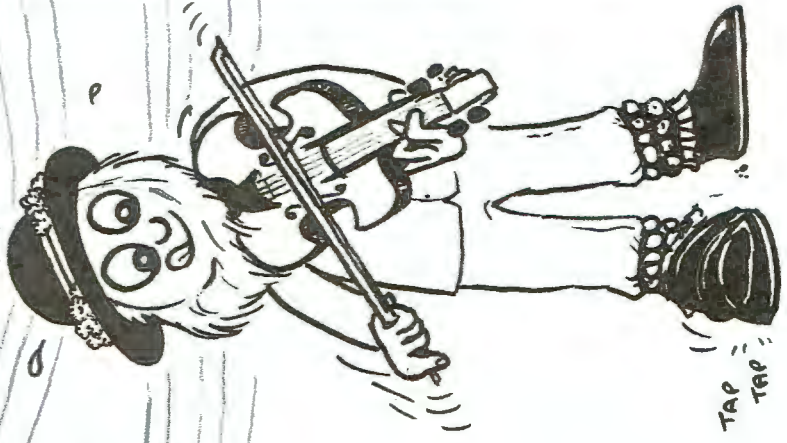


# Morris Matters



HSE: TO USE STICK: ENSURE  
3 FOOT EXCLUSION ZONE. WEAR  
GLOVES, HARD HAT & GOGGLES.  
EAR PROTECTORS ADVISED.....

## Contents of Volume 27, Number 2

<b>Editorial.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>New tunes for the Morris.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Barry Goodman	
<b>More on Music for the Morris .....</b>	<b>7</b>
David Wintle, George Frampton and Roy Dommett	
<b>Pub Morris.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Roy Dommett on influences and memorable moments .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Women in Trousers – a Perspective .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Shirley Dixon	
<b>ASBO Morris – or, Doing Bumbledom’s Job.....</b>	<b>25</b>
George Frampton	
<b>Singing sides.....</b>	<b>27</b>
Long Lankin	
<b>Events .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Book Review: The Hastings Traditional Jack in the Green.....</b>	<b>30</b>
George Frampton	

Morris Matters is published twice a year by Beth Neill  
with help from Jill Griffiths  
**27 Nortoft Road, Chalfont St Peter, Bucks SL9 0LA**  
phone 01494 871465

Subscriptions are £6 for two issues (£8 outside EU countries),  
published in January and July.

Please make all cheques payable to Morris Matters.

### Editorial

Having enjoyed Simon Wooders' article about cheese rolling in the last issue – I suspect it's just as well he did it last year when the weather was kinder – this year at least one entrant incurred broken limbs. It rather makes doing the risk assessments for morris dancing in a town centre look like overkill: in all the years I have submitted applications for licences and permissions I have not been asked for this, but in 2008 along came 3 separate requests for risk assessments. Fortunately a good morris dancing friend who knows how the minds of the Health & Safety Executive work filled in the form for us this year.

Glad to hear that Norris Winstone of Kemp's Men celebrated his 95<sup>th</sup> birthday with a tour of Norwich, attended by teams such as Chapel en le Frith, Golden Star, Leicester, London Pride, Thaxted, Letchworth and King's Men. He was presented with a custom-made pottery tankard [depicting Will Kemp<sup>©</sup> and .....Norris Winstone] by Paul Reece, Morris Ring Squire. Norris has kept up with Morris Matters probably since its inception and often contributes his views on the morris scene.

I am delighted to be able to continue the Roy Dommett biography with some correspondence over a couple of points made in the last issue (partly due to the attempt to transcribe only a small part of what he said). Roy has also kindly let me reproduce some of his early photos showing him at various morris moments; he is so frequently on the taking end of a camera that there don't seem to be many images of him actually dancing or playing; does anyone else have good photos? He is a mere youngster compared with Norris, having just celebrated his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday.

I've been trying for years to get some more contributions on morris music; what works and what doesn't, so thanks to Barry Goodman (musician, singer, dancer and MC) for his take on writing tunes for the morris, which I'm hoping he will continue. Thanks to Phil Watson of Open Morris for allowing me to include Shirley Dixon's article (originally published in *Dancing On*, November 2007) about the emergence of morris women in trousers! Has anyone got any other insight to share about early women's kit?

Its raining again as I write – how many events have you been to that have been rained off this year?!

Happy Dancing  
Beth

☺ **Talking of Will Kemp** - Kemp's Jig revisited again (*spotted by George Frampton in "The Metro"*).

It seems no time since we were cheering on Ben Dauncey who was attempting to do the famous long distance jig in 7 days but that was actually 2 years ago. In June 2008, comedian Tom FitzHigham was morris dancing all the way from London to Norwich to raise money for charity, having learnt the basics over a six week period! The fundraiser was said to be 'shattered' after jiggging 125 miles over nine days. 'My ankles are in a terrible state,' he said. 'I don't think I'm going to be doing much standing for a while.' Mr. FitzHigham two-stepped his way into Norwich under a guard of honour from the Lord Mayor's bodyguard, saying 'We all had a dance on the bishop's lawn. It was great fun; like something out of the Middle Ages'. Despite some abuse from Londoners, he said support had been great. 'It's been a marathon with bells on'.

## New tunes for the Morris

Every Cotswold Morris tradition has its tunes, and dancers recognise the dances by the tunes that go with them. *William and Nancy*, *Bean-Setting*, *Glorishears*, *Princess Royal* – all conjure up a dance, a chorus, a set of movements familiar to anyone who has learned the dance to that music.

We know that many of the tunes used by the Morris teams whose dances were collected during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were popular tunes of the day, and that some had a history going further back in time. Some were song-tunes, some came from the military tradition, while others were country dance tunes adapted to the Morris style. A good number of the tunes are replicated throughout the tradition, sometimes because of their innate popularity as dance airs, but also because of the “sharing” between teams of a good local musician, who carried his repertoire with him (and often was paid for his services). Indeed, there is some evidence that some musicians not only took their tunes with them from team to team, but that they also taught the steps to dance to them!<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of important elements in the tunes used for Cotswold Morris:

- ◆ the **rhythm** of the music determines the style and look of the dance - most Cotswold-style dance tunes are in common time (4/4) or jig time (6/8) – and the emphasis in the stepping is quite different for each rhythm (try dancing a double step to *Princess Royal* and then to *William and Nancy* to understand how different they feel).
- ◆ the **phrasing** of the dance for which the tune is being played, for instance: two double steps, two back steps, step and jump. The music has to match the phrasing of the steps, often with little variations in the pace of the tune, and sometimes with notes left out to create emphasis for capers and jumps.
- ◆ the **speed** of the music – this will depend on the dancers’ level of fitness, the intricacy of the stepping or sticking involved in the dance, and the impression the dancers want to achieve (slow and controlled or fast and exciting, for instance).

For an in-depth analysis of the whole business of playing for Cotswold Morris, look no further than Roy Dommett’s seminal article in a previous edition of this very publication <sup>2</sup>.

The appropriateness of the tunes used to accompany “traditional” Cotswold Morris is self-evident – it’s usually easier to remember how a dance goes by humming the tune than to do the reverse! But what about finding the right tunes for a “new” dance tradition? What are the processes that result in the happy marriage of movement and music which allows the dancers “to dance comfortably...” with the music fitting “the natural rhythm of the music rather than forcing it” <sup>3</sup>?

At Redbornstoke Morris, we have developed three “traditions” of our own. Two of these, “Amphill” and “Scouthall” are danced in a style which is recognisably close to the Cotswold style, while the third, “Marston” is a sort of amalgam of Molly and Border, with vestiges of Amphill thrown in! In almost every case, the music for the dances is not from the “Morris” tradition, but has been chosen or composed especially for each individual dance.

The “Amphill” tradition, which began its development in 1981, contains elements of Cotswold style (the use of handkerchiefs and sticks and a verse-chorus structure to the dances), as well as many which are not found in the collected Cotswold traditions (figures based on triangles; a stepping pattern based on one double step, a jump and four single steps; a circular starting position; an in-line finishing position). While standard “traditional repertoire” tunes would fit this structure, it was decided from the start that tunes should be peculiar to the dances, thus providing the “tune/dance prompt” for the dancers, and emphasising the uniqueness of the tradition.

The first dance to be written in the Amphill tradition, and thus the dance from which the rest of the repertoire was developed, is a corner-crossing dance in which all the corners cross in order, then return to place simultaneously. Almost from the outset, the tune for this dance has been *Billy Bones*, a song-tune discovered for us by one of our dancers from a BBC Schools “Singing Together” pamphlet. The words of the first verse are sung at the beginning of the dance, with the dancers stepping in the final two bars as a “once to yourself”, before beginning the dance proper.

It soon became apparent to dancers and musicians alike that some emphasis had to be placed on the distinctive “feet-together-jump” at the beginning of the second and sixth bars of the “A” music. This resulted in musicians playing a staccato, emphasised note on the first beat of these bars, followed by a crotchet (one-beat) rest. Once this had been established, a template had been made for subsequent tunes to be used in the Amphill tradition.

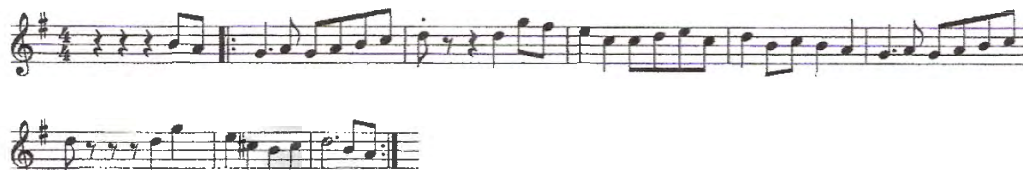
The next dance to be composed in the Amphill style, and the first stick dance, was christened *Nodder Sway* in honour of a road opposite the Three Tuns pub in Biddenham, named “Nodder’s Way” (one of the first places where the dance was performed). Originally conceived with a “utility” tune to provide a rhythm and structure for the process of composition, we soon realised that the dance needed its own music. As it was so unlike any Cotswold-style dance that any of us had seen, a Cotswold Morris tune was singularly inappropriate; indeed, the dance contains some elements that look a lot like Border Morris (single-step chorus, short stick clashing, movement of the set away from the original orientation), so a tune that evoked the Border tradition was sought. As it happened, I had recently written a couple of polkas, and one of them, *Plaiter’s Polka*, seemed to fit the dance rather well. This is a tune with very distinctive “A” and “B” music, so that the transition from danced figure to stick-clashing chorus is emphasised in the change of melody, and it has an “A” music that can easily be punctuated by the “Amphill Pause” (the emphasised note followed by a rest as described above). The tune was adopted, and has been used ever since as the music for *Nodder Sway*.

### Nodder Sway - original version

Barry Goodman



**Nodder Sway - version with "Amphill Pause" Barry Goodman**



One of our tunes, composed by Martin Banks for a dance to honour our tenth anniversary (so many years ago!) called *Snuffing the Candles*, has a passage of three “climbing” notes at the point where the jump happens in the dance (bar 2). Because of this, there is no need to put in the pause, as the music mirrors what the dancers are doing perfectly. Needless to say, Martin wrote this tune having danced the Amphill tradition for some time, so the shape of the dance was well-known to him, and the tune reflects this.

**Snuffing the Candles**

Martin Banks



As the number of dances that we devised grew, so the process of fitting tune to dance became a regular feature of the creative process. Some tunes offered themselves up without a fight – the tune for *Pilgrim* is a version (with augmented B music) of John Bunyan’s *To Be a Pilgrim*; *Hunt the Bunny*, which has a shooting movement alternated with stick-throwing, is danced to the tune *Hunting the Hare*, while the tune for our five-man dance is *The Motley Cap*, which I based on the jig tune, *Lumps of Plum Pudding*. The relevance of this is that *The Motley Cap* is a dance performed in memory of absent friends, one of whom is the late Jerry Griffiths, who was our fool for some time in the 1980s, and whose signature jig was...*Lumps of Plum Pudding*!

Other tunes were written by members of the side, including *The Handsome Puppet* (the tune for *Middles’ Revenge*, originally written for a Ducklington-style dance, but fitting well with the Amphill style) and *Alemeida Walk* (our processional tune, named after a tree-lined avenue in Amphill), both by Brian Mander, and another tune by Martin Banks, *XO*, written for the eponymous dance, and again including the emphasis for the jump in the second bar of the “A” music. *The Bedfordshire Clanger* by Taz Tarry was recently used in the film of the same name, featuring Redbornstoke dancing in early December and pretending it was mid-summer! Again, you can see how the tune (written by a dancer) telegraphs the jump in the second and sixth bars.

**Bedfordshire Clanger**

Taz Tarry



We have been known to reject tunes that don't work with the Ampthill style, often because the tune is too "flat" to accompany the explosive feet-together-jumps satisfactorily, or because the mood of the dance is not reflected in the tune and the dancers don't feel comfortable with it. We've also been known to go out on a limb to change the music – our dance *Finest of them All* was tried to a number of tunes until someone came up with the idea of using the tune to Dave Ritchie's song about canal boats plying the Grand Union Canal, carrying barrels of Guinness to satisfy thirsts in Birmingham during the Second World War. As the dance was written to commemorate the wedding of one of our dancers, who had lived for some time on a canal boat, this seemed especially apt, but then we wondered if the dance would work with the music sung, rather than played. We'd seen the Seven Champions dancing to Alison Thornley's singing, but had never yet witnessed a Cotswold-style team attempting to dance to a song. Nevertheless, we tried it out and discovered, to our delight, that not only did the song work very well as a dance tune, but it had exactly the right number of verses to fit the figures and chorus of the dance! We still use the combination of dance and song\*, which we find provides some variety in our set, and even provokes onlookers to join in with the chorus (sung, not danced!) on occasions.

At present, only one dance in the Ampthill tradition has a tune with any other Morris associations – our *Three-Man Stick Dance* (clever name, eh?) is performed to *Balquidder Lasses*, a tune often associated with North-West Morris, but containing the all-important second-bar emphasis. Otherwise, we have taken some tunes we like, some which have a special association with a particular dance, and the rest we've written ourselves (with the exception of *One Man's Morris*, composed by Graeme Meek and used in a stick dance especially devised to go with the tune)!

In the spirit of developing an individual style of Morris dance – the Ampthill tradition – this process of tune-making and tune-finding is not unreasonable, as new dances surely require and deserve new music. The tunes have become embedded into the tradition over the past twenty-seven years, and are now inseparable from the dances they accompany. Other Morris teams have "borrowed" some of our dances, and insisted on "borrowing" the music as well, while one of our tunes has also found its way into another team's repertoire, accompanying a stick dance not dissimilar to the one for which it was originally written!

That's "New Tunes for the Morris" as far as Ampthill goes, then. In choosing tunes for our traditions of Marston and Scouthall, other considerations and restrictions have had to be applied, making the process different, but just as interesting...but maybe that's a topic for another day!

## Barry Goodman

February 2008

### References:

1. Chandler, K., *Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles* (Publications of the Folklore Society 1993)
2. Dommett, R., "On Playing for the Cotswold Morris" *Morris Matters* Vol. 24 No. 2
3. Dommett, R. *ibid.*

---

\* Watch the latest version of *Finest of Them All* at [www.myspace.com/redbornstokemorris](http://www.myspace.com/redbornstokemorris)

## More on Music for the Morris

Ed: My transcription of Roy's views in the last issue prompted two readers to respond on a couple of points: some as a result of a genuine transcription error on my part, others are where, due to lack of space, I compressed what was said.

### From David Wintle; on Pipe & Tabor

It's always good to read something from Roy Dommett – but even better to hear him. He obviously hasn't lost his talent as a raconteur and it would have been even better if it had been possible to listen to the tapes. However, I take issue with him over his discussion of the pipe and tabor (MM volume 27 number 1). Some of it seems to be garbled and some plain wrong – has there been a transcription problem? *“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”*.

Russell Wortley quotes Cecil Sharp as noting that the tabor was struck “in different rhythms but chiefly [crotchet, quaver, quaver, crotchet, quaver, quaver]” which is pretty clearly doing the basic job of keeping the rhythm. There is evidence of dancers giving up when the pipe and tabor dropped out of use, the inference here is that they could no longer distinguish the rhythm. Clearly if the drum were being used only “to add excitement” to the tune, this would not have been a problem. Yes, there were rolls but they were in addition to keeping the rhythm. WJP Thorold (also quoted by Wortley) writes, “a type of roll has been heard, when a slightly shorter and double-headed stick was used”. Joe Powell, the last traditional player, is described as “rattling” his tabor and the wear patterns on his tabor and beater suggest that he used the rim as well as the head. [Ed; what Roy said in full was *“pipe & tabor players may think the drum is the beat for the rhythm of the dance, but for traditional players **as recorded** the whistle was for the beat. The drum was for the excitement – you played rolls etc*]

Roy goes on to say that *“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”*. The G pipe is the low pitched one, a C pipe would be higher in pitch (you can sometimes get low Cs but they are unusual and very long). In fact Tubby usually plays a G pipe, on which most tunes are played in C, whereas on the shorter D pipe most tunes are played in G. This is a nomenclature problem. To continue: *Outside you need a lower pitch – while inside a hall you're struggling with the echo and you need a high pitch*. That is exactly the opposite of my experience. Indoors with the echo, a high D pipe can be excruciatingly piercing and a lower G pipe can get lost outdoors amid traffic and crowds because of the lower overtones.

*If you have a G/D instrument, you play G outside & D inside if you can. But on a G/D melodeon the G row is pitched higher than the D row. [Ed: this bit is my fault – what Roy said in full was, “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 **which was common** is too highly pitched to have the volume to cope with modern noise. That's why Tubby Reynolds played **in C**. 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 indoors & D or C outside** if you can. That's why fiddles in A were quite useful indoors”].*

"*You can't have sides dancing to the old pipe & tabor*". Strange – when I play, sometimes I see people dancing, but obviously I am deluded.

David Wintle

*Ed: I forwarded David's letter to Roy, who has responded thus:*

I welcome discussion, how else do I get to learn anything? These two issues raised are points I have believed in for nearly 50 years, and unusually they are based on what I was told rather than derived from personal experience. Perhaps my interpretation is inaccurate - maybe that is why my views on these do not appear to have influenced anybody!

In the late 1950's and early 1960's I talked with and gleaned information from many of the surviving collectors and other people who had met the end of the "tradition". Several told me that they had learned that a common stick for the tabor was short and double ended, although this did not match the older published illustrations, but I never met any contemporary "revival" piper who actually used one. The implication to me was for a style related to tambourine playing or as the Irish hand held drum, though there were very few of either of these around at that time. But "good" revival players 50 years ago were steady (metronomic) and led the dancers rather than helping them by emphasising the effort profile of the dances. I suppose we were all far less mature then.

Also, none of those morris pipe and tabor players used their instruments widely for social dancing as would have the old traditional players. I think that the best players should fit what they play to the dance; broken rhythm for stepping reflecting the asymmetry in the body rise and fall, allowing more time for jumps and capers which involve longer off the ground, and accenting the leads into major physical efforts. The best that can be provided depends on the musician's technique or lack of it. But the common musical instruments for the morris traditionally produced sharp edged notes, more squeaky and rhythmic than melodic. They produced "spiky" melodies, which can be hard for the uninitiated to follow. Quality of sound is a relatively modern introduction into folk music via classical and then pop music.

Many traditional dancers believed in one note per step, causing in some circumstances difficulties in performing in jig time, implying that it was the melody instrument that was followed rather than the supporting percussive instruments. Moreover some dancers found it a problem switching from the pipe and tabor to the fiddle or concertina. The melodeon came after the traditional period and needs a different appreciation. Perhaps what had to be followed was different and the old neumonics, which were relied upon to remind and focus the dancers, were lost. Many 19th century musicians played frequently for social dancing, as do many morris musicians today. But few of the latter realise that the idioms are different. Barn dance players are commonly less concerned with phrasing and of course play too fast to allow of the more generous movements necessarily associated with the morris.

At a Barn Dance the pace of the music provides the excitement, as it does in sessions or in private practice. It encourages foot tapping and getting up to participate. The dancers in the main have not come for a stressful work out and intend to survive fairly continuous activity for a few hours. The slower South Midlands Morris inevitably will be at a pace that the music is not exciting in itself. The balance between music and movement depends on the dance idiom. Hence the migration of many sides to the modern interpretation known as "Border".

In these matters a particular influence on me was Major Fryer of Wargrave. He made, tuned and repaired pipes, often in bamboo, and he consistently sought for the largest diameter, which I assumed meant the lowest pitches. Contemporary players in my early days always seemed to want the bigger or noisier pipes, but obviously were limited to what was commercially available. Of course then there were not flocks of musicians playing together and committed to G and D. I do not think that I ever appreciated the link between key and pitch for particular instruments so my views may lack practicality.

Powell at Bucknell had learned something from Nelson, but those who met him said that he had a rather limited repertoire and only two tunes were played consistently so as to be noted down. He played a commercial pipe in a Basque tuning and could not get on with a Dolmetsch replica of Bob Potter's pipe, then owned by Wells at Bampton, which he had been presented with by the EFDSS. They had made a similar mistake in presenting a concertina to William Hemmings of Abingdon, when he played a one-row melodeon.

The relationship of idiom, melody, pitch, environment of echoes, background noise, sound absorption, may have changed over the years, especially as musicians have become more expert and responsive. The tradition is of little guidance because conditions a century or more ago were so completely different. The strength of the morris in all of its idioms is its ability to adapt and adjust to conditions and circumstances. This essential Darwinian evolution requires both creativity and copying others, features that were hard to promote in the earlier days of the so-called "revival".

## **Roy Dommett**

June 2008

### **From George Frampton; on Fleur de Lys**

I enjoyed reading Roy Dommett's memoirs in your last issue, but some of his points need elaborating, especially since my name is mentioned regarding development of the early Fleur de Lys repertoire.

I was a musician for the team over two periods. The first in 1977-78; the second time during the 1982-83 season. In the first, I had only just finished my inaugural season as a dancer with Cup Hill morris men, and was learning the English concertina. The then-secretary of the team and I had just returned from Sidmouth where the Shropshire Bedlams and Martha Rhoden's Tuppenny Dish had just performed - you imagine what an impression that had made upon comparative novices. Whilst knowing the early history of what had beset the team (as Roy mentioned) I had no say or input into Roy's teaching over the next few years - nor was there any reason for me to be included at that time. At no time then did I act to 'change' the dances. How could I? My own experience was limited to one season, although I was quickly absorbing all the new tunes that were being thrown at me. The only influence I had was in the stave dance 'Bootlaces'. Although Roy gave each musician a sheet of tunes, he didn't direct what he'd intended for this dance, so I suggested 'Enrico' from 'The Dorchester Hornpipe' tune book. That said, I can't recall Fleur de Lys ever dancing this out in public.

Although unknown to me wholly at the time, Roy had given the team an opportunity to define themselves in South of England dances. The Reading Cloggies were doing something similar

at the time. Indeed two members of the Cloggies were also in Fleur de Lys. I found this very exciting, and stayed on with the team beyond the time my initial reason for joining had lapsed.

As time wore on, I played in a local barn dance band, Stockbroker's Belt, which limited time spent on other musical activity. I returned to Fleur de Lys playing melodeon and concertina around Christmas 1981 at the request of Linda McLaurin (now Heath) who was tasked with forming a 'junior' team since the number of youngsters joining was felt to be affecting the 'balance' of the senior team. These sessions took place on a Saturday morning inside or outside musician Fred Elson's garage in Farncombe. At one of these Mary Fox, the squire of the senior team, turned up, saw me, and invited me to return to the senior team as well. Roy was no longer directly involved, but might 'eavesdrop' as he did at the 'cream tea fayre' at Guildford's Rydes Hill school in 1982 (wasn't it?)

By that time, I had been out of full-time morris for three years, but now deeply influenced by 'one-tradition' teams that were springing up, such as the Seven Champions and Windsor Morris in the south-east, and Hammersmith, Angel and Chingford Men in London where I was and still am working. Mary pushed me in the direction of a nascent WMF Research Group - which is where I first met the likes of Keith Chandler, Mike Heaney, Sue Swift and Sally Wearing. I also found myself at a musicians' workshop at Windsor, which encouraged me to play more for feet - sharing an inch-thick mustard and luncheon meat sandwich with the late John Gasson (happy days!)

Fleur de Lys were also discussing repertoire, and were keen for my views. Mary was very capable of leading the teaching herself, so I'll plead not guilty to the charge of 'trying to alter the dances a fair bit'(sic). There were several new dancers in the team, so it was an opportunity for 'something we can all learn', and I was asked to teach a new 'border' dance. Seeking to complement the few that Roy had taught in 1978 and beyond, I chose a version of 'Brimfield' in the Martha Rhoden's style, which I called 'The Original Farncombe stick dance.' I don't think the team ever danced this one out, either! One problem was, I had to teach the dance afresh every Thursday night because different people turned up for various personal reasons. Probably the dance was more needlessly complex than it could have been, but that was my only attempt at influencing progress.

The repertoire learnt from 1977 was still intact, although there was resistance to abandon 'one-off' dances such as 'The Lollipop Man'. I was in the minority to some extent, but my attitude was that any team I belonged to ought to focus on quality rather than quantity. With hindsight, I should have accepted that it was 'up to them what they did with the dances' and ultimately did. But I was 28 years old then, full of opinion like many of us were. If we weren't vying for excellence, we tried pushing back the boundaries of 'imagined village' tradition- I'm still doing that now, so no apologies. When it was suggested that I teach some Adderbury dances during the next season, I made my excuses - roughly at the same time the Champs asked me to join them, Lawrence Heath opened up a new folk club in Guildford, and the future Mrs. Frampton turned up - a triple whammy all round.

George Frampton

## Pub Morris



**Hands on Music weekends** - excellent tutors to improve your playing skills on

Concertinas: 27-28 September 2008

Melodeons: 15-16 November 2008

Strings: 7-8 February 2009

Accordions: 21-22 February 2009

Village Music Weekend: 7-8 March 2009

For details contact

Hands on Music, PO Box 1162, East Oxford D.O. OX4 4WS

phone 01865 714778 or see [www.handsonmusic.org.uk](http://www.handsonmusic.org.uk)

## 5<sup>th</sup> International Sword Spectacular

The 5th International Sword Spectacular was held in the medieval walled city of York from 23<sup>rd</sup> -26<sup>th</sup> May this year. There were over 50 teams from across Europe, the USA and the UK. The event was housed in Huntingdon School but full use was made of the dancing areas in York.

Friday night was spent at the school where the setup of indoor and outdoor camping was in progress. The bar was housed in one corner of the gym and, as the teams unpacked and partook of refreshments there was a silent rehearsal of flag waving in the bigger gym. This was followed by a marching band giving an impromptu concert and a chance to polka by the bar. Another team had a BBQ in near freezing conditions in the playground. It was a little different from the usual rapper get-togethers.

Due to last minute health and safety regulations, the foreign teams could not all be accommodated in the school classrooms. Instead, the organisers had to purchase tents and sleeping bags so that they could camp outside. This meant that tent-erecting workshops were held by the light of car headlamps late into the night.

On Saturday, there was to be a Grand Parade, starting from York Minster, followed by dance displays throughout York and we met early to have a quick run through. The scene that greeted us was amazing. It seemed that the musicians for each of the visiting teams took it in turns to warm up and show off their superb skills. We had our own silent practice (behind a tree) and found that we were being watched by a truly international audience. The most bizarre ending to this happened when the film crew (who were filming Robinson Crusoe in nearby York Minster) came dashing out and asked us to be quiet as 'the king was being laid to rest'

The rest of the day passed in a blur as, after the grand Parade, we performed several times in various squares within the walls of York. The organisers had managed the magnificent feat of scheduling our dances so that we were with a different international team and a different UK team for each spot. The European teams, dancing a hilt-and-point style sword dance, had a performance worked out which lasted around 15-20 minutes and usually finished with the sword bearer or flag waver hoisted aloft on a sword lock. They were so colourful and so lively and the sheer numbers of dancers filled the dance areas. We saw the team from Germany (Überlinger Schwerttanzkompanie) with their 'fool' who began the performance by cracking a whip several times on the pavement. [I'm not sure how the risk assessment coped with this!] We saw the sword dancers (Figure 1) from Lange Wapper (Antwerp) and parts of their dance wouldn't be out of place in the North East of England; we saw another military type display (Figure 2) from St Martin in Sulmtal (Austria) where the flag-bearer was raised aloft at the end and we saw the flag waving display from St Sebastiaansgilde Westerlo (Belgium). En route to another dance spot, we managed to see Kezka Dantza Taldea (Basque Country) dance their impossibly high kicks (Figure 3), whilst holding daggers, dressed in stunning white costumes.

The evening ended with a meal and a ceilidh back at the school and a chance to cement some international relationships and drink some more beer.

On Sunday, there was an opportunity to take part in workshops and attend lectures from various sword dancing historians such as Ivor Allsop, Dr. Steve Corrsin and Professor Elsie Dunin. As we were staying in the centre of York we decided to see the city from a different

perspective and took a trip on the York Wheel. Afterwards we had a little time to explore the National Railway Museum, which was great fun!

In the afternoon, there were several dance displays, in the sunshine, at different venues and with different teams. Then it was time to attend the Gala Performance at the Theatre Royal in York. It was such a great venue with comfortable seats for the audience on several levels and a chance to be 'noticed' in the Royal Box. We opted to dance in the interval rather than on the stage and it felt more normal to be surrounded closely by our audience and able to hear the heckling.

However, the performers on the main stage produced outstanding displays and it was a chance to see the teams that I hadn't been able to catch before. All 5 of the remaining original sword teams were represented: Flamborough (Figure 4), Goathland, Grenoside, Handsworth and High Spen. I was able to appreciate the traditional dances from the traditional teams and the ways that the tradition has evolved by the newer teams and by the US teams such as Orion Longsword, who danced their 'signature' Take 5 dance. Newcastle Kingsmen started the show with stepping, sword handling and all-round entertainment that shows what a premier team they are and Sallyport ended the show with a sparkling performance danced by a team that must have more rapper years in them than Phil and Aubrey combined!

Then it was time to head back to the school for food and more entertainment and try to drink the bar dry.

On Monday, while others were dismantling tents, I managed to walk the walls and had time for an ice-cream. There was a short lunch-time tour arranged, starting in Haxby. Bal Da Sabre Fenestrelle (Italy) started the tour. They have a young lad as their fool and, as he was hoisted aloft on a sword lock, he read a prepared speech in English. So cute, he'll break a few hearts before too long! This was followed by the Haxby Longsword dance in Haxby performed by Sullivan Sword which made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. Sallyport danced Poppleton. Despite several of them being on the organising committee, they still had to find time to learn the dance. The tour moved onto the next village of Wiggington while Ivor Allsop taught the Haxby Longsword dance to the Haxby village residents.

The highlights of the weekend for me were: the traditional dances danced in their home location (it was so cool); the surreal atmosphere while waiting for the procession to start on Saturday morning in the shadow of York Minster and lastly, I think I fell in love with longsword. Having dismissed it before as too long and the figures too similar, I've come to appreciate the subtleties and the flowing nature of the tradition. From Flamborough with their peculiarly random dance step to the twirls of Handsworth and the sheer majesty of Grenoside.

Thanks must be given to the Organising Committee for their good humour throughout despite being beset by bureaucracy: the Gala Performance was a fitting testament to their hard work.

**Jill Griffiths**

June 2008



Figure 1 Lange Wapper from Antwerp



Figure 2 St Martin in Sulmtal ( Austria)



**Figure 3** Kezka Dantza Taldea (Basque Country)



**Figure 4** Flamborough Head and Flamborough Juniors

Sword Spectacular photos all courtesy of Sue Swift:

*Pictures from the scrapbooks of Roy Dommett*



Abingdon about 1961 - Ray Hemmings was mayor - Roy Dommett (number 6, next to Frank Purslow, Brian Clark at number 2 (Ray Hemmings nephew) and Jack Hyde, Bagman at number 1; Len Bardwell on concertina.

Abingdon team at Marcham about 1965 - Roy Dommett third from left; Charlie Brett ( in extra sash) mayor; John White musician; Jack Hyde fool





**Dancing with Winchester about 1964 – Roy Dommett second from left**

**Hampshire-Surrey “Border” team about 1964 – Roy Dommett far right in waistcoat; musician Mary Ireson**



**Roy Dommett with Church Crookham Mummers about 1967**



**Adelaide Morris about 1983; Roy Dommett in Andy Pandy outfit**



## Roy Dommett on influences and memorable moments

*- continuing notes of Roy talking to Beth Neill in August 2007*

### Who have been your main influences?

First of all there was **Alan Browning** with whom I shared a room in the RAE and who got me involved in the morris. He started to run a weekly barn dance and I did the door. Then I joined in the dancing. Later on Alan appealed for someone to form a morris side; the team started practising in 1954. I was number one; we practised Bledington – from Russell Wortley’s notes – and was dancing out by 1956. He also had other ideas – Farnborough Morris never had a squire or bagman – we would appoint a foreman and bagman for each event that year – the year was shared amongst pairs of the team - we had the AGM at one of the weekends out over lunch somewhere, so everybody who turned up got a vote - we believed in having weekends that lasted Friday evening and included all of Saturday. In the early days we would organise dances between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. to fit in with the bus timetable! Farnborough Morris Men had one car and six bicycles – for our long weekend we would borrow the RAE bus and drive round advertising the dance. He was a profound influence on me anyway. That was really about organisation.

The next influence was **Mary Ireson** who had run a side based in Farnham – then at Woodnarks (home for disadvantaged girls) then eventually practised at Holybourne near Alton - she was a well known country dance teacher in the area who had learnt her dancing before the war and had passed all her morris exams & that stuff before the war – her father was still alive. She saw the whole thing as a social thing – people working together in groups – going out to fêtes – fitting into the community.

The next one was **Frank Purslow** – he introduced me to the traditions -I was introduced to him by Reg Hall who played for Farnborough in the early years – he said come along to see how Abingdon dance and that is how I got involved with Abingdon and with Bampton and he introduced us to Chipping Camden and so on. Through him I learnt about tradition and started visiting with him the old dancers and eventually did a bit of researching with them myself. EFDSS policy was not to film living traditions – they didn’t want to interfere – whereas I wanted to film Abingdon and Bampton in the ‘60s in case the teams folded. As it is, they survived.

I went to a weekend run by **Nibs Matthews** at Halsway Manor and asked about dances other than the ones he had taught. I was invited back by Bob Bradbury and the following year I ended up teaching at Halsway (around 1963).

And the final real influence was **Tony Barrand** –and he was about the aesthetics –the artistic bit - and also the fact of the interaction between the morris and the audience. As an assistant professor at Boston he did have a different approach to things. He did have a row with his sides as they tended to think he saw them as a psychological experiment; I think he just had a grasp of those things. His doctorate was about aesthetics of dance. Typical American I might say. He’s done some good things – researched and found step dances – he found that not all step dances had to be traditional – they could be commercial as well. He uncovered the equivalent of the West Gallery singing – the shape note and Northern Harmony. Marlboro Ale has been a great success over the years - a great influence - and getting Marlboro to concentrate on one

tradition was a good thing as well. I had a good session with his ex-wife about Ilmington; the repertoire of the women's side at the time.

He asked me for material – I gave him a copy of loads of stuff typed up to about 1980. When I went to Pinewoods, in 1980 I suppose it was, I took a set of notation of North West dances for distribution – bear in mind this was a time when everything in America was new – chronic shortage of material or information of any sort and no opportunity to access raw material (as distinct from publications). So it seemed to me a very sensible idea for material to be accessible. The Country Dance & Song Society in America, of whose journal *Country Dance & Song* (CDS) he was editor for a while (which I didn't know), decided there was a limited market for it and published it – and surprisingly, it got sold in this country! Although not many people knew about it. So when people (like Julian Pilling) made a fuss, no-one knew what they were talking about.

We had agreed for notation not to be published. Also I asked 'had they asked the teams if they were worried about their notation being published?'. I knew, like in Abingdon (as a member of the club) the older men actually wanted someone to do their dances & they had looked forward to the days when a massed Abingdon dance would be the massed dance at a ring meeting. It was the newcomers coming in that made a fuss. It's their opinion, they run the team and it's up to them to decide. Because of the fuss, there were British people who actually started threatening Tony through the post, threatening to take it up with the dean and the university. I don't know why they would say it but they would have been laughed out of court, as Tony only ever did things with the full approval of his faculty: as a faculty member he can only do things in accord with the faculty.

American copyright laws are different from here: over there if you want a copy of a book you go into the shop, just ask for it and a quarter of an hour later you get a quick single copy. That's how I got a copy of the notation of a Romanian morris dance; it cost me \$7. Rules there are different – none of this 10% of a document rule. CDS have decided not to publish the material any more – as far as I'm concerned the impact it had made, it had done its job. The morris world does not need a book like that any more – people can gather information via the internet or elsewhere. People have a different approach to things these days

**Tubby (Reynolds)** was a profound influence as a friend. He is the worst sort of influence; he will suggest something and think about it later. Last time we sat together we agreed we're not ashamed about anything we've done but we're not very keen for it to be written up!

I was going with Mike Cherry to Bacup via Tubby's in Bath – staying overnight; the car broke down near Bath – Tubby came and towed us home but on the way towing us back to his house he overtook a bus!

## Highlights and Lowlights

*What was your worst morris moment?*

It was being welcomed to Bath City University morris, making me an honorary member by being thrown in the lake - in my best suit which I'd only had for three days – and I went down with a kidney stone. Marguerite has not forgiven them – a suit cost a lot of money when you've got a large family.

I don't recall being embarrassed – there are one or two things I regret – I know when I went with Tubby and Bath to a Thames-side Ring Meeting, there was a day with Benfleet Hoymen.

It wasn't Bath City but lots of ex-Bath City coming in for a reunion; they were basically out of control. Tubby & I didn't really notice what they were up to because we were talking with old friends. It got out of hand, it was all embarrassing. At the AGM the then-squire of Bath City had to crawl to the Ring to apologise for their behaviour. There were people saying 'why are you associated with a university team?' I couldn't answer that - because as far as I was concerned they were as gifted as anybody and they had a spark that made it lively - not associated with most of the Ring sides at that time.

I was embarrassed by a Bath City woman - they were doing Stave dances and they did them beautifully - I said something which I thought was complimentary - the squire burst into tears as she took it the wrong way. She was obviously very nervous about it and expecting criticism. The women needed to find something they felt confident about and could do well. The boys were happy to work on traditions like Ducklington. Bristol was the centre of the brass industry - where the stave heads came from - so it made sense - the side were young and inexperienced; it gave them something to go round with like that and gave themselves confidence.



*And your best moment ?*

I remember when I first started dancing you could get a high - hardly touching the ground with your feet up in the air floating around (long distance runners get it) - it's the rhythmic movement that gets you. Once you think about it, it disappears just like that. It's the phrasing of the stepping, you start and set up a rhythm.

**Roy Dommett**

August 2007

**Michael, Simon, Stephen, Peter, Judith, Roy, David, Thomas (in hat) and Margeurite Dommett - about 1970.**

**Boys in Abingdon kit**

## Women in Trousers – a Perspective

Remember feminism? Back in the 1960s and 1970s, women in the West were reacting strongly against the attitudes current in society that they were to strive to be decorative, diligent in child-care and supportive of their menfolk's more important roles. Women who wanted something different, and women who knew they were just as capable as men of undertaking demanding jobs outside the home, made their voices heard and changed society. Part of the reaction transformed the Morris dance scene from one of men's clubs presenting the dance as an ancient, pagan-based tradition to the hugely varied Morris world we now enjoy.

Kicked off by a few individuals who were interested in folk, often those frustrated by having to sit and watch while their boyfriends and husbands had all the fun of teamwork and public performance of this great form of dance, women's teams started to spring up (in many ways!) around the country. But what was a Cotswold Morris woman to wear? The men's teams imitated the dancers, and photographs of earlier teams, seen by the turn-of-the-century collectors; these had donned for performance either their cricket whites or tatter jackets. But those early teams had consisted solely of men. The 'revival' women's team, Mary Neal's 'Esperance Girls', had, of course, worn dresses – it was immodest enough back then, before the First World War, to be exhibiting yourself in public, but certainly no woman would wear trousers to do so.

Even by the 1970s, women did not sport trousers as readily as they do now. It had become quite common, especially since the Second World War (1939-1945) to wear 'slacks' in leisure time, and jeans became a unisex uniform of the young in the 1960s, but a woman had to be beskirted in formal situations. Morris dancers have, of course, always 'dressed up' for their performances in their best trousers or cricket whites, decorated with ribbons and rosettes; women would tend to think of skirts or dresses in such a context. There was also an attitude of respect for, and attempts to follow, 'tradition', and a desire not to be seen as 'trying to be like men'. All this led many women's sides to restrict themselves to the more 'ladylike', less boisterous, traditions and dances, and to adopt skirts for their costumes; but often the experience of dancing in the chosen costume led to amendment. Bath Ladies, one of the teams driving the formation of the Women's Morris Federation, as it then was, initially performed in the knee-length skirts which were then fashionable, but soon felt that to be an inappropriate choice and adopted instead a version of the old Esperance dancers' kit - ankle-length skirts with apron and sun-bonnets. This was a kit that could be worn for dances which did not involve jumps and capers, but even in the mid-seventies, there were women's teams which had a different attitude, adopting the vigorous dances and shape-revealing costumes that men's teams were displaying. Women's teams in North America were an inspiration to some; others chose such dances and kit simply because they had never felt that being women meant being 'fluffy'. Quite which was the first female team to take this line seems to be somewhat lost in the mists of time: I examine some of the claims below.

An issue that is always contentious in a women's side is how well the kit suits the team's members. Men in the 1970s did not have the same image-consciousness that is common now to both sexes, but women were only just escaping the pressure to be 'feminine', 'ladylike' - basically attractive to men (as 'prey' rather than as friends). Slim girls might have been happy to perform the Morris in trousers, but a woman with a larger frame, anxious to look her best, or at least not to be the butt of ribald comments, might be very reluctant to wear a costume so

revealing of her shape. Sides which chose trousers or breeches often had pressure from some members to change to wearing skirts. Fiz Markham remembers the debates at Holdens Goldens on whether to change from long skirts as 'long, drawn-out and agonising', and Kesteven, according to Sue Swift, went through a period of four years when they changed kit every year (but never into trousers). However, those who cared strongly about the dance knew that Cotswold Morris as it had developed since the late 19th century cannot be shown off properly if the legs are not free of restriction and cannot be seen. Windsor Morris, a team which made a conscious - and contentious - decision to dance with strength and vigour, countered criticism after their change to trousers in 1978 by asking any questioning man "Would you like to dance Cotswold Morris in a skirt?"

Footwear was an even more important choice, since it would affect the style of dancing and the ability to dance without injury. Men's sides wore everyday leather shoes, but what was an 'everyday' shoe for a woman in the 1970s? A side choosing to wear skirts, especially skirts which did show some leg, would often opt for a shoe with a small heel, since flat shoes looked dowdy with such a costume. But even the smallest heel puts the foot in a position which restricts the calf muscles and where it is very difficult to avoid putting weight on the heel - and the springy step of Cotswold Morris needs to be danced from the ball of the foot. Trainers did not really exist - plimsolls were worn for sports such as tennis, but they were not particularly supportive for strenuous dancing. Suitable casual shoes began to be marketed towards the end of the 1970s, and Windsor Morris opted for 'Polyveltdts' even when they were still be-skirted. For women who chose to wear trousers, plimsolls were a popular option; the short-lived Queen of Herts, founded by Val Parker (in Hertfordshire) in 1976, wore white plimsolls. When trainers were available - designed to support the foot through the strain of vigorous sports - such teams adopted them enthusiastically. Jackstraws Morris made their debut on Boxing Day 1977 wearing Dunlop 'Green Flash' trainers.

Windsor Morris are often cited as being the first women's side to choose to dance in trousers, but that is not the case. They were one of the first high-profile sides to do so, certainly. Teams who felt involved in the political wrangles tended to be circumspect about offending the Morris establishment any more than they had to. Queen of Herts wore culottes, a compromise between skirts and trousers. It was only during the 1977-78 season that Windsor Morris and another team at the forefront of the Women's Morris Federation, Holden's Goldens from Wolverhampton, changed their kit from skirts to trousers; less politically-aware teams had already jumped into the fray all unwittingly.

Oyster Morris in Canterbury was one. Now a joint side, they started in 1977 as a women's side, taught by John Jones (now well known as the melodeon player in the Oyster Band). Rhiannon Owen reports 'We had no idea that it was controversial for women to dance Cotswold (John taught Bampton, Brackley and Adderbury, then later Fieldtown and later still Badby when we had men). There was one of us who was a bit older and big in the EFDSS dance scene but she was the only person who mentioned skirts. As far as we were concerned Cotswold Morris dancers wore trousers (or breeches). The local Morris teams were Wansum & East Kent - one black breeches with tabards and one all white. Effectively we went for the "current" fashion solution - black flared trousers and whatever we could buy as white blouses/shirts (I think mine was even cheesecloth!)... basically because we were great innocents in the Morris world and didn't realize we were being at all controversial, we just did what we wanted (an advantage of East Kent being at, if not beyond, the edge of the known universe)'.

I have heard rumours also of a side at Bishop's Stortford in Hertfordshire who wore trousers at about that time, but have definite reports - and photographs - of a side founded earlier still, in

1976. Updown Hill Morris was founded in Windlesham, Surrey, by a former member of Windsor, Brenda Gosling, and she chose breeches. Jackie Emerson (now Jackie Weller) describes the kit thus: 'We wore a wide brimmed straw hat, tied under the chin and decorated with ribbons and dried flowers. A beige cotton long sleeved blouse with a drawstring neck and baldricks, with Updown Hill emblem in the middle. Brown corduroy breeches, long woollen socks, which were far too hot in summer, and suede lace-up ankle boots'. It was a very seventies look, but they were daring to project themselves as vigorous dancers as well as trendy dressers! This is my earliest example of a side founded by and for women which chose to wear kit which revealed the shape of the legs. The side did not last long, but Jackie founded Jackstraws, and she put her team in long trousers. However, they wore smocks, so an individual dancer's figure was not on show. The team was amused after performing in Sidmouth Market Place one year, with dancers including Kris, a wiry 4'11" and Maggie, a strapping 5'9", to have a compliment on the dancing followed by a comment that it must be easier to present a uniform appearance when your dancers are all such similar sizes!

But there were even earlier pioneers, arising from mixed sides. In the mid-1970s, Mike Boston, now fool of Great Western Morris, was a teacher at the Blyth-Jex School in Norwich. He asked Norris Winstone of the local side, Kemp's Men, to teach Morris as an activity for the Sixth-Form Club. Started in 1974, the side was mixed initially, and wore jeans, but the boys did not stay, leaving it a girls' side (with no desire to change into skirts). However, the earliest example that has come to my attention is Red Stags Morris, the Southampton University side. Established men's sides at universities were finding themselves forced to open up to women, as Student Union policies insisted on team memberships being open to both sexes. Jenny Howard, rebuffed at her first naïve attempt on arrival at Southampton in 1971 to be part of Red Stags ('But you're a girl!'), could join in at last in the summer of 1973 – mainly because the men's side had folded through lack of dancers. She recalls 'the Winchester man who taught us wasn't keen, but in fact we were needed to make up the numbers, so he put up with us.' The women simply donned the same costume as the men when they came to dance out – white trousers and white shirts with tabards, and Jenny has a memory of her first appearance in public 'as Peter Bellamy's warm-up act for a University event; I was wearing skin-tight white loons, and he passed behind us just as I was putting my bells on and said "Cor, I like lady morris dancers" which, however ignoble his motives, boosted my confidence no end!' When a separate women's side, Hamwih, was formed in 1977, they chose to wear breeches with short waistcoats, and former members who went on to found other sides felt it normal, indeed necessary, to recommend trousers or breeches to their colleagues. Norfolk Biffin, founded by Jenny Howard and Hilary Gomme in 1977, chose white trousers, and Eryri Morris, started by Nicky Heinersdorff in 1982, black breeches, both adding waistcoats.

I recall the reaction of a male Morris dancer in 1980 when he saw a photograph of the Hamwih women executing the extended 'RTB' in Bampton 'Flowers of Edinburgh': 'That's not very ladylike!' Fortunately, there were enough of us who didn't care about such opinions, so that today we can dress as we like, and dance as we like.

## **Shirley Dixon**

*With thanks to: Jenny Joyce, founder of Windsor Morris; Jackie Weller, founder of Jackstraws Morris; Jenny Howard of Rockhopper Morris; Norris Winstone of Kemp's Men; Hilary Maidstone of Golden Star Morris; Rhiannon Owen of Oyster Morris; Fiz Markham of Windsor Morris; Clare Mach, Nicky Heinersdorff, Heather and Paul Rosser and Christine Dover, all formerly of Red Stags; and Sally Wearing, Sue Swift and Val Parker, former officers of the Women's Morris Federation.*

## ASBO Morris – or, Doing Bumbledom’s Job

This article differs from the usual historical diatribe I write, and hopefully begins an exchange of ideas with you, the readers.

Picture the scene. There you are, performing outside a pub, either in a quiet lay-by or car park. Your barker has just announced the dance, and you begin. Along comes a car, sounding its horn. You take no notice. It inches nearer – and nearer – and nearer. Do you: (a) do nothing but jump aside and let the mean-spirited sod pass through, with you mumbling obscenities in the pub afterwards; (b) hit his bonnet with a well-aimed stick, (c) send out your meekest yet most assertive performer to reason with the git if he stops, or (d) send in your token neanderthal to deal with the situation? At the end of Hastings’ Jack in the Green festival, members of Rabble were in contemplative mood, recalling an event two years previously at which I wasn’t present, but heard so much about. It seemed on that occasion (c) prevailed after her husband had performed (b), and unanticipated language of a fruity variety ensued from female partner to many astonished ears! In hindsight, this situation could be regarded as amusing, if it wasn’t so scary at the time. Okay, most drivers stop and wait for the dance to finish and to be met with a cheery wave and thank you from one or more dancer. No problem.

On another tangent: stewarded events. What with the trouble on terraces at football matches in the 1980s, we fans have become used to the sight of dayglo-tabarded people self-stewarding games, rather than paying the police a mortgage-busting sum. So too is this the case at larger folk festivals. The Rochester Sweeps Festival has these. I spent many happy years inside and outside The Two Brewers with the Fezheads, having a quiet drink and entertaining the punters with no hassle. Fast-forward six months to the Winter Dickens Festival at the same venue. Sweat-shirted stewards hired by Rochester-upon-Medway Council chose to ‘move us on’ because we were ‘causing an obstruction’. What’s so different? Bloody little Hitlers!

Whilst on the subject of the police; even where present at a publicly-sanctioned event – and in support of it – it is no guarantee they are empowered to act for you when any irritated motorist finds you in his path. I was told by one of the Wessex morris men attending the annual maypole dance at Ansty in Wiltshire that a motorist drove through the middle of a set performing outside the eponymous pub during the May Day celebrations.

Today we live in a world of Public Liability Insurance and other nasties. Roy Dommett once said at a Sidmouth workshop (and I apologise if his meaning is distorted here) “Morris is disrespectful, but not disreputable”. When the old mantra is uttered that Morris is a pre-Christian fertility ritual, I usually counter the belief that its actors hold themselves to be somehow ‘alternative’ to Society rather than some benign practising priesthood. An extension of that would follow that they are outside the law. That might justify explanation (b) in the second paragraph – or not!

I was party to some rather tasty emails last Autumn initiated by members of the Good Easter molly dancers. The thrust of the message was that, after twenty-four years performing at the Whittlesey Straw Bear festival, their services were no longer required by the organising committee. In other words, they were banned! Naturally, the lads were very upset, and their circulation list include some very prominent people, including three Morris Ring squires past and present. Language veered towards the Anglo-Saxon! Their transgression was to continue

their practice of performing outside the public houses viewed as part of their circuit (my words, not theirs). These included the lay-by outside The Bricklayers' Arms and the road in front of The Falcon Hotel, neither location seeing much in the way of vehicular traffic and, in the former case, bringing an unused venue into the Festival.

Readers will recall how the Festival has changed since its inception in 1980 from a few Morris teams over one day, to a full-blooded Festival with invited teams performing formally and informally, then to a regulated event with strict timetabling to thwart any threat by the 'authorities' because of perceived health and safety fears. I have already written to say how I regret this, but could see both sides of the argument. By late Autumn, the email exchanges had become more heated. The crime was re-expressed that Good Easter had missed their stand at the Market Square and someone else had to fill in for them. Also, the allocated steward or 'straw bearer' was unable to account for them. It was countered by Good Easter that they were doing what they had always done. Impasse! This was getting silly. As the Straw Bear biographer, and ally of personalities on both sides of the argument, I sought to calm things down. I'm on Christian names terms with most of these people, some of whom I exchange Christmas cards with. Emails are notorious for conveying a badly-worded message with misconstrued meaning, sometimes little better than a text message. A letter to the Festival founder and organiser seemed in order.

In the event, such offices came to nothing. Good Easter did their usual Plough Monday rounds, and joined Gordon Phillips on his Fenland molly dance tour the following Saturday. At Whittlesey, I joined the Mepal Molly Men for my second year, informing them of the correspondence. They promised to keep on the right side of the straw-bearers. The only altercation we had all day was when the steward asked us to do a fourth dance to pad out time outside The Black Bull public house when the session was under-running. That's something of a problem for a team with only three dances and a song in its repertoire. Whilst tied to the Mepal lads, I saw little of the Festival at its height, and only right at the end did I manage to get down to the southern end of town to see anything else – by which time, most of the teams had packed up.

It was on my way that I found a clue to the seeming intransigence of the Whittlesey Straw-Bearers. The organisation has its own traffic calming, Park and Ride, and other street signs to make the day safer for everyone. At half past three, the stewards were busy packing away these restoring the town to normality. I was reminded of something I wrote back in 1990, expressing the pride of one person that 'Brian (Kell) had brought the straw bear back to Whittlesey.' This is too precious to lose, and nothing – but nothing – is allowed to stand in its way. However, I hark back to the words of George Moore-Smith writing in 1909, upon being told that a zealous inspector of police had forbidden the straw bear as a form of cadging, saying that 'it seems a great pity that primitive customs should be suppressed by Bumbledom, and the thought occurred ... that a representation by lovers of folklore addressed to County Councils would be a means of preventing such action in future.' Not quite an analogous situation, but it seems curious we are now doing Bumbledom's job in self-justification, albeit for festivals that have outgrown their initial aims.

## **George Frampton**

June 2008

## Singing sides

Morris is a mess of divisions worse than the Anglican Church . We have Open Morris, Morris Ring and Morris Federation; there are men's sides, women's sides and mixed sides; some sides keep alive the "Tradition" while others dance all over it making up their own. However .....

Never mind whether you are Border, Cotswold, North West Molly or Sword!

Put aside the trousers, skirts, breeches debate!

Forget the schism of black shoe / white shoe or whether clogs should have metal, leather or rubber on the soles!

The key question that defines your team is whether or not you are a "singing" side. Much depends upon what you do after the dance out at a pub and sides seem to divide into 5 main groups.

**Dance & Go:** These sides tend to turn up for a dance out, dance and then disappear. Some may hang a round for a drink, particularly if they have business to discuss but in the main they go home. They come to dance and having danced they move on.

**Hangers On:** These will at least stay and be sociable. They will join in any choruses and the musicians will join in the music but they will not initiate a song/music session. If asked the members will tend to say that they don't know any songs. But they are pleasant enough and provide an audience for the Morris Choirs (see below)

**Hold Your Place:** This type of side tends to have a number of individuals who know songs while the rest join in the chorus. They may or may not initiate the singing depending upon how they feel and the nature of the sides they are with – they can sing sufficiently to entertain themselves and "hold their place" in a song session with other sides.

**Hail Well Met:** These are as likely to sing as they are to dance. They will have songs that they all know and will sing together mostly in tune and possibly in part harmony. For these sides the song/music session is an essential element of the dance out.

**The Morris Choir:** This type will do a few perfunctory dances and then go to the bar for a song and music session, which for them is the main business. Not only will they have songs they sing in three-part harmony but they are likely to have practised them. These sides probably also have songbooks which are issues to all new members.

The other side of the coin is what the publican and the general public expect. From the very unscientific survey I conducted (I asked some work colleagues who have been to Morris dance outs – sometimes unintentionally) the image they have is like those tourist adverts for Ireland that show a session in every bar. The public see it as something different and as part of the "show": by watching Morris dancing and listening to the songs afterwards they can experience some strange lost idyll. It is a sort of English "Brigadoon" which appears once a year or so when the Morris dancers come around.

For the Publican the of course it is simply an opportunity to fill the bar on a slow weekday evening.

## Long Lankin

July 2008

## Events

### Bert Lloyd Centenary Event

**Who** wrote to Hitler offering to buy the books he was burning? **Who** narrowly escaped death in an Australian bush fire? **Who** did Dylan Thomas ask for advice on his poetry? **Who** flew to Argentina for a chat with Evita? **Who** wrote classic features on the Gorbals, Cardiff's 'Tiger Bay' and the 'Elephant and Castle' for *Picture Post*? **Who** wrote a radio series that had old women hiding under their beds? **Who** was one of the architects of the modern folk music revival? **Who** first translated Garcia Lorca's poetry into English? **Who** introduced Eastern European folk music to Britain? **Who** wrote the standard work on English folk song? **Who** was a lifelong Marxist? **Who** spoke six languages and read several more?

February 29<sup>th</sup> 2008 marked the centenary of the birth of A.L. (Bert) Lloyd, the renowned English singer, folklorist, journalist, and writer. To mark this anniversary, the English Folk Dance and Song Society will publish a biography, by Dave Arthur, entitled **Bert: The Life and Work of A.L. Lloyd**. To launch the publication and to celebrate Bert Lloyd's life and work, the English Folk Dance and Song Society will host a day of concerts at its London headquarters, Cecil Sharp House, on Saturday 15 November 2008. Guests confirmed so far include folk luminaries Frankie Armstrong, Martin Carthy, Bob Davenport with Roger Digby, Will Duke, Dan Quinn and Alex West, Roy Harris, Louis Killen, Maddy Prior, Dave Swarbrick, Norma Waterson, Martyn Wyndham-Read with Iris Bishop and, from the current explosion of young singers and musicians, Lisa Knapp and Sam Lee.

Bert Lloyd (Albert Lancaster Lloyd, 29 February 1908 – 29 September 1982) was not only a world-famous scholar but also a spellbinding singer who inspired many of today's leading folk performers, giving generously of his time and material. He continues to influence new generations of singers through his books and recordings. Bert's daughter Caroline Clayton and her husband Ted are pleased to support the occasion, all proceeds from which will be donated to the English Folk Dance and Song Society's Vaughan Williams Memorial Library.

### Vaughan Williams memorial tribute

Luminaries of the folk world will gather at Cecil Sharp House in London, home of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, on Saturday 4th October to pay tribute to one of the most important figures in English music, Ralph Vaughan Williams. RVW is a day-long commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the death of Ralph Vaughan Williams, featuring concerts, exhibitions, lectures and appearances by folk legends including Shirley Collins and Eliza Carthy.

While Vaughan Williams' legacy as a composer is widely known, his contribution to preserving the nation's traditional music heritage is perhaps less celebrated outside of folk circles. He was responsible for collecting over 800 songs from traditional singers, and such tunes often found their way into his composed work. This collecting legacy was vital, as the songs collected by Vaughan Williams and his fellow composers formed the backbone of the English folk song revival.

The day's events will include two concerts: Vaughan Williams and Friends is an informal afternoon concert of songs collected by Vaughan Williams' contemporaries such as Percy Grainger and George Butterworth, which will be performed by Tim Van Eyken, Mary Humphreys and Anahata, Chris Coe and Katie Howson, Jim Causley, and Sam Lee and Lauren

McCormick. Bushes and Briars is an evening concert featuring a soundscape journey through the song collecting of Vaughan Williams himself. There will be songs from Eliza Carthy, Jon Boden and Fay Hield, Lisa Knapp, Jim Causley and Jackie Oates, and Jim Moray. Shirley Collins will bring the story to life with narrative readings. Between concerts there will be talks from Katie Howson, Shirley Collins and Mary Humphreys, which explore Vaughan Williams' life and work, and exhibitions provided by the East Anglian Traditional Music Trust and the Philharmonia Orchestra.

The day starts at 12 noon, with the evening concert starting at 8pm. Tickets are £20 (concessions £15) for the full day, or £15 (concessions £13) for the evening concert only. All profits will benefit the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. Tickets are available by phone on 020 7121 1100, on line at [www.theplace.org.uk](http://www.theplace.org.uk). Postal bookings should be sent to EFDSS at Cecil Sharp House.



*Caption time: what had Mabel Gubbins been doing before they danced? Is this a new figure?*



## **Book Review: The Hastings Traditional Jack in the Green**

Keith Leech; Hastings Borough Council  
978-0-901536-10-5

When Keith Leech moved from London to the south coast to take up a teaching job, he became involved with a number of local traditions such as the Sussex bonfire, as well as the local morris team Mad Jacks Morris (named after a Member of Parliament and eccentric from the Georgian era, Jack Fuller). Following up nineteenth century newspaper references and inspired by Roy Judge's book 'The Jack in the Green' published in 1979, the case for reviving the custom was put to the team, and on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1983, a jack walked the streets of Hastings for the first time in ninety-nine years.

Twenty-five years later, Keith tells us all about the custom in a gloriously illustrated 144-page book, leaving few stones unturned. He puts into context May Day and the chimney sweeps' custom of the jack. He examines the revival in the south of England, before surveying the local history behind his own creation. He then goes on to survey the quarter century of the revival at Hastings which draws thousands of people into the town every year over May bank holiday weekend. He describes some of the extraordinary characters who take part in the spectacle such as the 'bogies' who comprise the jack's entourage, and the carnival giants from Sheffield and elsewhere who take part in the procession. There are well over a hundred photographs taken by London photographer Peter Stevens, mainly of personalities in the revival. I kid you not – if self-funded, this book would have cost a fortune.

My only quibbles lie with some of the detail in revivals elsewhere, either due to lack of knowledge or misinformation. No mention is made of the jack in the green taking part in a non-folkie May Day event at Brentham in west London, or in the Pilgrim morris men's 'summerpole' day at Guildford since 1976 (or my own 22 years' service inside the bugger!). I would also have preferred documentary evidence to the start date of the revival at Rochester – to my knowledge, no jack in the green appeared there before 1983. Those caveats apart, this is a 'must have' addition to my bookshelves where it may live with pride next to Roy Judge's masterpiece. Priced £7.95 and available from Hastings Borough Council, Town Hall, Hastings, TN34 1QR or [www.visit1066country.com](http://www.visit1066country.com)

**George Frampton**

June 2008