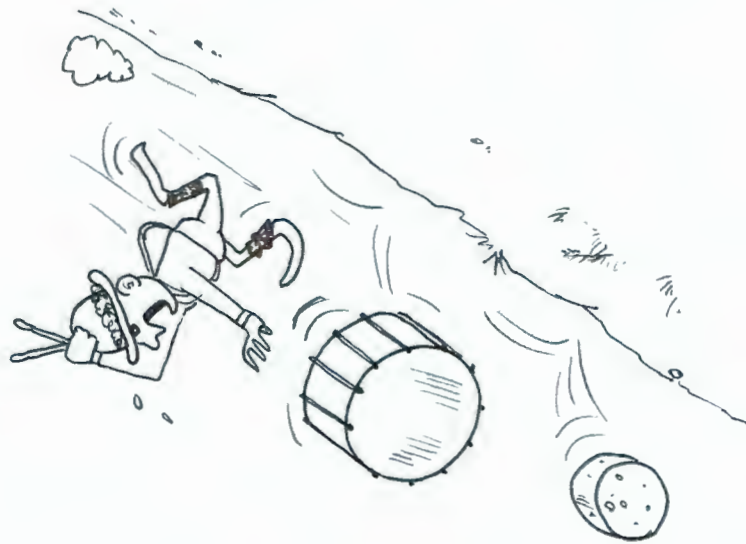


MORRIS MATTERS



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Welcome to 2008. In this issue we have the first instalment of the second part of Roy Dommett's autobiography! I took a tape recorder to his house, where he talked about life, the universe and everything related to morris; more will be included in later issues. Sue Swift reports on the broadcast of a fascinating programme about Mary Neal and we also have thoughts on various customs from cheese rolling (you have to read it!) to Jack in the Green and mumming.

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Great Aunt Mary's Tune

Radio 4: November 2nd 2007 11am.

This broadcast was indeed a grand occasion in the old style. Enticed with coffee, tea and home-made biscuits, a select group gathered together around the radio to hear the remarkable story of Great Aunt Mary, alias Mary Neal, the woman who founded the Esperance Club in London to give working girls better conditions and a healthy lifestyle. We met at the Place Theatre in Duke's Street, a small picturesque street near Euston station, where Mary and her suffragette friend Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence lived for almost 20 years at the turn of the last century.

Searching for a source of healthy activities for the girls, Mary decided that English traditional dance might be a suitable outlet for their considerable energies. Having heard that Cecil Sharp knew something of traditional dance, she contacted him then subsequently fired his enthusiasm for morris dancing. While Sharp was to become a key figure in the collection and revival of traditional dance and song and the founding of what is now the EFDSS, Mary, despite her enthusiasm and enormous effort, was largely forgotten. At the height of her success, she was soon to be overshadowed by Sharp's heated criticism of her ethos towards traditional dance in a passionate defence of his own rather academic point of view.

Over the century, men and women alike have developed a strong sense of equality thanks to the pioneering efforts of Mary's friend Emmeline and their contemporaries. Within our now vibrant morris dancing world, we owe much to Mary's perseverance and interpretation of the spirit rather than the letter of performance. We have learnt about her from dancers and dances taught by the Esperance girls, the detail and pictures in the Esperance Books, her autobiographical manuscript and snippets of information in the morris archives and Vaughan Williams Memorial (VWM) Library. The Morris Federation scoured her books for arguments to help counteract the criticism of the emerging women's morris teams in the 1970s, and in 1989 when Roy Judge published the results of his research into Mary's life, he inspired us all with his humorous insights and animated talks. This new information and surge of interest eventually led to the staging of the documentary play 'The Forgotten Mary Neal' at Sidmouth and Hastings some ten years later.

As a family member, Lucy was able to bring a completely fresh approach to the story of her Great Aunt Mary and the programme took advantage of the link to feature Mary's great-nephew Michael Neal and goddaughter Nita Needham. There was plenty of humour, anecdotal stories, scene setting and quotes from the past. Listeners were taken on a journey that flowed easily and at times had us laughing out loud as well as thinking deeply on the injustices of past destructive and rather personal hostilities. An interesting mix of modern folk heroes also contributed to the story. One of these was the Rev Prof June Boyce-Tillman who, fresh from receiving the prestigious Woman of the Year Award, added considerably to the gathered ensemble as well as to the radio programme with her enthusiasm and insight.

Similarly, there was a good spectrum of comment from the stars of the modern traditional dance and song world who in different ways, have benefited from the revivalist efforts a

hundred years ago. These included Mike Heaney, Laurel Swift, Georgina Boyes, Shirley Collins, Simon Ritchie and Malcolm Taylor, each of which brought their own special brand of experience and opinion to the programme. It was pleasing to see Roy and Marguerite Dommert among the group that listened to the radio and endlessly discussed it afterwards and it seems clear that Mary Neal's name will persist a little longer and sit comfortably with the various offspring and offshoots of the twentieth century morris revival.



Figure 1 Laurel Swift and Lucy Neal

(photo: Sue Swift)

So, what was it that really gave this story the personal touch and stayed in my memory particularly? For me it was that Lucy chose to link the past and the future together with her personal predicament of finding herself the family's nominated guardian for Mary's archival collection. That the archive is important is without question as it not only chronicles her motivations and actions to support the girls of the Esperance Club but also contains accounts of the very public criticism of her approach to morris dancing by Cecil Sharp with resulting arguments and intimidation.

Clearly the archive should be preserved and made available. The most appropriate and accessible resting place for such a collection is the VWM Library at Cecil Sharp House and therein lies the dilemma. Given the nature of the relationship between Cecil Sharp and Mary Neal, is it fair to deposit the collection at this location? I am not sure that we truly came to a conclusion in Duke's Street that morning but there are many indications that Mary had a forgiving and compassionate nature and perhaps could accept the irony of such a resting place for her archive. It is good to be reminded of this great woman and all she stood for so that the deposition of this valuable archive in an accessible but safe site is essential.

So overall, this was a lovely programme with plenty to interest the Radio 4 devotees as well as the morris enthusiasts. It was cleverly put together thanks to the interest and considerable persistence of Lucy Neal with the help of the excellent producer, Beaty Rubens. It is pleasing to think that Mary Neal's name will live on and inspire more activity and interest. A copy of the broadcast has been given to the VWM Library at Cecil Sharp House and further information is available from Lucy Neal at lucy@lucyneal.co.uk

Sue Swift

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January 2008

Roy Dommatt on Teaching, Teams and Repertoire

Beth Neill sat down with Roy and Marguerite Dommatt in August to follow up on Part One of his autobiography (MM Volume 20, Number 2)- which left off in 1985 – to find out a bit more about life after that, especially working with various women’s teams.

“Let me explain my situation at the moment – I was diagnosed in 1980 with diabetes. In those days before we went abroad on business, we had to go to the RAF for a medical, so it was picked up fairly early. It’s led to kidney failure; I started on dialysis at the beginning of 2006. I get dialysis now three days a week. At the moment it’s 4½ hours on the machine each day, so the fundamental problem is that you get up at 6am - on dialysis - get home sometime after midday feeling somewhat washed out. We don’t have many days free and get behind with everything - only essential things get done. Also I haven’t driven for 2 years so it absorbs Marguerite’s time as well as she has to drive me. The other problem that hit us very badly; my father died in 1996 aged 89. We’d been looking after his affairs since 1982 for 25 years and then my mother died last year - aged 97½ - so we’ve had 30 years of dealing with her finances and health. My daughter Judith died in 2002 and other close relatives died also in 2004 - we’ve had our fair share of family losses. I struggle to write things for people; one thing you can do on dialysis is write things down in notebooks. But it doesn’t stop me sitting and thinking about things and there are a lot of aspects of morris that I’ve been illuminated on recently – don’t know if it will be of interest to people. It enables me to read a lot – I have a lot of books lying around the house – anything that impinges on the morris, such as life in the early eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

I was dancing morris out in 1955; I passed 50 years of first being involved in morris in 2002. I didn’t celebrate in any way, it just made me feel old. It’s not that I have stopped being interested – there’s nothing quite like spring coming along and the morris teams getting out and going out to see them. It’s so different from going along to a practice I began to understand some of the old men I knew, like old Len Bardwell from Abingdon; it kept him going till he was about 84 or 85. He looked forward to doing his jig on May morning in Oxford every winter. You know, it keeps you going.

I retired from work in 2000. I was actually working over the Millennium – I was there for the Millennium bug (which didn’t happen). I thought I was going to retire at 60 but they kept me on full time till I was 63, then I had 2 years officially at half time and then 2 more years of what they called “on demand”. I was finishing a job and doing far more hours than I was being paid for. I finally escaped working at Farnborough when I was 67 in the year 2000 - but by then I was a member of the nuclear research advisory council. I was on that for ten years although you were only supposed to serve on it for three – and I only came off that in 2006. The last day I was in there working at Farnborough they got in everyone who had worked with me over the years – all of one person – everybody else had gone! The laugh was that the one chap who was left was by that time my boss, who I had in fact recruited in 1972! I have done a little bit of teaching occasionally since then, but I really retired from morris in September 2000 – rather sad.

I’ve worked with women’s morris teams since the late ‘70’s. I worked with Fleur de Lys for the first two or three years, then Minden Rose. Minden Rose are what I think of as the ideal women’s side – they’re effectively almost all married – they were middle-aged when

they started. It got to the stage this year one or two couldn't make some functions because there weren't enough of them. I worked with them for quite a few years – they had a good band, a good teacher and a long-term goal. Then I got involved with Fleet Morris who practise just up the road from me. I remember celebrating Fleur de Lys' 25th anniversary and I know Minden Rose celebrated 21 a few years ago - maybe the same thing is true of Fleet. All three sides have changed from being young unmarried executive types [the sort of side that you phone at 10 o'clock on the Friday evening to turn up at 10 o'clock on a Saturday morning] to a side where you have to decide in February what you're going to do in July or August because of families and things".

Morris Federation and the Morris Ring

BN - Did being involved with (W)MF stop you being elected as Ring Squire?

"No. I stood twice in my days with Abingdon, each time proposed by Thames Valley and seconded by other people. In both cases I was eliminated in the last round. From my point of view, if I had been elected as squire (which would have pleased me immensely), it would have affected my career tremendously. I had 132 visits to the States on my job; I have spent several years of my life abroad. Towards the end it got to be every three weeks. I would not have done as well as I did in my career. I would have liked it because one was a particular anniversary (1969; 60 years since Sharp); there were two anniversaries where my knowledge would have been invaluable to the celebrations. Never had an interest in it since. It would have given me the opportunity to get around and film a lot of morris.

The Morris Federation - although I talked at great length to Betty (Reynolds), the first President, I debated but never tried to persuade her to my point of view. I suggested options but I never recommended anything - the Federation was its own boss. It's been my attitude with the three women's teams I have worked with. You can't have morris without people doing it – the people doing it therefore have got to get something out of it – that is what I have loved about the three women's teams– they're not just nice people and friends - they all get something out of it as well as increasing their self-confidence. This brings me to a good point – the difference between men's & women's teams. I think mixed teams are doomed because one sex or other will dominate.

With women's sides, I notice that they spend all day playing roles. For example we went to a weekend of dance at Port Talbot – they dressed for breakfast, for morris, for relaxing. When asked why, we realised everybody did role-playing in a somewhat subservient way. Get them to a morris practice – all that is thrown to the board – they come along to practice, all uniform in behaviour & appearance; no airs & graces. Although there was one side who did have one elderly lady who gave herself airs – they offloaded her onto another side - they could only improve when they got rid of her! It's hard when someone doesn't fit in – it always surprises me when you get to know the background of the members of a team, the diversity of the people in the team. Men during the day are happy to work to stretch themselves, so they like to be something in the evening; in the evening they dress up, drink, they don't settle down to work hard - unlike the women's sides who are determined to work and work at something. Men's sides say, "I can't do it so I shall never try again" – unfortunately even the good sides I've worked with over the years.

In Fleur de Lys, Marguerite came to most practices and would sit in the corner sewing; the team all came along to chat so they had a "mum" to talk to (as Betty Reynolds had done

for Bath City) – you need that in a young team. You don't find that in a men's team – they just don't behave that way. That's why when women's sides work together with men, one or other tends to dominate to the disadvantage of the other – they only recover from that situation when they break away - when they have their own squire and own officers. They may socialise together but have different repertoire; different and independent teams. I've noticed that in sides in this part of the world, the male attitudes against women have largely disappeared – apart from, for example, Bob Bradbury in Somerset who could never get used to the women doing it. All you want is for them to do it well –not do it badly. I'm always happy to support WMF – also I was interested to see what it would be like”.

BN: has it gone the way you expected? “ No!”

Fleur de Lys

“With Fleur de Lys, as I remember it, I only once went out and played on a tour for them - the strawberry cream tea seemed too good to miss! Although I played at practice I never played out, since they had a very good concertina player. When they started they had only a second rate morris man as a foreman. The foreman ran away with the squire – they were stuck – they had no-one to teach them, so I went over to get them on their feet – they'd only been going one year – a lot of shouting 'jump now' – to get them together - one of the problems of women who weren't used to doing things together.

Fleur de Lys discovered Martha Rhodens, who did Mad Moll of the Cheshire Hunt and Bonnets so Blue, which nobody else was copying. Then they wanted something local – found some ribbon dances but they are a bit unforgiving; if you make a mistake, you stand there all tangled up. Then they found stave, which suits them down to the ground. George Frampton tried altering the dances a fair bit. It's up to them what they do with the dances. They now have some new, some old – always of interest. They feel what they do belongs to them. My real feeling is that sides ought to find what suits them – you ought to be able to find what suits you. The problem comes with remote sides like Belles and Broomsticks (*Guernsey*); also the Wellington side in New Zealand. They want to do it all, but you are on your own. You have to fit into your community as well. In New Zealand they have a get together somewhere. In Australia there are good sides but they are 500 miles apart. Of all the places in the world I'd love to live in New Zealand. You go to dance and people turn out because nothing else is happening!”

Minden Rose

“I got involved with Minden Rose because a number of wives and other people wanted to do something other than what the Alton men did. So they called a meeting in the community centre of Alton, tried learning two or three dances; they liked them and found a hall in Nursery Street with plenty of room and were there for many years. The problem was that I was very influenced by Dave Robinson (aka “Buttercup”) when he was in Bath City Morris university side and knew his father-in-law who was in Manchester Morris Men. He had access to his father-in-law's book of notations, so I was strongly influenced by what he said about the reality of northern dances - given a repertoire that didn't repeat itself – you've got one Cheshire dance, you don't need another one like it – you've got a Preston dance, you don't need another.

One of the problems with Minden Rose was to give them a balanced repertoire. I have a great debt to Julian Pilling, although I don't think he thinks kindly of me any more. He said a lot of good things and gave a lot of good advice to people. One of the things he

pointed out was that North West repertoire was divided into major and minor dances. Many teams up north had what we would call a north-west dance, but they were very often associated with a dancing class or groups and many of them were associated with a lot of other things. Kids of course would have Scottish dances, sailor's hornpipe, maypole; adults would have country dances and things of that sort as well. They all would have a dance repertoire of things you would consider ritual, things you would consider traditional, things you would consider modern. That is the way the folk world always was.

So we rapidly exhausted English repertoire; added Dutch garland dances, we've got a dance from Provence [I converted the hobby horse dance from Provence into a stick dance, which we then called Ansty Mill. They said it looked so complicated it looked like a mill, so we've called it after the mill down the road] and we're quite used to persuading a northern side to do it, believing it is a northern dance. So we've decided not to disinform them! Also have the Dummer 5-hand reel, which I collected from my grandmother, so that it's a pretty mixed bag – both large and small. Of recent years I have created a dance for Minden Rose called Nutting Girl, which was based on an idea on the first day they wore their new kit. There was a photo showing some with garlands and some with sticks and they said, wouldn't it be nice to have a dance with sticks and garlands. They still do it and it's satisfyingly simple.

You discover some things are too difficult – it's discovering what can you learn satisfactorily in a winter's practice –so that you can do it when you're out the following spring - if it is too hard in a winter it's not worth doing. That's the problem really. With Minden Rose there was always an influx – a few new people each year –when you've got 16 or 20 dancers, two or three new dancers is easy to absorb – but by the time you've taught them the repertoire, there's not time to learn much new. Peggy of Minden Rose is a very good foreman, very good at controlling, organised, they have a good bagman, good music and so on – there wasn't a role (for me).”

Fleet

“So when Fleet came to me – they had a problem - Graham Upham and his wife were leaving – I can't remember the side being more than one or two years old – I toured with them. I think I filmed them to see what they were like – and because they were doing Adderbury, Ducklington, Stanton Harcourt, I thought there couldn't be a problem with a side because they were doing things I'm very familiar with. It didn't turn out like that; they were just looking for another musician as it happened. I couldn't recommend anyone, so I was happy to play along with them for a while. I discovered that although they were doing Cotswold dances as a Cotswold side, the rhythms of the things they did were absolutely off the rhythm of the sides I danced with. They didn't have anything in common with Fleur de Lys or much in common with any of the men's sides I've worked with.

An interesting experience but it forced me to think very hard about playing – and rationalise all the lessons I learnt from it. Getting people to listen to the music was hard. The one point I was able to make - if you play to the dance well, they respond to it – they can dance very well without you having to explain a lot. If you're stuck with unresponsive music, you probably can't dance very well anyhow, you're constrained by the music. Foremen spend a lot of time trying to improve the dance – they're not improving the bit that matters - and I firmly believe it's the quality of the music, the rhythm, the phrasing that matters.

Fleet of course eliminated a few dances – we did Badby for some years especially the versions of the dances I introduced - they found it was too much like hard work. However, Moulton say they do Badby. I say, ‘No you don’t, you do a Moulton version of Badby and Windsor do a Windsor version’. That is a problem - how many dances can you add to the repertoire and it stays the same tradition? The answer is, not very many before it becomes your own anyway. I introduced Fleet to Lichfield – we had a night doing the same dance from different traditions to decide if we liked it. Couldn’t cope with Kirtlington - thought they could cope with Lichfield. Then we found some Basque stick dances. Marguerite and I went up to a show at Milton Keynes where we filmed 2 shows and we liked the choruses. One is called The Windmill and the other is Chicken in a Basket (something to do with eating in a pub). What we’ve done with Ducklington in Fleet is to introduce some of the Fieldtown dances. Old Woman Tossed Up; instead of doing the chorus in three corners, we had two lots of three people doing them together. The dance is too long otherwise. We do Cuckoos Nest going into line one at a time, which I first saw Windsor do. I have tried many dances over the years that don’t work. I see other people do them and think ‘that’s a great dance’ - then it doesn’t work. I do have a little booklet of all the dance ideas I’ve tried on Fleet –of my invention. Fleet wanted something to remind them of the Fleet Air show, something to remind them of the Red Arrows: we have a dance called Red Arrows – quite unusual; that took about a year to think up.”

Workshops

“I’ve run workshops with the various teams - when I was with Fleur de Lys, we had some workshops in Guildford where we had a mixture of Cotswold and clog. With Minden Rose we had a garland workshop, teaching garland dances for four, five and six that I picked up in the States. That was very successful. With Fleet we started some workshops; after the second time we decided, let’s do border morris –something that none of us do. We invited the local side and asked them how they did border. I did a selection of dances that I knew, then after a couple of years Alton Morris decided they would run a workshop. We did some more in Farnham at the Memorial Barn, Shinfield Shambles ran two or three, then the last one was by OBJ at Bracknell. But I’m pleased to say I don’t think I repeated myself - that was also my principle when teaching North West and garland dances - I tried very hard not to repeat myself. When a new team formed at Hungerford, I cobbled together figures from different dances so they had a unique set of dances. The border workshops ran for ten years or more between the various people. It came at the right time and the right clubs – each club had enough confidence to run a workshop – know how to enjoy yourself - not be overwhelmed by visitors – other people came in wanting to have ideas – I think that is why teams like Alton, Hook Eagle and Datchet have gone away with ideas and wanting to put things together.

What none of them learnt is – you have a limited repertoire - they have a good idea and pad it out to make a dance. What teams do then is have too many dances – what they should do is say, ‘let’s amalgamate the good parts so you have fewer dances that are better’. I did this with Treacle Eater down at Taunton -they had a good selection of garland dances for various numbers of people – they suffered from that problem –we spent a day touring with them and made a dance from a selection of the best bits - now they have one very good dance called the Treacle Eater. Another side – Magog at Horsham wanted to learn some garland dances – they rather liked the Bacup garland

dances – they learnt the five garland dances and strung them all together so now have one dance that has the best bits of all of them! I admire that.”

Rapper

“I gave up teaching this; I was running a workshop on doing back somersaults until someone went over backwards and landed on his head! If you’re running a mixed weekend or folk club, it’s different – I do have in my papers all the published notation for rapper dances – I have filmed a number of sides doing rapper but it didn’t enthuse me to create anything. What I’ve wanted is for someone to sort it all out in the same way that Mike Cherry does with clog steps – they’re not all different steps - what you should do is look at rapper in the same way for the fundamental movements. Each team does it differently but it’s all the same movements if you see what I mean. In North west they are all the same figures [back to back, half gyp etc.], just put together differently. It was never very popular in the south of the country.”

Longsword

“I’ve taught it to children – at a junior school south of Fleet – they were going on a school trip and wanted to show off –the senior teacher was very keen for them to have a dance. We taught them the usual longsword dance – five figures (single over, double over): there were two teams, one from the top stream and one from the bottom stream; it was the bottom stream that lapped it up – they were the ones who borrowed the swords and practised over lunchtime. Another time the kids found a certain amount of difficulty with one of the figures so they altered it grossly (even more amusing); they didn’t know what to do, so instead of going under they reversed back – it worked with that age group. We found a shop which sold stair rods, which you can’t make a lock with, but kids can belt each other with them and that proved invaluable in workshops in large numbers¹. Under-exploited that kind of thing is!”

Maypole

“I got involved with Berkshire council, teaching maypole on the outskirts of Reading, Bear in mind I’d never actually seen one but that didn’t matter; they had a commercial maypole and I did it for seven years until they realised I wasn’t a teacher. I ran a schools dance festival at Basingstoke for three years until someone realised I wasn’t a teacher and I shouldn’t be doing a teachers job. As a dance teacher you look at it differently – figures and movements and what can be done. Talking to old people and looking at old pictures, I realised there are more than five standard figures; there are 17 figures that you can simplify as well.”

Working with children

“We were asked to teach at a school where most of our children had gone – the headmistress wanted us to do a maypole dance so we could do it at the church fete. I’d never taught little kids but I thought I’d try it. We went down there and I tried but there is no way I can teach 5 or 6 year olds - I just can’t cope with it. I tried but I can’t dumb down enough! I’m too used to working with older people, so all I could say to Marguerite was ‘you may not know what you’re teaching them but this is it’ – and she taught them like a mum. I had written notation for the dance and after a while Marguerite actually learnt the figures properly – it was hilarious because I knew what I was playing for, as I

¹ Editors Note : don’t try this in your own children’s teams!

could play for them and make the length of the tune fill the time for what they did, as distinct from having music left over or not enough music.

That's where you've got to get them – junior schools. The objectives when teaching children morris or maypole or country dance is that they've met it so when they grow up they don't say ugh! We want them to recognise it. [Farnborough Morris had to learn Beansetting because everybody that we met in those days knew it!] Young children at the moment are a lost opportunity – you can't fit dance into the curriculum but you could do it after school. When I was running a youth centre here (a country dance team) they wanted me to have a dance qualification – the only one I could get was old time dancing – there is no recognised folk qualification. Why can't we have a (Saturday) folk dance course? One day teach a course on a simple border dance, a maypole, country dances. A committee could produce a brochure – a few pages on each topic – enough to make the key points to teach. There are enough people around with teaching in that field to do it. A close friend of ours ran classes in Aldershot for children at risk – they provided them with all sorts of activities. We went over to provide basically the singing games. We were defeated at almost at the first step; 'stand up and join hands in a ring' 'go round together to the left'. They had no concept of co-operation, they had never been in social situations. You don't learn it in school – those social interactive skills are lost or are not being gained on the current curriculum or they lose it as adults if they ever gained it in the first place – they haven't learnt how to engage."

Wantage (Advanced Cotswold Workshops)

BN - how did they start?

"I have an idea that it started from the WMF notation group including Barbara Butler -we met regularly to do dance notation. Phill (*Butler*) was there – but who organised that weekend I've no idea. The first one was up in Norfolk (How Hill) a strange building with very odd shaped rooms. The next one was Burgess Hill in a Catholic hall (and we couldn't dance on the Sunday morning because of the church services). In Brighton we stayed in a youth centre and walked down the road. Then it went to Wantage.

This business of 'every 18 months' started because I had said that for Sidmouth, Cardiff, Halsway manor, annual events were too soon really. Tubby (*Reynolds*) and I found you needed to refresh yourself between the weekends – and that meant you needed more than one season. Two years would have been too long, so that led to 18 months. It suited us down to the ground – enough time to prepare, to try out new ideas and for regulars to feel refreshed as well and ready for one. That's one of the problems with instructionals and events; they're either one-offs or annuals. 18 months for Wantage was so ideal in many ways, being able to exploit Friday teatime through to Sunday teatime – we had a full two days. Other events I've been to, like Ring meetings, in their instructional sessions I've noticed you spent as much time doing nothing as you did in the instructional – I'm not sure what the thought on that is.

The great thing at Wantage you could do things that you couldn't do at any other workshop – first of all they were genuine advanced dancers so there were things that I never imagined we'd be able to do. I remember doing an Irish mummings dance; I saw them doing it originally and I wrote down the parts. We had to find out how to do it ourselves – once we got it going we didn't dare stop in case we didn't get it going again. The idea again was to stimulate ideas, to approach things, in the same way as we had a

fallout from Halsway weekends. People like Tim Radford were inspired by the range of things we did and the attitude that developed. [Within the Federation did anybody keep a chart of how the number of sides grew? It would be interesting to see if these things had real influence – three or four years after people attend, there ought to be sides doing things on their own.]

The Morris Ring wanted their sides to be run by people with 10 years or more experience – who knew what they were doing, knew the ropes. The reality was that MF formed sides from people with only one or two years experience. I had the idea of writing a booklet of giving advice of the various things that foremen ought to know about, that new sides had to learn by themselves. When you go to school, somebody teaches you how to read and write. They don't actually sit you in front of a pile of books and say, 'find out how to read'!

I was never very good when I was younger at creating dances. You get a tune and think, "how can I fit a dance to that?" – I hardly get anything that gives me satisfaction. On the whole good dances have to be simple and most of the good ideas have been thought of already. Take Cotswold dances – about 360 have been collected. I encourage people to make dances up. Very few people have taken the dances away from my teaching at places like Halsway Manor or Wantage. Having said that though, I did invent a tradition. I called it Juniper Hill (I was heavily into Flora Thompson at the time: Lark Rise to Candleford and all that stuff); something that was a bit Brackley-like. There was a new side at Norwich that took it up, which came as a surprise in East Anglia. The molly sides up there had never learnt the *original* molly dances; one day the side did the Juniper Hill dances and I filmed it. I was very pleased – I really appreciated it. You can give things to people and they can do what they like with it. . Similarly with North West dances – I acquired a lot of dances by writing to different people and sharing it around – so if they meet they should all have different dances.

'The Rose' I got from a university get together; this group of girls from Sunderland Polytechnic said it had been taught at school by a man who didn't like women doing longsword dancing, so they did a garland version and changed it to suit themselves. I taught it to teams like Knots of May; having taught it to sides like that who weren't very happy with it, they changed it. So it came back to me as an improved form of the improved version of the improved version! As far as I'm concerned it is the definitive form – I got it as a dance for 12 but sides have adapted it for eight and I've got a collection from English Miscellany who did it for six and I'm surprised how well it worked. I have no proprietary right over these things – you give someone the concept."

Teaching techniques

"We found sides abroad that wanted someone to come up to them and say 'you're doing quite well, you're going the right way' - they have no way of seeing themselves. There comes a stage with sides when they do like Windsor did: said 'something's wrong or could be improved; come and say how we can improve' - very few teams did that I must say. I said all the steps and jumps looked the same – wonderful, but all the same! It takes an incident like that to find a good sound principle –finding out things the hard way - again all this should be written down. They should be concentrating on the performance, not how to get the steps right.

That is why tapes of the music played the right way would be invaluable to people – the Ring did a series of tapes for each tune for all the dances in the Black Book – for people who could learn by ear. You need to talk about where the emphasis came. Douglas Kennedy used to start by teaching people about movement. He had classical training – he talked about the offbeat and delays. I've got an article by him – if translated into morris it was sound advice. Tony Barrand said the same thing – you have to explain to people – do you start the movement on the upbeat, or do you get there on the beat? Where is the beat? If you can understand that you can tell the drummer what to do. A drummer usually beats on the beat, driving into the ground, which kills the life of the dance. The best thing you can do is pick up the drum yourself!

When you've got small groups, you find the drum isn't necessarily the rhythm instrument; the guitar or banjo may be the rhythm. With pipe & tabor you may think the drum is the beat for the rhythm of the dance, but for traditional players the whistle was for the beat. The drum was for the excitement – you played rolls etc. I don't think it is necessary to reproduce the tradition as it was, there are lessons to learn from it. You can't have sides dancing to the old pipe & tabor. The G pipe is too highly pitched to have the volume to cope with modern noise. That's why Tubby Reynolds played a C pipe. Outside you need a lower pitch – while inside a hall you're struggling with the echo and you need a high pitch. If you have a G/D instrument, you play G outside & D inside if you can. That's why fiddles in A were quite useful indoors.

The technique I have for teaching (I used to do it at Sidmouth; also at Wantage and at Pinewoods) is to teach a tradition in an hour and a half. You'd do a dozen traditions this way - not to teach the tradition to people - but enough to work on it but not so much that it's fixed in their mind. The mistake I made in this approach was that people forget what you taught to start with and they start to make it up by the end of the workshop and then they go away saying 'that's what Roy taught us'. And I know it's not, because I keep notes! Not that it matters in the end because what I want is that each team should have its own repertoire that make it different and better – as far as they are concerned - than anyone else. One day we went out with a side and I didn't recognise anything they did – which is great. Whether that is the best thing for the morris I don't know! But it has got to be better than the other way, with 50 Cotswold dances which you learnt progressively, starting with Headington and working your way up the traditions.

The thing about teaching the morris is to teach dances or tunes; with enough advice to lift their self-confidence up. One thing I've learnt over the years: don't give gratuitous advice whether to musicians or dancers – only what they ask for. Otherwise you lose friends, no matter how well intended or needed the advice is! People who aren't performing well don't know they're not performing well; how do you educate them to know that? People don't know they're doing it wrong – all you can do is point them in a direction or drop some hints - and they may pick up on it. As I've said to Tony Barrand, morris is only as complicated or as difficult as it has to be. When there is no competitive morris around it can actually be very simple, when there are lots of morris sides around you've got to be distinctive - or better!"

Roy Dommert

August 2007

Wanted: A pair of second-hand football boots (size 11)

Hello to all you Readers of "Morris Matters", here is a question for you:

What's big and round and can hurtle down a grassy slope at speeds approaching seventy miles an hour? Any ideas? Well, the answer is an eight-pound Double Gloucester cheese at the Cooper's Hill Cheese Rolling Competition, which is held every Spring Bank Holiday (-that's the one in late May-), near Brockworth in Gloucestershire.

Here is another question, see if you can do any better with this one:

What should know better, but because it is completely suicidal has now sustained three broken legs, two broken arms, a dislocated shoulder and a fractured skull? A difficult one I must admit, but the answer is.....

..... the gaggle of competitors trying to catch the cheese.

Yes, alright, I know that maybe, just maybe, I am exaggerating a little bit here, but if you have seen the footage on TV and the pictures in the national press, then you will have a pretty good idea what I am talking about. In front of a crowd of up to 4,000 spectators from all over the world (including many television cameras and newspaper reporters) some members of the general public are driven to uphold the centuries-old tradition of performing all manner of aerial somersaults that, let's face it, they didn't know they were capable of doing, in their headlong plunge down a grassy cliff as they unsuccessfully try and catch an eight-pound lump of cheese.

In recent years the downhill races are interspersed with a number of uphill races to further entertain the crowds whilst they wait for the next downhill race to begin. These uphill races are open to everyone; there is one for the boys, one for the girls and a third one, an open race for all-comers. These uphill races are lung-busting affairs. The competitors all start off enthusiastically enough but it's not long before the force of gravity gets the better of them and their scramble slows down to a painful, pitiful, pathetic crawl, on all fours, as their bodies are quickly starved of oxygen.

But all the same, these uphill races have surely got to be a lot safer than the downhill ones!

Well. let's see....

I rather fancy my chances in the open uphill race and so here I am at the bottom of the 250-yard racecourse on the appointed day along with dozens of other competitors all as eager as I am to be the first up to the top of the hill. I've always regarded myself as being a bit of an athlete. I exercise regularly, I don't smoke and I only ever drink in moderation. So, I should be in with a pretty good chance.

The starting horn sounds and I'm off, straight up the hill like a young chamois in full flight. I reach the top a good twenty-five seconds ahead of the rest of the field, and set a new World Record into the bargain. I collect my prize and, guess what; I haven't even broken into a sweat!

Well. that's how it went in the dream I had the night before. But, in reality, things are to turn out a little bit differently on the day itself! Yes, here I am at the bottom of the

250-yard cliff face on the appointed day along with dozens of other competitors all as eager as I am to be the first to the top.

I seem to be surrounded by teenagers - I must be at least twice their age - but I am looking good. Maybe some running on the spot as a warm-up might just intimidate the opposition. (No. I didn't think it would.) Luckily a few older blokes turn up and I can start to relax a bit, secure in the knowledge that at least I shouldn't be the last one up to the top. That is, until one of the old-timers calmly tells me that, the moment we are off, he is going to grab hold of the back of my trousers! What!!! Surely there must be rules banning this sort of thing! But no, sadly, there are no rules. It is, quite literally, everyone for themselves.

More and more people swarm to the start line. By now this race looks like it must have a couple of hundred competitors taking part.

The starting horn sounds and we are off...

But, in that split second I am overtaken on both sides by dozens of people and completely 'boxed out'. To this day I am still at a loss to understand exactly how that happened (although I have a horrible, nasty, sneaking suspicion that all the people who overtook me actually started running before the horn went off).

Well. I sprinted the ten feet or so to the foot of the hill but then spent what seemed like an eternity running flat out on the spot, going absolutely nowhere whilst more and more people shot past me on either side. I partially blame my shoes for this! I just couldn't get any grip! Never in my entire life have I expended so much energy in order to achieve so little.

Gravity eventually got the better of me and I fell forwards onto my hands. Now that I was on all fours I could begin my ascent proper. If only I had done this sooner I might still have been in with a chance. But, by now, it was too late! Any thoughts of a victory soon went out of the window when, a couple of seconds later, the horn sounded again to announce that there was a winner.

But let me assure you, Dear Readers, that I am not finished with uphill racing yet, and even whilst you are reading this article, I am already at work planning my come-back. Now that I have discovered the best technique, all that I need is a pair of football boots. Yes, a pair of football boots with enormous great studs for better grip and then I will be the undisputed King of Cooper's Hill.

Simon Wooders

September 2007

Morris Offspring – with bells on....

My hopes were high for Morris Offspring's second major show and I am delighted to report that I wasn't disappointed. It didn't have quite the same impact as the first ('On English Ground'), but that was inevitable as the first was so innovative.

By the way, I should confess that I am a Morris Offspring fan, so don't expect this to be an unbiased review. I was distinctly misty eyed during most of their first show.

The show opened with a 'straight' set of four Cotswold morris dances. The first, Adderbury Haste to the Wedding, would have had more impact if the dancers had faced the audience. This was followed by a fine William and Nancy, from Bledington. For all of this part of the show, the dancers who weren't involved in the dance stood around the stage, giving a good feel of a 'real' morris dance spot. This was particularly effective during the third dance – a highly competitive, well danced Swaggering Boney double jig, performed by Jack Worth and Phil Bassindale and accompanied by heckling from the other dancers and, of course, the audience.

The last 'traditional' morris dance was a Raglan dance for eight, accompanied by the excellent full band of Jackie Oates, Jamie Delarre, Matt Keegan-Phipps and Saul Rose, whose attention to the dancers was exemplary. This dance was the best set dance, full of lively, lovely dancing, with plenty of powerful surges. For me, this was when the show started to take off and go beyond just being an enjoyable show to one that grabbed the audience.

A simple Bonnie Green off completed this section of the show. Next was a beautifully performed song from Jackie Oates, before we were treated to the first new dance. This was typical of Morris Offspring's innovative approach. "Rising" was the first piece of large scale morris that the team had developed since its original commissions ("Red" and "Blue", which were created for Sue Swift's show 'Flame' at Sidmouth Folk Festival in 2003). "Rising" displayed typical Offspring (or should I say Laurel Swift?) choreography – slightly too complex, but with great shapes and flow.

The highlight of the dance (and of the show) was the sticking sequence performed without music. It was complex and riveting, executed with building tension. This took the show onto a higher plane and I felt the familiar mixture of emotions that Morris Offspring manages to kindle in me. Envy: why wasn't morris like this when I was young? and Pride: Offspring wouldn't exist without people like me who got involved in the 1970s and started to open up the possibilities for the future.

After a good set of tunes, the next new dance, "Crabs", brought the first half to a close. A stick dance full of circles, it was enjoyable but not as enthralling as "Rising". Personally, I would have swapped them, so that the first half finished with the more powerful dance. But that is my only serious criticism of the first half of the show!

The programme told us that the second half started with a procession, but the audience was still taken by surprise when the dancers danced through the audience and up onto the stage. This simple, effective opening was followed by a song from Saul Rose. Next came

another innovation: a morris dance combined with a game. We were told in the introduction that we needed to work the rules out for ourselves and we were encouraged to shout ('lines' or 'muppet'!) when we thought necessary. I confess that I didn't really cotton onto the rules but it was fun to watch and had a good finish, with big moves and circles. The concept was good, but it probably needs more obvious rules and more clarity. It was a morris dance for a morris audience; I'm not sure what non-morris people would make of it. Although it did give me an idea for morris draughts, where you drop out of the dance if someone leapfrogs over you.

After another song from Jackie Oates, there were two more new (probably more accurately described as 'evolved') dances: Jalapeno and Abraham Brown. They both involved the masks that made a brief appearance in the first Morris Offspring show, where they were fun but not well developed. This time, the dancers were better at acting in character with their masks (especially the jester), which meant that they were much more effective.

Next up was the Big Stick Dance. Great idea, just needed more practice. Then Saul and Jamie played a magic pair of French Canadian tunes: fast and furious. It's always good to see talented musicians having to work hard – Saul's intense concentration was very visible!

Chris Taylor then danced a smart Sherborne (Go and enlist for a sailor) solo jig, before we arrived at the fitting climax of the show. This was a reprise of "Red", one of the original Sidmouth pieces, danced with the two huge animal heads: the boar and the unicorn. This had matured nicely. Better characterisation and more confident dancers took what had been an excellent dance and made it into a real showstopper.

Inevitably, there were a few 'hesitations' and the odd fluffed bit in the show, and a few of the dancers needed to look more confident and give a bit more "eyes and teeth", but so what? The dancers gave an enchanting and gripping performance that delighted the audience.

Oh, and there was one other innovation. Traditionally (!), Morris Offspring have abjured bells. In this show, they wore them for the first part of the show, during the 'straight' morris dances. And very welcome they were too – as was the whole of Offspring's second big morris show. Well done to all of them, especially Laurel. And what's next?

Sally Wearing

January 2008

Two Photographers – Thoughts on Jack in the Green Customs at Lewisham and Deptford

Travelling in on the train from Kent every morning and passing through Hither Green Station, you become conscious you have arrived in the conurbation where its contiguous suburbs merge into each other. A kilometre further on to the east, you can see Lewisham town centre. Shortly after that, your journey takes you beneath iron girders forming a bridge beyond which lies St. Johns station. Another kilometre further on, and you are zooming past New Cross then through Bermondsey to London Bridge. This is partly a disclaimer saying that you are never quite sure whether each suburb has boundaries. Historically, these places did, although as an observer reporting events that happened over a hundred years ago, one is hardly sure today of their relevance!

The Jack in the Green custom of Deptford was revived in 1984 by members and friends of Blackheath Morris. Their inspiration was drawn from Roy Judge's eponymous book and, in particular, a photograph it contained taken by local photographer Thankfull Sturdee. Sarah Crofts has published a booklet 'Fowlers Troop and the Deptford Jack in the Green' which went into a second edition this year following the discovery of a second photograph taken around the turn of last century, also by Sturdee. Roy Judge's book 'The Jack in the Green', now in its second edition and published shortly before his death, serves as a template for teams using this tableau at various festivals, most notably at Rochester and Hastings. This article serves to augment material contained in both books, and any remarks passed are not intended to be critical of either work, albeit infused with observations and opinions of my own.

Thankfull Sturdee (1852-1934) was a photographer and local historian, who eventually found employment with the 'Daily Mirror' in later life. Up until 1910, he lived in the area between New Cross and St. Johns known then as Deptford New Town. He had a studio in Tanners Hill in 1899 before moving 400 metres away to 16 Bolden Street where his one-time residence is marked by a Lewisham Council blue plaque. But it is his first photograph of the original Fowler's Troup that initially comprises our key interest (Figure 1). Vada R. Hart writing in 'Lewisham Local History Society Transactions' for 1976, describes all of Sturdee's Deptford photographs held by Lewisham Library. The one relevant here says:

'Large series, 40: an old May Day custom Jack in the Green (late 19th Century) – Sturdee's note says 'Fowler's troupe of May Day revellers or 'Jack in the Green' was an old institution in Deptford and regularly kept up until about twenty years ago when the Police stopped all such customs.' In the centre is the traditional Jack in the Green, an elaborate bush-like structure of leaves and flowers. The party would dance round the streets to the sound of a tin whistle and a drum and collect money which was later spent in the pubs.'

The posed photograph shows the Jack in the centre with its ornate floral crown surrounded by eleven obvious members of his party with other passers by – many of them youths. There is a hole in the frame of the Jack through which its bearer's face is clearly visible.

Four male members of the group are dressed as clowns: one wears a white self-crafted suit and white top hat. The costume bears the letters TIRE TIM with a bottle-like motif just above his midriff. It is possible he represents a cartoon tramp-like character 'Tired Tim' – a creation by Tom Browne, who with his co-star Weary Willie, first saw the light of day in 'Illustrated Chips' in May 1896. If so, the motif could be interpreted as a hot water bottle of its day. Alternatively, the character is 'Tiger Tim' another cartoon character from the same genre, and certainly in circulation before the 'Daily Mirror' included him in its coverage in 1904.



**Figure 1 Deptford Jack in the Green in about 1900, taken by Thankfull Sturdee
(Reproduced with grateful thanks to Lewisham Public Library)**

However, neither caricature resembles the white-clad behatted male seen in the photograph! The clown squatting down in front of the group has some face make-up and wears a light-coloured tunic or smock, also holding a teacher's mortar-board in his right hand. Another besmocked clown to the left of the jack also has some face make-up, and is wearing a jester's cap with bells on the pointed tips. The clown immediately to his right, wears a pierrot's cap and is similarly made up. He wears a dark coat and holds a walking stick in his right hand. Squatting in front of the party is a small child dressed in very dark clothes, whose face appears to be blackened – most likely in character as a climbing boy. The remainder of the costumed characters wear no make up. To the right of the pierrot, stands a young man holding a beadle's hat which hides what else he is actually wearing. There are two musicians: one bearing a large bass drum, the other holding a tin whistle –

each dressed in everyday clothes and flat caps. There are two women: each in light-coloured long dresses with floral headgear.



**Figure 2 Deptford Jack in the Green 1897 or 1901 taken by Thankfull Sturdee
(grateful thanks to Sarah Crofts)**

After an appeal by Sarah Crofts for further information, a second photograph taken by Sturdee was discovered (Figure 2). It was taken in a different location, but probably on the same day. Eight of the twelve characters are definitely present. The Jack sports two Union Flags around the face hole, possibly indicating the proximity of a day of national rejoicing, e.g. Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, although other occasions are feasible in the 1890s and early years of the twentieth century. Two extra costumed characters are featured in this second photograph. One is a clown-type individual wearing a white suit covered in hand motifs. The second is a man wearing a dark jacket, with a walking stick in his left hand and wearing a hat reminiscent of soldiers from the Boer War with its brim turned up at the side. If so, this could date it as 1902, for King Edward's coronation. (Sarah Crofts thinks the same character is present in the first picture standing sideways on next to the taller of the two women, but he is not distinct, and he appears taller in Figure 1).

A different boy dressed up as a clown squats in front of the group with his face made up – unless this is the blacked up boy alluded to earlier seen literally in a better light. There is a pierrot, the bass drummer, and two women in white each wearing sashes over their left shoulder. 'Tired Tim' is also there but less prominent, and standing to his left is a possible man-woman character with blackened face. Sarah adds, 'these are not poor people. I get the impression that they got their kit together very carefully and dressed the Jack

beautifully. They were perhaps influenced by pictures of earlier Jack in the Green groups, as they incorporate many elements of pictures I have seen from the early nineteenth Century, e.g. the 'Lord' (the chap with the bicorn hat and cane), the maidens are perhaps emulating the often featured milkmaids, there is the pierrot or clown, the small sweep or 'imp' and the man/woman. They obviously knew something about it.

The exact location of each photograph is unclear. Sarah Crofts describes the houses shown as 'typical examples of ... small houses built all over London during the Victorian period'. I will go one step further. The first photograph showing houses on the right hand side with their trianguloid bay windows are in modern-day Albyn Street to the north side of St. Johns station. On a visit there in June 2007, I couldn't locate the corresponding houses opposite and one assumes the area was partially rebuilt following the Blitz. In support of this, I would point out that Thankfull Sturdee lived in the immediate vicinity – Bolden Street is a short street connecting modern-day Brookmill Road with Albyn Street – and he probably set up his camera and tripod there within a short walking distance of his studio. One assumes that photographic gear had to be cumbersome over a hundred years before the digital age. Portraits had to be posed – the fact that one boy is blurred in Figure 1, indicates he forgot this cue! The second photograph is a little more mysterious. On the right hand side is a row of houses with a continuous white beam just below the first floor windows, ending in what appears to be a shop or public house outside which stands an old-fashioned Victorian street lamp. 'Kelly's Directory' for Kent in 1893 lists sixteen pubs and beer retailers in this labyrinth of streets which might help with identification. However, the only terrace I could find now is in Albyn Road between Friendly Street and Admiral Street, where the words 'James Street 1853' are embossed into the brickwork.

The buildings on the other side of the road in the photo are less distinct which is just as well: the south side of Albyn Road now comprises flats built during the last thirty years so offer no further clue. However, there is no trace of a pub or shop. One possibility is the pest control office on the corner with Friendly Street which, if validated, suggests the image has somehow become inverted! Similar terraces can be seen from the train along Brookmill Road on the corner with Elverson Road. Sarah Crofts is less convinced. Having visited the same district, she believes the best match is in Malpas Road whose houses have no front gardens. Alternatively, the streets were to the north of New Cross Gate where demolition took place in the 1960s and 70s. This is tempting to believe, as the eponymous John Fowler lived just round the corner at mid-terrace 118 Shardeloes Road. However, the mix of houses in that street today barely evokes a eureka-type response. Sarah adds that the building on the end of the terrace is definitely a pub – but where? There is a barely legible name on the frosted glass in the photograph, although the second word looks like 'Ales' rather than 'Arms' if that were to be a clue as to its identity.

The earliest historical reference to the Jack in the Green custom in the district appears in the 'Kentish Mercury' for Friday 7th May 1881, which says:

'Monday last being the 2nd May, the usual Jack in the Green with its accompanying satellites issued from Mill Lane, Deptford, and visited Greenwich, Deptford, Lee and Lewisham, and the best 'get up' we have seen for years.'

Mill Lane was the name of modern day Brookmill Road before much of the district was demolished to make way for Deptford New Town at around that time. As we have already seen, part of the western end of Albyn Road had been called James Street, and a further

portion of it was St. Johns Road. Old time Mill Lane was as 'an appalling slum of ramshackle cottages and common lodging houses' and densely populated by 'labourers, beggars and tramps'. Today, a walk down Brookmill Road from Deptford Broadway towards Lewisham reveals a pleasant park on the left, with a typical turn of last century housing estate to the south. We shall return to this later.

The second photographer we know less about. His name was George Frederick Collis (1874-1965), and his image of a Jack in the Green party came to light after his death when his son-in-law, local historian William Bartlett discovered it after the former's death, later allowing it to be copied by the Lewisham Local History Society. The 1901 Census describes Collis as a photographer's apprentice living at 3 Lewisham Park, although no directory suggests he took this up as a full-time occupation, and his family left this residence in 1906. At his death, he was living in Ladywell Road, only one kilometre from where he took his photograph. This image is best measured against a report of 1894 in A.R. Wright and T.E. Lones's 'British Calendar Customs', which is an eye-witness account by a Frank Lewis to his cousin Leland L. Duncan:

'In the High Street, at the inn near St. Mary's church, we saw a Jack with a Queen of the May, two maidens-proper, one dressed as a woman, and a man with a piano-organ. The organ was playing a quick tune and the Queen and the maidens danced round the Jack with a kind of 'barn-dance' step, the Jack turning the other way. The man-woman sometimes danced with the maidens, turned wheels, and collected pence. The Jack was a bottle-shaped case covered with ivy leaves and surmounted by a crown of paper roses. The Queen wore a light-blue dress and had a crown similar to the Jack's. The senior maiden wore a red skirt and a black body; the junior wore a white dress. Each wore a wreath of roses. The man-woman wore a holland dress and over it a short, sleeveless jacket; his face was blackened, and had a Zulu hat trimmed with red, with the brim turned up. The man-proper [apparently the one with the piano-organ] wore dark grey gaiters (long ones), a dark suit with ribbons on it, and a grey night-cap, with red, blue and green ribbons; his face was blued all over.'

Of the photograph Bartlett says: 'The 'Jack' was a young man who was encased from top to toe in a light wicker basket type of frame into which leaves, branches and evergreens such as ivy and fern were closely threaded. He was usually accompanied by a fiddler and three or four youths or girls who collected coppers from the bystanders as he proceeded by jumps and dancing steps along the road. The exact location of the photograph, which was a single shot, and I have found no more of the subject, was a point in the High Street Lewisham on the south east side near to the foot of Court Hill Road and the railway bridge, and opposite the end of Ladywell Road, and nearly opposite a public house which I think was called The Bull. The date given which I have checked by various means was 1903 and I think is fairly accurate.'

Roy Judge then added that The Bull is the next public house about 300 yards along the High Street from that referred to by Mr. Lewis, which more or less fixed the location. The Bull has since been renamed The Fox and Firkin.

Leland Lewis Duncan (1862-1923) lived at 7 Limes Grove, Lewisham and was the son of a customs officer. In later life, he was noted as an authority on Irish folklore and local historian. Alas, his one book on the history of Lewisham omits any reference to calendar custom in the town. Frank Lewis (1877-1897) was the son of Henry Clutterbuck Lewis

and nephew of L.L. Duncan's mother. Frank was born in Southsea, and was seemingly on a family visit when he saw the Jack at Lewisham, which was duly noted and reported to his first cousin. The photograph (Figure 3) depicts four characters accompanying the Jack. The first is a man in an ornate coat with thin drainpipe trousers or tights who holds a hat in his left hand. There is a woman or man-woman to the left of the Jack, in a long white dress. Her right hand is holding a long white feather or fan.



Figure 3 Lewisham Jack in the Green circa 1904 taken by George Collis

(Reproduced with grateful thanks to Lewisham Public Library)

A man on the right of the Jack has his face blacked up and wearing a dark bowler hat, a dark striped jacket and bell-bottomed trousers. There appears to be a white sash depending from the belt on the inside of his left leg. Lastly, there is woman to the right hand side of the Jack in a white skirt, with a bodice in a different colour, wearing a floral head-dress. There is no obvious musician – unless there is a barrel organ behind the Jack on the side nearest the row of shops. There is a decorated horse and cart parked outside the Victoria Wine shop behind the characters.

So, given my opening comments about the nature of south-east London's suburbs, is there any chance of the two groups being interrelated? Well, the two Jacks are fairly similar in construction, but the Lewisham party is short on clowns and supernumeraries. However, the Lewisham photograph was taken later in time than the two by Sturdee. Perhaps the roots of the two groups are similar, but we only guess the name of one participant in either custom. The area now known as Deptford comprises the town itself, New Cross, Brockley, Lewisham Way and St. Johns, all separated from Lewisham by the Ravensbourne which flows northward from the Bromley area out to the Thames via Deptford Creek. Roy Judge's work, and to a lesser extent notes made by the late Keith Holland in his own collection, indicate the May Day custom as prevalent throughout the entire metropolis until around 1910. The 'Kentish Mercury' gives a disappointing six references to the custom between 1881 and 1895, with the 'Brockley News' chipping in an extra one for

1894. All refer to the custom at Lewisham alone, with the exception of that for 1881 mentioned earlier. Most refer to the Jack's attendants in 'grotesque' or 'fantastic and light' attire. However, the 1881 reference suggests that at least one party travelled further than just the immediate locality, including Deptford, Lewisham, Lewisham and Lee on its rounds. Many of the reports in the 1890s include these citations as one item in a day of revelry that included a parade of decorated horses and carts, plus an annual May Day service held at the Congregational Chapel whose attendees would bedeck the church and themselves with flowers and greenery on the day.

Two eye-witness accounts were given to Roy Judge. One informant was Mrs. Jane Hannah Fielding who, aged eight, saw him on the Lewisham Road near St. Johns in 1896. Her chief recollection was being frightened by him, falling over and cutting her knee. Although pedantic, Roy listed this among his 'Lewisham' entries, but St. Johns is geographically viewed as Deptford. The other was from Mrs. Catherine Louisa Biggs who, aged eight or nine, saw him at 1898 at Rushey Green, Catford: "it was early in the morning; 'quiet and peaceful and sunny', and he was 'whirling round with a dancing step' all by himself". Again, it is curious to the non-Londoner as to why Catford – about four kilometres from Lewisham town centre – was included as Lewisham and not as a separate entity. I have deliberately avoided bringing in references to Greenwich, Peckham or Bermondsey, or the lists become endless! Keith Holland gave one more Lewisham entry simply stating that an 'old lady' who attended a lecture he went to at Fulham in 1970 remembered one from about 1900. A sketch was made which showed a pair of feet protruding from a conical framework atop of which was a distinct spherical head region to which Holland appended the word 'mask' – quite a different shape to the cylindrical Jack described earlier.

So, how did Fowler's Troop acquire its name? The sole reference to a 'Fowler' was given by Thankfull Sturdee, who described the party he photographed as 'Fowler's troupe of May day revellers'. Let us assume that its leader was someone by the name of Fowler. Surely he would have been quite well-known to him? Was he a near neighbour? Most of the members of his party are in their late teens and early twenties, with a few older than that. We shall now assert they were not linked to sweeping as a profession! In 1882, the 'Kentish Mercury' described the Lewisham event as 'a poor representation of the chimney sweeps' heyday of bygone years.' We are discussing a 'revival' either by a philanthropic or opportunistic group.

The main suspect is John Allen Fowler (1848-1897) who the 1881 and 1891 censuses describe as a hydraulics and sanitary engineer. Hardly the occupation of a Jack in the Green group leader you might think. Where he worked is unknown. Until 1891, he lived at St. Johns Road, or Albyn Street as it is today, so he may have worked at the water works about 300 metres away on the north side of Brookmill Road. His eldest son, however, worked at a local gas works, so it might have been there instead. Fowler senior may have enlisted his team of co-workers to take on roles in his 'troupe'. In 1891 he moved to Shardeloes Road on the south side of Lewisham Way, which is a further 15 minutes walk from St. Johns, but it is curious to think of him as a near neighbour of Sturdee around that time. However, Fowler's early death in 1897 might disqualify his candidature if the Deptford photographs are validated as later, unless the leader had any posthumous kudos. 'Kelly's Directory' also mentions a James Edward Fowler (1849-1924) who worked as a dairyman, but his co-residences in Deptford and Bexleyheath, especially later in this period, suggest otherwise.

This, of course, doesn't devalue today's revival one jot. It has been my privilege to share the day on two occasions. The first in 2003 was a walking tour of Greenwich and Deptford, where I recall a fascinated group of schoolchildren amazed when the entourage went past, with a green-faced bogey on leave from Hastings beating out a tattoo with drumsticks on the school railings. The other was this year, when the group toured the City, meeting the City Jack on London Bridge, then visiting the hostelries around Leadenhall Market, going past many prominent buildings, such as the Erotic Gherkin, the Monument, and the Lloyds Building en route. And the weather was glorious. I look forward to the event next year!



Figure 4 Fowlers Molly outside The Market Porter, Borough Market, 1 May 2007

(photo- courtesy of Sarah Crofts)

My thanks to Sarah Crofts who commented on and corrected the first draft of this article, and whose support enabled it to reach fruition.

George Frampton
September 2007

For further information, visit www.deptford-jack.org.uk/

See also: Roy Judge, 'The Jack in the Green' 2nd edition, The Folklore Society, 2000, ISBN 0903515200

Sarah Crofts, 'Fowlers Troop and the Deptford Jack in the Green' 2nd edition, Rainbarrow Press, 2007, ISBN 0954266110

Of Morris & Mumming: A seasonal tirade

It never ceases to amaze me that there are people who still believe that things like Mumming and Morris have their origins in pagan rites. A chance discussion on Boxing Day made me realise that this old chestnut is still very much alive: what made it worse was that it was being put forward by somebody heavily involved in the folk scene. Such is the romantic draw of the 19th century “antiquarians” who first mooted this idea and the New Age pagans who have latched onto it.

So, as we start another cycle of the seasons, it is worth reflecting on the origins of Morris and Mumming. My own view, having considered the question over numerous pints (and under various tables) is that their continuation has little to do with “folk memories” of our pre-Christian ancestry and is certainly not celtic as some would claim. Looking at the contexts within which they are performed or enacted gives a very different perspective.

Boxing Day and Plough Monday and the days in between, were opportunities for the largely rural poor to go around the neighbourhood performing Mummers plays, dancing, or singing - sometimes they would throw in a decorated plough or dead bird -and basically begging for beer money.

Pace Egging (Easter) is the next event. Less observed now it involved people dressing up in various disguises (hence “guisers”) and touring the area singing and begging for food or beer money.

May Day was a celebration of the start of summer. In terms of the pre-reformation Church it was also the feast of St Joseph (patron saint of workers) and May itself was associated with the Virgin Mary: there were parades through the streets, fairs and people danced “The Morrice” to earn some extra money. Throughout the summer gangs of men roamed the countryside morris dancing at inns before passing the hat around for - their beer money.

Autumn brings **All Hallows Eve, Soul Caking and Bonfire Night**. These have drifted into each other and out of favour. The former survives as “trick or treat” and the latter as “Penny for the Guy”: Basically though it was again guisers, songs and begging or even – as in Mischief Night – simply an opportunity to get back at those who didn’t give you any money during the year.

The year turns full circle and in the build-up to **Christmas** we see again carol singers and the occasional morris, particularly Border Morris, being performed. The purpose as before was to beg for beer money or other treats.

The common factor is that they are all associated with Church festivals. All these dates have pagan associations but this does not mean that everything now associated with them is also pre-Christian. At each of these high days and holidays (holy days) people would have had time on their hands to go around the neighbourhood collecting money, food or other treats. They invariably involved the “poorer sorts” visiting the houses of their employers and wealthier neighbours. The fancy dress and disguises that are often adopted are either no more than attempts to dress up or are intended to hide the true identity of the individual who was involved in something that was often little more than begging.

The image of St George as a knight was introduced to England following the Crusades so the Mummer's Play with its focus on St George and the Turkish Knight cannot date from before the twelfth century and the earliest references to such plays are of the late medieval/ early Tudor period. The earliest references to Morris dance date from a similar period and are generally agreed to originate with Court entertainments.

Furthermore we need to remember that the plays, songs and dances performed today are based on those collected in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or have been created since. The tradition we are preserving and continuing is thus based on something rooted in rural poverty.

This interpretation does not alter the enjoyment for the dancer nor the spectacle for the audience, past or modern. My original concern was to break away from the "Merrie England" image of traditional dance before we are finally swallowed up in the sanitised view of history provided by the "Heritage" industry. It is equally important that Morris and Mumming do not become associated with the new paganism, instead we need to see them for what they are – traditional forms of street entertainment. If some Morris dancers or Mummers want to invent a religious significance for what they do fine – just don't project that onto the rest of us!

Long Lankin

This article is based upon one that appeared in Unicorn Jan-March 1995



CD review – The Mother of all Morris – Various Artists

(Talking Elephant TECD118)

“Definitely the last in the Morris On series” promises Ashley Hutchings of this latest offering, perhaps because he is running out of family members to name them after. If it is the last one, he’s finishing on a high, and if you’ve liked any of them previously, dating back to the original ‘Morris On’ from 1972, you’ll almost certainly enjoy this one too – and probably more so. These days there are several other morris compilation CDs available, of varying quality and appeal, but what makes this one stand out is the wide range of excellent artists that Ashley and his joint collaborator Simon Care have persuaded to contribute tracks, and the variety and musicianship they all bring. Alongside the three offerings from their own ‘Morris On’ band (a high quality Albion variant), are those from morris-friendly names like John Kirkpatrick, Eliza Carthy, Show of Hands, the ubiquitous Saul Rose, and many more, and without exception everyone’s contributions more than live up to their reputations.

As usual there are some refreshingly different arrangements of familiar tunes from various traditions, and also new tunes and songs which match the style of the traditional ones. With so much good stuff on offer its difficult to pick out individual tracks, but especially worth a mention are the Minehead Hobby Horse musicians recorded ‘in concert’ (well, in Quay Street, Minehead on Mayday actually), exquisite fiddle and guitar tunes from Chris Leslie, Ric Sanders and Ken Nicol, and a deep and fruity voiced Jim Causley describing just what the Lollipop Man does with his big stick (you don’t want to know). If you can’t enjoy the music of the morris unless it’s played on pipe and tabor, and slightly out of time with the dancers, this is probably not for you. Otherwise, listen and enjoy! – and now that Ashley’s mantle is there to be taken up – a series of “Now! That’s What I call Morris!!” anyone?

Malcolm Major

January 2008

Talking Elephant are on www.talkingelephant.com
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My mistake:

In the CD review of Fairport Convention in MM 26-2, I wrongly gave the reviewer’s name as Les Juall; his friends at Sutton Folk Club may have had problems in realising it was Les IVALL who wrote it – sorry Les! Also, the table of contents transposed the two CD reviewers – Malcolm Major (Albion) and Les Ivall (Fairport).

Beth Neill

NEWSBOARD

New Chief Executive for English Folk Dance & Song Society

The English Folk Dance and Song Society is delighted to announce the appointment of **Katy Spicer** as its new Chief Executive as of 18 February 2008. Katy comes to the EFDSS with extensive experience in arts management. She is currently General Manager of Rambert Dance Company, the UK's flagship contemporary dance company, where she has been managing a new capital project, as well as promoting and managing Rambert's overseas and special performance projects alongside other management responsibilities. Earlier in her career, Katy was Executive Director and Co-Chief Executive Director of Arc Dance Company. She successfully raised Arc's profile, developed partnerships, as well as an education programme, and boosted the company's fund raising.

Katy is also a former Administrative Director and Co-Chief Executive Director of Chester Gateway Theatre and General Manager of Green Candle Dance Company. As a freelance arts manager and consultant, Katy has worked with theatre and dance companies, as well as venues, on strategic and business planning and financial management. Katy is a trustee, and currently Chair, of *Independance*, a London-based organisation nurturing artists working in urban dance forms. She has also been an advisor and performance assessor for Arts Council England. Katy's experience of folk music and dance started at school, and her parents organised folk music events in Shoeburyness, Essex in the late 1960s.

Katy Spicer says, "I am delighted to be joining the EFDSS, particularly at such an exciting time in the organisation's distinguished history." Mike Norris, Chair of the EFDSS, welcomed Katy's appointment. "These are exciting times in the folk music world and the appointment of such a talented arts manager demonstrates our determination to be at the forefront of this movement."

Moreton in Marsh record attempt 1 September 2007

We had a great day when 88 dancers and 10 musicians took part in the record attempt. The event was well received by the audience and several of the dancers have said they would like to return to Moreton in Marsh to try again at a later date. The Show itself was a great success and everybody enjoyed the day. I would like to thank everybody who came and indeed everybody who bothered to reply to my somewhat persistent e-mails!

We finally received our certificate in January 2008 from the Guinness Book of Records confirming the largest morris dance! Many thanks.

Pam Hathaway