the proper name of the tune which was commonly called the Belle Island March.

The French used *Belle* in place names. Some of *Belle Isle* occurred in England from those fleeing the French Revolution. The most notorious was part of the Somer Town Rookery, or large scale slum, near the site of Cecil Sharp House in Camden Town, which was largely displaced by the building of the railway to St Pancras. It was also the name given to sea battles, one by an island in the mouth of the St Lawrence river in Canada, and the other a masterly retreat by Admiral Cornwallis from the Bay of Biscay on 17th June 1795 during the French Revolutionary War.

However the one of interest arose when the Marquis de Belle Isle was the French War Minister during the Seven Years War, 1756-63, and held the large island of Belle Isle, off Brittany's Atlantic Coast and heavily fortified. Pitt the Elder thought small raids were what Britain could mount and believed the taking of Belle Isle would rile the French. It was achieved on 7th June 1761 after an initial reverse. There had been so many delays and reconnaissances the defence had plenty of warning. Eight of fourteen current British regiments have it as a battle honour because of the difficulty of the assault, although the honour was not awarded until 1951!¹

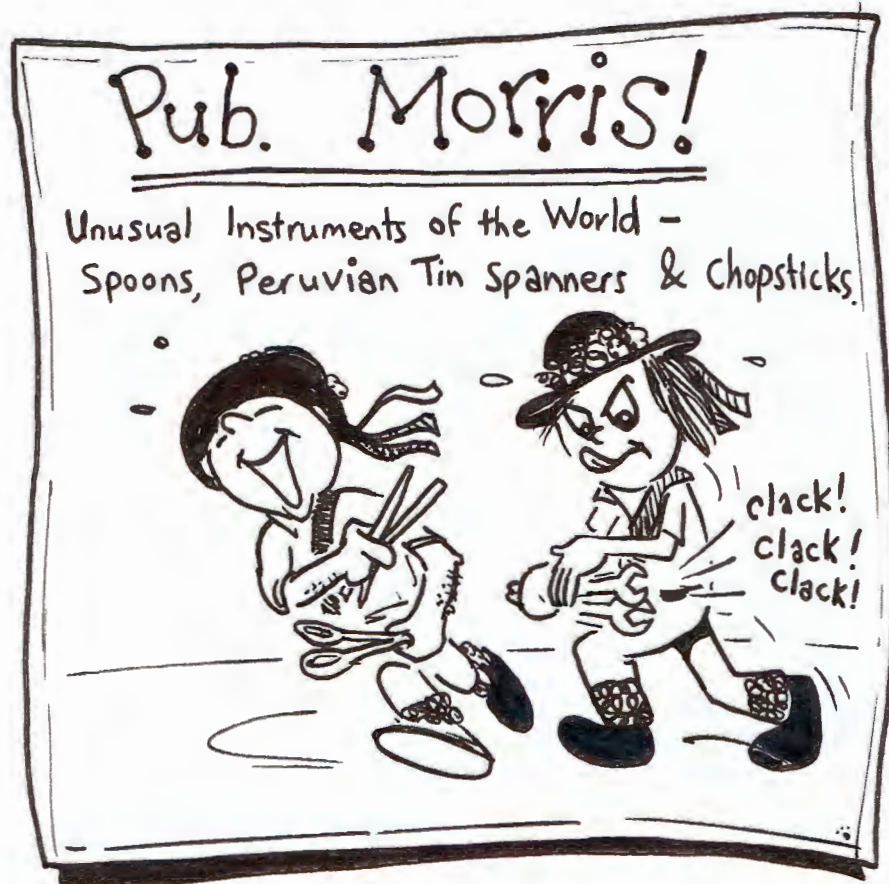
The celebrations at the end of the war included a march past by the British Army in front of the new King George III, like an early King's Official Birthday 'Trooping the Colour'. As a gesture of conciliation, the French Ambassador in London was invited to join the salute. As each regiment passed, it changed to the quick march "*The Belle Isle*", as a Swiss hymn tune that had been picked up had become known! The tune continued to be used at least on ceremonial occasions and at the Trooping the Colour into the 1970's.

The morris version of the tune is called after Monck at Sherborne and Bledington, but elsewhere, including places quite close to these two, it was called "*Belle Isle's March*", as at Longborough, Lower Swell and Brackley. It was published soon after the march past as "*Lady Petersham's March*" in "Twenty Four Country Dances with proper tunes and directions to each dance as they were performed at Court, Bath and all publick entertainments for 1764". It was probably named after Lady Caroline Petersham. The hymn writer Thomas Lynch used it for '*My Faith it is an Oaken Staff*'. Quite dissimilar tunes called '*Monk's March*' or "*The Mad Monks of Bangor*" have been found in printed collections.

A French ship "*Formidable*" captured by Lord Bridport off Belle Isle on 23rd June 1795 was renamed "*Belle Isle*" and fought at Trafalgar on 15th October 1805 where it was third in line in the lee division under Collingwood.

Roy Dommett

¹ This was not exceptional, Tangier 1662-1680 and Namur 1695 were awarded in 1910, Gibraltar 1704-5 in 1909 and Blenheim 1704 in 1882.



VENI, VIDI, SALTAVI – DERT MM1V

Our weekend started on the Friday with afternoon tea in the famous Bath teashop, Sally Lunn's. Very genteel. But we were not in Bath for a pleasant couple of days sightseeing. We were here for the far more exacting participation in the Dancing England Rapper Tournament 2004; this year hosted by Northgate Rapper, more specifically, Martin Hanley. The event was based in the Pavilion, where we all gradually gathered on Friday evening for drinking, eating and socialising. Indoor camping was provided, but some of us had opted for the more luxurious Youth Hostel, which had the unfortunate disadvantage of being a long walk away – uphill!

Next day we all reconvened at the Pavilion for the start of the competition. Some teams sought out secluded corners of the building for a last minute rehearsal. We were then divided into tours of four or five teams and set off, first to the warm-up pub and then on to 4 competition pubs. Following last year's successful system, there were 2 judges in each pub, but this year's twist was that 2 of the 8 judges had never seen rapper before. These "virgin" judges were to represent the views of the general public when they see rapper in a pub and a special prize, the Tyzack Trophy, was to be awarded to the team gaining most points from them. The advantage (or disadvantage) of staging the competition in a series of different pubs is that you get an interesting variation of dancing surface and space to contend with. At one pub we were on a sort of dais with a two-foot drop at the front and a window behind, which made Black Swan's double forward tumble a little trickier to execute. As the day progressed we moved between the pubs, performing with varying degrees of success, but always with the interaction and camaraderie of the other teams. This is one aspect of the rapper world that I find particularly enjoyable as, despite being highly competitive everyone is very encouraging and supportive.

At the end of the day we returned to the Pavilion for each team to perform an exhibition dance. This was a chance to see all the other teams we hadn't seen on tour, and again each team was received with enthusiasm and in some cases, customary heckling. Gaorsarch, a recently formed all female team from Scotland impressed us with their sword work, stepping and amazing dancing kilts! East Saxon delighted us with their ingenious locks and Whip the Cat set themselves the additional challenge of keeping their 2 sets, dancing simultaneously, in perfect harmony (well almost!). We were particularly pleased to see two young teams, Phoenix and Silver Flame, taking part in DERT for the first time. Those kilts made a reappearance – this time worn by the all-male Black Swan Cygnets, with an interesting choice of underwear! The teams in the Premier Class thrilled us with their expertise, danger and excitement; none more so than Black Swan who went on to win the Premier Class, the Tyzack Trophy and the Steve Maris Trophy for the highest overall score. The Open Class was won by Thrales, and Roger, playing fiddle for Black Swan, won the prize for Best Music. Chris Pitt, with his continuous patter and Brian Kelly, with his hilarious interference, won the Best Character prize for Newcastle Kingsmen. We were proud that our own "Betty" aka Sally Wearing was runner-up.

After all that excitement all we were fit for was a sedate evening in a Chinese Restaurant, but others continued to dance and drink elsewhere in town, late into the night, back at the Pavilion. Sally somehow made it back up the hill to the Youth Hostel, but not for long, as we descended once more in the morning to take part in workshops before making our farewells. We even managed to fit in a bit of sightseeing before setting off for home, making the most of the historic setting for this thoroughly enjoyable and well-organised event.

Jenny Major, Insword Rapper

GREAT GRANDSON OF MORRIS ON

So is Great Grandson a welcome addition to the Morris On family or a generation too far? As with its predecessors, it features some excellent interpretations of traditional morris tunes which lovers of music for dancing will enjoy as much as ever. But in an attempt to produce a rounded album, it also includes a smattering of songs and vocal pieces about the morris and its rituals, seemingly more so than on the previous albums, and in some cases these sit uncomfortably alongside the dance tunes. The track 'The Field and the Farm' for example is a pleasant enough contemporary song but for me it suffers from rather contrived lyrics such as "I am the Stick...", "I am the Bell...", and "I am the Handkerchief..." which Roger Wilson, despite singing it well, is patently not, though he may wear a white shirt on occasion.

But the album also has great versions of tunes like 'Swaggering Boney', 'Highland Mary', 'Washing Day' etc, which recall some of the excitement and spirit of the original Morris On album over 30 years ago. For these tracks, fine musicians and dancers from accomplished morris sides such as Dogrose and The Outside Capering Crew join the album's excellent core band of Ashley Hutchings on bass, Guy Fletcher on drums and fiddle, Ken Nicol and Roger Wilson on guitars, and the inimitable Simon Care on melodeon, who demonstrates his customary affinity for the morris music, (and a nifty stepping demonstration during the touring live shows accompanying the album release). For a further treat Ashley, who once again is the inspiration behind the album, and its producer, has persuaded John Spiers and Jon Boden to contribute a pair of tunes including a particularly bouncy 'Shepherds Hey'.

Overall, there's certainly enough on the album for most morris enthusiasts to enjoy and to make it worth owning. Personally I didn't like it as much as the original 'Morris On', or the much more recent 'Grandson'. But it does have some excellent tracks, and the sound of the dancers on some of them adds to the sense of it being a real morris album. And like its predecessors, anything which allows a broader audience to enjoy great traditional music should be welcomed, especially when performed with the energy, enthusiasm, and high quality musicianship displayed throughout the album from all concerned.

Malcolm Major

"Great Grandson" is available from
Talking Elephant: 8 Martin Dene, Bexleyheath, Kent DA6 8NA;
phone 0208 301 2828 (fax 0208 310 2424)
e-mail talkelephant@aol.com
web site www.talkingelephant.com
.....have a look, they have a huge stock of music, new and old

MARLBORO' ALE 2004

When the Outside Capering Crew were first invited to the Marlboro Ale, we were excited at the prospect of dancing at this wonderful event (Tracy and I had danced there with Windsor Morris many years ago!). However, there has always been a tradition at Marlboro that no mixed Cotswold sides had been invited to dance and so, before accepting, we needed to be sure that we would be able to perform our Baccapipes dances whilst we were there. The answer came back – there would be no problem – and we were off to the States on 27th May 2004!!

We arrived in Boston late on Thursday evening and on Friday we travelled up through wooded countryside to Marlboro College where we were staying for the Ale. The beautiful forested campus with its white clapperboard buildings has been home to this event for 29 years and this year 19 teams had been invited. The main dance tradition was Cotswold, with 2 North West teams and 2 Sword teams.

Friday evening is a time to meet friends and settle in and, as more people arrived, impromptu dancing began, at first with sides dancing their own dances, and later dances were called and anyone who wanted to join in, did! What was lovely to see was how many youngsters were there, not just with parents, but as dancing sides in their own right. We were impressed by their enthusiasm, skill and knowledge. It was a wonderful atmosphere to be part of and the weekend was only just beginning.

On Saturday morning the dancing began with a procession to a site on the Campus where each side performed a show dance. This was our first chance to see all the other teams. The standard of dancing was extremely high not only technically, but there was good use of space and the sides that had fools had well thought-out performances. Many of the dances had interesting “twists” that caught the eye, and held your interest. American sides seem to pay much more attention to good stepping and precision in their figures than is usual in England. They have a clear idea of side identity and use this to develop their own style and attitude within the dance. We had decided to perform our side by side Baccapipes dance and the response we got at the end was amazing, a wonderful start to the tour.

After lunch, the sides divided into 6 tours which took the dancers around various venues in Brattleboro town, and at the end of the day all 19 sides met and performed their show dance. Toronto Morris Men from Ontario and Foggy Bottom Morris Men from Washington D.C. were on our tour and we all had a good time entertaining the audiences (and getting them to join in!). For the massed stand, the Crew managed to get around the “Mixed Cotswold Problem” by Tracy and I doing half a jig, followed by Brian and Simon doing the same! This way we all managed to take part in the show dances!! Orion (a unique longsword side) performed their dance and this was the first time they’d danced it out. The audience were spellbound; it’s not often there is a complete hush from a crowd, but Orion got it. They have skilfully produced flowing, interesting dances which interprets the music so closely, it compels you to watch. After a massed dance of Bonny Green the teams dispersed back to the College or pubs or, like us, a restaurant! When we got back to the College there was contra dancing in full swing which continued into the wee small hours. This provided some of us with a very steep learning curve.

On Sunday morning Simon (Pipe) suggested that we should offer to do a Baccapipes workshop and it was duly announced during breakfast. He then retired to his bed feeling extremely ill and so wasn’t able to take part. We weren’t sure how many people we would have at such

short notice, but amazingly about 30 people showed up. Luckily we had managed to find some masking tape to make crosses on the floor and within the hour we had everyone dancing around the pipes. Everyone is so enthusiastic and we're sure that next year there will be Baccapipes being performed out. Many of the youngsters were writing down the steps and at various times through the day we could see them practising. It would be great to come back and see that more dances had been created and were being danced out.

For the tours we drove in 6 bright yellow school buses to different venues. We were dancing with Binghampton and Marlboro Morris and Sword. Our first port of call was Putney, a lovely village full of the traditional white painted wooden buildings. Our audiences were small but appreciative and the standard of dancing was great to watch. Binghampton's Fool spent time to engage with the audience, and in all their performances the side used the dance space well, using big sets to show off the dance itself. Marlboro had created a dance to "All I want is a room somewhere" from My Fair Lady - not an obvious combination of tune to dance style but their interpretation worked. Lunchtime saw us sitting in rocking chairs on a broad porch overlooking the village green (very relaxing but hard to get going afterwards!) The next dance spot took us to Dummerston, and much to our delight Simon had recovered enough to drive himself there (minus a wing mirror from the hire car). Meanwhile Brian had been invited to dance with Binghampton which he considered a great honour!

At the end of the day we all met at Newfane for all sides to perform one show dance. The highlight of the weekend is dancing at Newfane. The whole town turns out to watch the dancers and there is a very special atmosphere about this event. The dancing definitely goes up a notch for all the sides and the audience is so welcoming and appreciative. I was so glad that we could dance together for this last dance spot and we danced 4 Up which was the first time anyone had seen 4 of us dance over one set of pipes. The response from the audience when we finished was deafening and we were so proud to be part of the whole event, a wonderful memory to hold onto!

Back down to earth again and we returned to the college for The Feast! The hall was decked with lights, the tables were groaning with food and the company was the best you could wish for! On this last night we were entertained by singing, dancing, comedy of all sorts.

We wanted the night to go on for ever, to hang onto all the good moments of this weekend and to keep in contact with all the new friends we'd made! Nevertheless, Brian decided that late-night discussions on the Morris should be interrupted by sleep at some stage and left the bar. He heard music from the dining room and went in to find one of the girls from our workshop practising the routine - at 4.30 am!

The Marlboro Ale is certainly a special event not only in the excellent quality of the dancing and hospitality of our hosts, but the support and enthusiasm that you get from the other dancers is inspiring. The large number of young dance teams is great to see and hopefully this trend will continue to produce a new generation of very talented dancers, who can entertain audiences of the future with their enjoyment of dancing.

Sue Graham

A POSSIBLE REFERENCE TO BAMPTON AND BLACK BOURTON DANCE SETS IN 1835.

The nineteenth century local newspapers are peppered with references which look as if they might refer to activity by morris dance sets, but remain completely unprovable. I recently drew attention in this magazine (Vol.21 (2); July 2002, pp22-23), for example, to a possible sighting of a Spelsbury side in 1854. Men who defied their masters and left work during the Whitsuntide period provide a further conundrum, and I intend at some point to draw together and publish this corpus of references.

In the meantime, the following item could well be referring to three of the numerous fights - both between distinct morris sets and within individual sides - extensively recalled by dancers interviewed during the early decades of the last century, but with few such incidents specifically located in time and space.

Jackson's Oxford Journal for 4 July 1835, page 3, gave details of the following court case, heard at the Quarter Sessions in Oxford :

James Hurcomb, James Hurcomb the younger, John Hurcomb, Richard Dixey, Joseph Tanner, Isaac Green, Richard Eeley, and William Blake, were indicted for a riot, tumult, and assault, at Bampton, on the 16th of May, and all found guilty excepting Richard Eeley, whom the Jury acquitted. The sentences were - Richard Dixey, to four months' imprisonment and hard labour, and the last month in close confinement; Joseph Tanner, six weeks' imprisonment and hard labour; and James Hurcomb, James Hurcomb the younger, John Hurcomb, Isaac Green, and Wm. Blake, three months' imprisonment and hard labour, and one of those months in close confinement.

The same *James Hurcomb, James Hurcomb the younger, John Hurcomb, and Richard Dixey*, were secondly indicted for a riot and tumult at Bampton, on the 18th of May, but, by consent of the prosecutors, were acquitted.

Richard Hedges, Richard Eeley, Richard Clark, Henry Clack, Thomas Sillman, Robert Bradley, John Hurcomb, and Christopher Eeley, were indicted for a riot, tumult and assault at Blackbourton, on the 18th May; and all found guilty, and sentenced to one month's imprisonment and hard labour.

Unfortunately, there is no equivalent report in the other contemporary newspapers, *The Oxford Chronicle* and *The Reading Mercury*.

Although these affrays occurred three weeks before Whitsun (Whit Monday was 8 June that year), it is tempting to see this as three separate altercations involving members of two distinct sets, namely Bampton and Black Bourton. The latter place is otherwise unrecorded as having fielded a morris side, but as I have pointed out on a number of occasions, there is no apparent reason why every village should not have done so at some point during the hey-day of activity, say before 1850.

When the ages of the participants are examined they reveal such a perfect spread that it becomes difficult (for me, at any rate) not to believe my thesis. Details of those named in the tumults in Bampton on 16 and 18 May 1835 may be arranged thus :

	<i>born</i>	<i>aged</i>
James Hurcomb	ca 1785	66
Richard Dixey	?ca 1773	62
Richard Eeley	1806	29
Joseph Tanner	1808	27
James Hurcomb	1810	24
John Hurcomb	1812	22
Isaac Green	1812	22
William Blake	ca 1814	21

That is, six men between the ages of 21 and 29 (and thus falling within the accepted age bracket for dance activity), and two older men, possibly a fool and musician. The two James Hurcombs were father and son.

And those involved at Black Bourton on 18 May 1835 :

	<i>born</i>	<i>aged</i>
Thomas Silman	ca 1770	75
Robert Hedges	1803	31
Henry Clack	1805	29
Richard Eeley	1806	29
Robert Bradley	1807	28
Richard Clark	1808	26
Christopher Eeley	1810	24
John Hurcomb	1812	22

Here seven men are aged between 22 and 31, with only one older man as candidate for fool or musician. The fact that Richard Eeley and John Hurcomb are common to both listings is yet a further minor mystery.

Of the latter group, little beyond the fact that Richard and Christopher Eeley were brothers may be stated, but at least one, and perhaps two men in the Bampton affray have family connections with known participants in the morris set. Joseph Tanner, for example, is a son of dancer Thomas Tanner (1771-1832), and thus a brother of Charles Tanner (1816-1899), who was a noted dancer in his day and the father of three later dancers. Richard Dixey is almost certainly a direct ancestor of dancer Henry Dixey (1846-1909), three of whose sons also later joined the set.

Keith Chandler
March 2004

HOLIDAY READING

"British Society 1680-1880": Dynamism, Containment & Change; by Richard Price

CUP, Cambridge, 1999. ISBN 0-0521-65701-5

As a young engineer in the 1950's discovering morris, it was easy to accept the Edwardian view of its history. When I took an interest in the realities of the 19th century, it began to fall apart. Many dance notations came from village revivals, under influences, Darcy Ferris, pageant master, Percy Manning, antiquarian, Queen Victoria's Jubilees, etc, and our "revival" history was partly bound up with the Suffragette movement. So what had it really been like?

Recorded remarks indicate a decline in the 19th century probably in quality, certainly in status. Some said it got like begging. Further back were tales of ales, Club entertainment, week long tours, competitions, and up to London ahead of the harvest. On the other hand we know of the hardships of the Napoleonic Wars and the aftermath, Chartism, Captain Swing and Luddites. Early 19th century popular journals were concerned even then at the increasing rate of change, e.g., the impossibility of farmers keeping up with the suggested advances in practice.

Our mental images of various historical periods are strikingly different, Roman, Saxon, Tudor. There had been an industrial revolution in the Middle Ages and other developments in ordinary life, untouched on in the old books. Obviously there was always change and there never has been a static period rich in slowly changing customs. Sound work has been done on the period from the Glorious Revolution in the last fifty years. Price's book is a synthesis of this, in particular of the developments in the 18th century. There was a marked change in attitudes after 1688. A surprise was how different the current attitudes still were, even though many elements of modern life can be traced back to then. Administration was still at a local level, the vestry with its committees provided what we would now call the social services. But the improvement in agricultural productivity raised the standard of living for most and left time for leisure activities which had formerly been restricted to special annual days.

"Start of Play": Cricket & Culture in 18th Century England, by David Underdown

Penguin Books, London, 2001. ISBN 0-14-028354-4

The history of morris' problem is putting it in context. There are anecdotes, enough to show continuity from 1750, with an inkling of how the Cotswold Morris fitted into its social landscape. One can speculate on how conditions impacted on the morris; but it is helpful to consider another pastime. Morris and cricket had much in common. Early references do not indicate detail, but both were regional pastimes. Cricket occurred in the Weald and the edges of the Downs, and the morris in Oxfordshire, spilling into the nearby counties. Both might have been influenced by similar activities found in Flanders and the low countries

The history of the Hambledon Cricket Club 1750-1825 is unusually well documented. For a while it was the county's leading team, able to challenge and beat sides drawn from the best

elsewhere. It was a club, a voluntary association which brought people with a common interest together, so characteristic of the English over this period. What made Hambledon unique was it had an outstanding team early on, whose success attracted the best for miles around, and captured the interest of neighbouring gentlemen and aristocracy, ensuring its continuity.

Players' regular weekly practices paid a better rate than for farm work. Each match played for a sum, the share depending on whether they won or lost. Fame brought them matches at long distances, as in London. The 18th century populace bet on almost anything, so cricket became a popular part of any occasion, including the social side of the assize gatherings and the races, along with balls, cudgel fights (single stick) and cruel animal sports. Most men were familiar with single stick but the best came from Wiltshire and Somerset.

A common feature were the large meals and excessive drinking following matches. Of interest is that many teams were known as singing sides. In such ways exist similarities with the morris. Of course the betting side led to arranging matches to be more even, so that the results would be less predictable. Often players were "given" to the other team, or the good players split between the two sides. As stakes rose, the best players, as distinct from the gentlemen, became semi-professional and attracted to London clubs, and control of the rules moved to the MCC, with the eclipse of Hambledon, and their loss of local aristocracy support.

The early folk dance revivalists approached the morris from song and other one-on-one interactions, with little interest in where this group public activity should fit. It is hard to believe that the first collectors, brought up in the second half of the 19th century, were not aware of the immediate social history and the consequent range of tensions. They could not have seen this background as relevant to an appreciation and exploitation of the dances in the Edwardian and post WWI periods.

There are many threads in the books

- ❖ The idea of "improving" activity as essentially more desirable than old ways.
- ❖ The enormous growth in household women servants locking so many out of the public scene.
- ❖ The shifting effect of the Victorian philosophy of two separate worlds for men and women - a very serious concern for activities which depended on community acceptance and largesse from those further up the social ladder.
- ❖ The overloading of the local administration with many new tasks in the 19th C leading eventually to a county and then to a state run civil service.
- ❖ But worst of all, the apparent underlying desire to establish a docile, hard working, underpaid working force, with a convenient surplus of unemployed. Much has been gained since then.

But also something preserved, without the excesses. I recommend two stimulating and complementary texts!

Roy Dommett
February 2004

NOTICEBOARD

The (is it the last?) 50th **Sidmouth International Folk Festival** is imminent – details elsewhere in this magazine. Or look at www.sidmouthfestival.com

The book, “The First Week in August” by Derek Schofield is available from:
Festival Office, PO Box 296, Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 3XU for £25(inc. P&P)
cheques payable to Sidmouth International Festival..

Whether this is the last festival or not, it sounds like a book to have. Over 450 photos – many in colour.

At the end of August; **Towersey Folk Festival** celebrates its 40th birthday – from 26 to 30th August. Morris teams invited include Black Swan Rapper, Chinewrde, Rogue, Windsor, Boojum, Towersey MM and Ditchling Morris.

Plus loads of good music and dance from – in no particular order - the Demon Barber Ensemble, Florida, Bedlam, Oxford Waits, Roy Bailey, the Woodpecker Band, John Tams & Barry Coope, Stomp, Stepback Special, English Acoustic Collective, Pete Lawless White’s Suitcase Circus, Kerry Fletcher..... and lots more.

For details contact Jess Adams, Festival Office – address as above. Phone 01629 821874 or low at www.towerseyfestival.com They are offering a buy-9-get-1-free offer. Full w/e (4 days) season adult is £60 and camping tickets for 5 nights are £13.

So, the summer festival season is over – what to do in autumn and winter..?

The **Baring-Gould Folk Festival** and study break takes place from Monday 25 to Friday 29 October, running into the festival weekend (29 October to Sunday 31 October). Artists include Martin Carthy, Chris Coe, Simon Care and Martin Graebe. It is inspired by the collecting and travels of Sabine Baring-Gould.

For more details contact www.wrenmusic.co.uk or 01837 53754
Wren Trust, 1 St James Street, Okehampton, Devon EX20 1DW.

Then brush up your playing at the **Hands On Music** weekends:

The tutors include Simon Care, John Spiers, Tim van Eyken, Julian Sutton, Alistair Anderson, Damian Barber, Dave Townsend, John Kirkpatrick, Nancy Kerr, James Fagan, Karen Tweed; offering not only tuition but a Saturday evening concert to enjoy.

The courses are:

Melodeons at Witney 13 – 14 November 2004

Concertinas at Witney 25 – 26 September 2004

Strings at Witney 5 – 6 February 2005

Accordians at Witney 19-20 February 2005

Village Music Weekend 5 -6 March 2005

Hands On Music weekends PO Box 1162 East Oxford D.O. OX4 4WS
Phone 01865 714778 or www.handsonmusic.org.uk

Update on Tony Barrand’s Morris and Sword dance video collection mentioned in Volume 22, number 2– it is still pending! It has moved forwards but is not available on line yet – it will be soon!

MORRIS BAITING²

There are times when I dislike Morris dancers. This may seem odd since I am one, but there are times when I would rather not have them around. One of the perils of summer is having a quiet drink in a country pub shattered by a hoard of hooligans jumping around in the car park or garden.

Of course, there is very little you can do about it, the landlord is not going to turn custom away and anyway, as soon as you go to leave they start dancing across the front of the car park. If you do go to another pub it will probably turn out to be the next one on their tour as well.

On these occasions I go in for Morris baiting.....

If there are not many people around, I play the very interested on-looker. Before they start dancing, target the Squire or the musician and engage them in a highly detailed discussion about the origins of Morris: this will usually keep a Morris man or woman going for at least half an hour. The key is to take the opposite line they do.

If they give you all the traditional tripe about pre-Christian fertility – say that you thought it originated in medieval court dance or bowdlerised versions of it. If they give you all the revisionist rubbish - argue the pagan meaning of it all (this is great fun if you have come across one of those New Age type border sides). The objective here is to delay the start of the set by at least ten minutes.

During the course of the set, ask really detailed questions about their kit, instruments or dances. Good questions to ask are:

- The significance of the number and pattern of bells on their bell pads;
- The origins of their name;
- The reason for their choice of colours;
- The relative merits of a hook-leg over a galley (or vice versa);
- Why they dance the specific traditions they do.

If you are lucky they will think they have a potential recruit and you may even get a pint out of it.

The instruments are a good topic as well. If they have a band, then ask questions about the merits of their grouping of instruments over others. Introduce alternative instruments they could use: e.g. “Have you ever considered having a bassoon to provide more bass?” Introducing alternative instruments also works if the side only has a few instruments or a solo instrument policy. The more esoteric the instrument the better – hurdy-gurdies and Galician bagpipes are particularly good. See how long you can keep the conversation going before you have to admit that you cannot actually play the instrument in question, though to save face you may need to invent a friend who can.

If there is a crowd (which is very rare) then an alternative game is make comments to your companions but do this very loudly so that others (and hopefully even the

² This article is based upon one that appeared in *The Unicorn* (issue No. 43) July-Sept 1993.

dancers if they are actually performing) can hear. If it is a Morris Ring side - you can check this out beforehand - a good one to start with is: "I've seen a women's side do this better".

More generally useful comments are:

- "Of course they charge extra for smiling,"
- "I've seen more energy in a dead rabbit,"
- "I saw this lot years ago - they're not half as good as they used to be"

Depending upon the costume and style of dancing you can add:

- "They're not so much traditional as fossilised,"
- "This more casual style is simply a cover for sloppiness,"
- "White trainers are really just an affectation."
- "Where did they get those - - - ! (insert: hats, waistcoats, skirts, dresses etc.)

And then there is the collection. Morris dancers are, by and large, a mercenary bunch and there is no point in trying to engage the collector in conversation - He/she knows only one word of English "Giussumoney" and will only say that if they have to. Always keep a few foreign coins in your pocket - euros do not count - to put in the tin or whatever they come around with. Trying to work out where the half rouble came from and what its worth will give them hours of fun in the pub later.

Long Lankin

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<http://adrian-williams.members.beeb.net/www-2005.htm>

SIDMOUTH 2004

A bittersweet event; at the time of writing there is still the possibility that this is the very last - as well as the fiftieth - Sidmouth festival. It is difficult to imagine a world without Sidmouth - and in particular it has been central to innovation and excellence in the Morris world.

This year's festival is focused around celebrating fifty years of Morris at Sidmouth but looking forward too.

The big event is "Leap", the latest of Sue Swift's Monday evening Arena spectaculars. Her run of dazzling successes in integrating superb Morris performances in a thematic structure reaches a milestone in the inclusion of Trunch's legendary Sid Kipper as MC for the evening, which meanders through fifty years of Morris at the festival and features many of the booked teams and some important additions.

To complement it there will be on Sunday early evening - between the two unmissables of the Jig Competition and the Morris party (this year hosted by Great Western) - "The Morris Celebrates..." 50 glorious years of being at the heart of Sidmouth Festival; an eclectic mix of everything that is good about the morris at Sidmouth; pairing significant individuals and teams who mean something to them. The show will include one team who danced at the very first Sidmouth - Jockey Morris men.

Booked teams include Hammersmith Morris, Great Western, Stroud Ladies, Rumworth Morris, Seven Champs, Albion, Britannia Coconut Dancers, Morris Offspring, Black Swan Rapper, Pig Dyke Molly and three new visitors - Jet Set Border Morris of Whitby, Black Adder Rapper and Pecsæton Morris.

There will be the usual wonderful programme of workshops and talks (including Roy Dommett on Evolution, Morris, Sidmouth - 150 years of watching the morris). Oh, and there will be a morris quiz...the event you didn't know that you were waiting for. All welcome, even musicians. Don't worry if you don't have a clue, neither will the 'celebrity' contestants.

It is impossible to believe it might be the last one...fingers and toes crossed!

Tony Forster
July 2004

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