

FIRST ISSUE

MORRIS, EVOLUTION, SIDMOUTH 150 years of people watching the morris

INTRODUCTION

This is a personal perception from fifty years of involvement in the morris world and sharing in the research into its origins and development. It is wider than most people's, although no one person has seen more than a small fraction of the morris, especially in the last twenty years. There are many people who have made major or minor contributions to the modern morris. Although not many are mentioned here by name I would like them all remembered and thanked. Typically, as most ultimately influential people have done, I started as a rebel and am now a pillar, and the consequential changes in my perspective may be also very significant to what I have to say. It has been seen from a point of view initially generated by a wartime working class upbringing. It is intended to be interesting rather than profound, putting some happenings and insights into a context. David Schofield's book is a good general account of Sidmouth with mentions of the morris. One thing that ought to be obvious is that older people were young once, and have had similar concerns and frustrations, but they also have gathered other responsibilities and things that they have to do that fills their time. The young do not appreciate the consequences of an age gap and have not been around long enough to see that changes are actually occurring, although the pace will be necessarily slower than they would like. I want to draw attention to some of such tensions inherent in the history of the morris.

At one time, not so long ago, the world was noticeably different. I once met an old woman who had known a man who had served in the army of William IV, so I am only two people away from the Speenhamland system. The experience, roles and attitudes only three or four generations away were not as today, even the ordinary things which conditioned people, such as the dirt, the smells, the flies, the quiet, the being solitary, the limited horizons, and having no strangers, but still having a crowded family life. We need to understand the past, or the why of what has been happening, in order to grasp the present. Much of what I will mention is water under the bridge and not intended as a raking over of old sores or to imply criticism. It is interesting how well thought through attitudes were limited by their time and era and have had long term effects which we can only appreciate now with our greater knowledge of the world.

Why 150 years? Roy Judge in his research into the use of morris in theatrical performances commented that post 1840 they often spoke of the morris in the past tense. The hey day was over. The major events that continued to sustain the Cotswold dance had ceased by 1860 and a severe decline set in, even though it did not finally fade away. The collectors met dancers who performed from the mid 19th century onwards. The significance is that our real knowledge of the idiom is only from its final period of decline.

Morris is defined here as public performance by a group of costumed and rehearsed dancers for entertainment and reward. It may for good reason be seasonal, but is neither ritual or pagan in origin. It is an ephemeral art form, which only exists when it is in performance. It is traditional in that the repertoire changes slowly. But tradition is like a piece of string - it's as long as you like, but it is made of many short strands twined together. At most it is no more than a moving window on the past of two generations ago.

ORIGINS

Was it likely that there was an equivalent to the morris before the 15th century? In Saxon times it has been estimated that the population was between 1 and 2 million, and that the average settlement had about 25 adults. It was 500 years from conversion to Christianity to the first millenium and by that time the country was entirely church orientated. For another 500 years we were a pillar of the catholic church, following all the trends, Marianism, Corpus Christi, processions, church drama and mystery plays. The Black Death killed from a third to half of the population in the 14th century, leaving about 4½ million, and it stayed about that level until 1688, before the level started to rise dramatically. It is hardly surprising that there was nothing recognisable as morris in the middle ages, but the roots from which it could grow were obvious. It has only been 500 years since something called the morris appeared.

The current understanding of the early years of the morris is owed to Forrest and Heaney who have listed the references, and the former had subsequently published an analysis as a book. It is clear that the morris was reasonably popular for about a century, starting with sponsorship from the church and civic bodies, but the church in particular turned against it so that it gradually became dependent on private patronage. There are a growing number of references to the morris in the late 15th century, but they can be explained as exotic imports or performances by non-indigenous groups. There is nothing to compare in Britain with the early ones on the continent, particularly in Flanders, old Burgandy and around Munich, where figurines survive comparable with those in the Betley window. The dominance of these regions in fashion and economics at the time is seldom appreciated in England, even though they were in closer contact with eastern England than were more distant parts of this country. The morris declined by the start of the 17th century. James' Book of Sports tried to encourage it and Kempe danced to Norwich as a publicity stunt.

The rise of Puritanism and the Civil War have often been thought of as reasons for a decline, but these were concerns with the excesses of popular behaviour in general. The suppressed Victorians read too much into the past, such as with the maypoles. The maypole was a signal for community celebration, relatively uncontrolled and prone to excess. When there was considered to be a risk of rebellion or other disturbances, the authorities just banned maypoles and football matches, the major occasions at which crowds gathered and sedition and the like could spread.

There is evidence of three common forms of early morris dance,

- 1 the linked chain,
- 2 all circling individually around a central person,
- 3 going two-by-two.

All these survived into recorded times, in processional dances, children's games, etc.

The country dances of the Elizabethan era seem to have been simple compared to the later publications by Playford during the Civil War. That there must have been a link between the morris as we know it and the later country dances in steps and figures is obvious but the precedent is unknowable. The exploitation of the country dance by dancing masters would suggest that they came first and that the growth of morris in the 18th century was based on the memories of that idiom.

HEY DAY

Typically of a community based activity it seems that the morris was common for just over a hundred years, from somewhere after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 when the UK was occupied by Dutch forces, until the accession of Queen Victoria. This Hanoverian period was tough, enclosures, establishment of estates, agricultural and industrial revolutions, farms upgrading buildings, highwaymen, no police, and no representation. But it was still a time when money, a "box", could be expected in return for appearing rather than as a reward. References to the morris are accumulating, but there is little about attitudes, about what were the competing activities, in fact on ordinary life socially. The 19th century turned against the licence. Although the sources are few, the implication of Keith Chandler's work is that morris teams were fairly thick on the ground, were mostly ephemeral, and were associated with a leader rather than a place.

Mike Heaney has found that the cost of kitting out a dancer was very substantial and probably needed sponsorship. Surviving descriptions are interesting on describing the Ales and their goings on - perhaps they were not so different from modern dancers. Over time, with the growth of the village Friendly Society Club Days became a significant venue for the morris. Perhaps there were few choices for entertainment?

If what the collectors found was representative of the morris at its best, established team could have a repertoire of up to 40 dances remembered, although not all in current practice. Of the 20 regularly in use 6 or 7 would be jigs. This is in marked contrast with today. But by the 20th century local sides with limited dance opportunities could get by with only 5 dances - enough for one show. The morris was only as complicated as it needed to be.

There existed dances akin to the morris in other parts of Europe, some of which have survived to be seen at Sidmouth. A fine set was those that the Spanish taught in the Americas, some still being performed. One day perhaps the morris organisations and the EFDSS will sponsor a conference that starts to bring together these threads, as the Sword Spectaculars have done for their idiom.

THE PRESERVATION OF THE MORRIS

At the start of the growing wider interest in the morris there was a common belief in absolute standards, although for the morris this could only have been in the minds of the propagators because not one of them had seen a morris in its supposed "heyday". This attitude led to non-evolutionary and authoritarian concepts of dance interpretation, because no one knew what variation was tolerable, and to the disputes over authenticity, eg. between the Mary Neal and Cecil Sharp parties over William Kimber. Incidentally it is difficult now to appreciate the impact in London on the young women of both groups of his music, dances and appearance. It is easy to understand why he tried to keep the contacts within his own control. There was a later fear of the apparent simplifying changes that appeared to have been introduced even at the many traditional revivals which were found to be surprisingly common, and which presented intellectual problems against the strict interpretation of what tradition meant then current. There were serious attempts by Sharp to reconstruct and publish the oldest forms of the dances. Heated correspondence on the manner of the performance of the details of the morris appeared in the newspapers, eg. the Morning Post, which sheet incidentally survived for many years as the court page in the Daily Telegraph.

The EFDSS lived with the Cecil Sharp legacy. But how did he know what it should be? He knew what he wanted it to have been like, and it had to be so to make it generally acceptable in his time. He had no traditional model that he wanted to show other than William Kimber, and he made disparaging remarks about the current teams. He told his followers who had started the annual pilgrimage to ignore the detail of the dancing at Bampton, which even at that time was somewhat variable. Most of his sources were quite old men. Only Jinky Wells and Bill Kimber were middle aged. The then recently active younger people at Abingdon, Bidford, Bledington, Chipping Campden, Headington, Ilmington, and at Upton near Didcot (in the Sherborne tradition) were ignored. Maud Karpeles claimed that Sharp based his own views on the step and style of even older dancers such as Bampton's Charles Tanner! The approach gave Cecil Sharp and his heirs immediate control by eliminating the impact of any independent access to sources. Douglas Kennedy had said that this was Sharp's policy and he also made observations in an interview on his own uncertainties about Sharp's interpretations of the movement actions of old dancers, eg. Taylor at Longborough and the team at Eynsham.

The collectors missed the significance of the traditional performance of the morris and it being properly a young men's activity with one or two older men to add responsibility and hence provide respectability. Its economic background has been recognised only recently, both as a source of income but also because of the impact of the cost of suitable dressing. The popularisers had views about the role and use of the morris that may never have been true. We are today still seeking to describe the magic of the morris and the significance of maleness to it whilst simultaneously adapting to today's social mores. Age has different ideas as to what is acceptable behaviour and what are to be the reasons for performance. These issues can still be seen in the behaviour of new and of university sides. You have only to read the media discussion on the social background and history of yob behaviour to realise that the morris was a more self disciplined example of the young persons' culture, which has still to be studied properly rather than just complained about, even if whingeing is a traditional pastime. Unfortunately there is a thin line between aspects of modern yobbishness and serious criminal behaviour, which makes thinking about such linkages difficult for most people. In the past the wilder aspects of youth culture were only available and tolerated for the rich, leading to the double standards separating "yobbishness" from "high spirits".

Drinking has always been associated with the morris, it was one of the grounds for opposition to it in the 19th century. But before the last war few could afford to drink much - many old men spoke of making a pint last all evening - hence the popularity of pub games. They also denied the existence then of real ales of modern quality! The performance of the morris inhibits drinking time, we are not great customers from that point of view. Binge drinking, the modern curse, is a consequence of too much money and too much encouragement.

We in the folk world with a concern for preservation perhaps should guard against ignorantly and unnecessarily suppressing any true folk life behaviour patterns and of deliberately or inadvertently changing the tradition by

guiding it into new areas, particularly in this case of domination by older less sympathetic people. Historically in any field, control by councils, guilds or other elderly staffed bodies has led to eventual stagnation. It is all too easy for mature and dominant personalities to impose views regardless of their unappreciated long term impact. It is not our task to adjust society but to fit within it, but traditional behaviour was often a realistic solution to a real problem. Older people holding on to the morris in good faith but denying it to young persons contributes a little to society's problems with the teen and young twenties age group. To preserve this manifestation of our culture we continue to need enough sides with low average ages. But sides grow older because they don't give up and only recruit in kind. This should also be seen as natural and quite acceptable to the public, even though such "old" sides contribute too often to the overall poor public image of the morris. There is the compelling principle that people who want to express themselves through dance should not be dissuaded. It is always better than no morris at all. However we cannot be fixed. Society's appreciation of the value of what we do is constantly changing. Today the existence as well as the content of the media changes the balance of people's experiences of the world, so the morris has to respond to what are now different expectations. An obvious mechanism already exists to pass on the necessary performance skills to young sides without imposing on young people old role and body language models, although many older clubs do not accept or even recognise their responsibility to such sides. In looking forward it is dangerous to guess which of today's expressions of the morris will be that successful in the long term.

The problem of having middle class attitudes within the morris is that they are seldom recognised by their holders for what they are, and they do not provide a grasp of the culture from which the morris was drawn and so see no issues involved in its deliberate modification. This concerned point of view has been expressed over the years by a group which included such involved people as Mervyn Plunkett, Reg Hall and Frank Purslow. However there is not much that we can do about it, and thus it is not worth much agonising over, no matter how much it is to be regretted. It has been almost seriously suggested that the role of the EFDSS was to give those who might interfere with the surviving tradition something else to do.

From Sharp's position the morris could not be allowed to be seen as popular culture as were the Kitchen Lancers and other village level Old Time social dances, partly because the EFDSS and its predecessors were dependent on gifts and government department grants, and also because popular culture was subject to fashion. The older "folk" art part of folk culture had to be elevated. Missed in the arguments were the important differences between the survival processes of superstition, songs and social activities which exist because of the contrasting levels of community involvement. Most of the academic study of the "traditional process" has been related to the one-on-one transmission, not to activities involving a group who have to exist in the wider community with a role that is not perceived as essential by or for the responsible local hierarchy.

Instructional classes were the cry of the times, for the approaches available then to meet the challenge were still new and inevitably simple. We must remember that compulsory schooling for all had only started in Sharp's lifetime. One of his objectives was influencing the Board of Education to insert the more artistic "folk" material of both song and dance into the schools to catch the next generation. This was an age when there were many "do gooders" on both sides of the Atlantic. However my experience of talking to villagers on the receiving end was that to the villages the classes had a social not a revival or improving role. Unfortunately it was a movement started and dominated by women who had few other channels for active expression, and it made prowess visible by badges, certificates and competitions. This is not to denigrate them as their position in society then was as much imposed as chosen, even if they did not then realise it, and, as many had found ways to compensate, it was not realised to be an issue. The EFDS structure involved many teachers, growing out of the early background of the Chelsea College of Physical Education, part of the South Western Polytechnic, the simpler material available being seen as suitable for use in schools. It was county organised and village based and worked hard to be true to its declared objectives, but it could only give what was acceptable within the opinions and prejudices of those with the ultimate local and national control.

THE BEFORE SIDMOUTH DAYS

On Festivals, Rolf Gardiner's published view in the early 1920's was that the EFDS should become the English Festival Dance Society sponsoring displays by the best traditional performers. It took fifty years to happen! Gardiner had led the first public hikes across the Berkshire Downs after WW I. His 1923 Cotswold walking tour with his friend Christopher Scaife met a couple of the surviving dancers and was one major factor in initiating the first Travelling Morrice tour in 1924 following the collapse of a proposed dance visit to Germany. Believing in the need

for a reconciliation between the peoples of the countries, he had a lifelong involvement with the countries around Northern Germany and called his later irregular magazine "North Sea and Baltic". He was seen to be in dispute with Sharp and his monstrous horde of women and was dropped from the stage performance of Sharp's "Old King Cole" at Cambridge. Despite this action, he was strongly and lastingly affected by having been dancing with the Travelling Morrice on the last day in Adderbury as Sharp died. He became involved with Mary Neal after WW I through the Kibbokift organisation and she passed to him some of her material to assist his arguments. Through his uncle Balfour Gardiner the composer, he bought Gore Farm in Dorset and then the Mill at Fontmell Magna and eventually formed the Springhead Ring from townee professionals who wished to rebuild roots with the land through seasonal work camps. An enlightened view for the time, but also adopted by the fascists. They were in some ways romantics but with nothing to do with the folk tradition. I remember an AIDA performance one evening where all shared the singing and the playing without any other audience and the gods descended by cable across the mill pond. He went with a coach party to sing privately in the churches along the west side of the East/West German border as a civilised protest. Rolf Gardiner was practical as well as visionary, the farm was as wood based and self sufficient as possible and he showed later his considerable skill in organising the countries flax production during WW II. The family was involved with farming in Rhodesia. His ambition to dance the "Gallant Hussar" on his 60th birthday was fulfilled.

The major and long lasting influence on men's teams has been the Cambridge MM, and its style was adopted by the new morris clubs with the titles of squire, bagman, and a feast, although the tradition mostly called them captain, secretary and substituted a share out. This remains an effective approach in today's world. It was found that having guests at the CMM annual feast was too slow even in those days to bring all morris dancers within a single organisation. Discussions led to the formation of the Morris Ring in 1934, self protectingly men only, involving most existing male groups. There were Ring meetings, always one each year at Thaxted where the morris had started under Mary Neal's influence. They were notable for the small numbers involved and the essential collective Saturday morning practice before the afternoon tour. At the Wargrave meeting in 1936, where all 38 attendees camped on Major Fryer's lawn which backed onto the Thames, Bill Kimber played for the instructional and Jinky Wells fooled on the tour. Henry and Percy Hemmings met them dancing in the Bury at Abingdon. The follow up party visited Tom Hemmings and also the Russells at Eynsham, and these contacts helped to spur their revivals in 1937. At Stow-on-the-Wold in 1938 surviving dancers were invited to the end of tour feast and a Bledington dancer spoke about the old days while Mary Neal, who had recently been made a CBE, was a guest of honour. Unfortunately little was noted or later remembered of what was said.

The inherent respectability implied in the records from this period is now a little misleading. Any history, oral, files or the media is severely limited by its omissions. It was convenient to ignore such aspects as the public house culture into which few respectable women were allowed. The public bar male exclusiveness, which could lead to embarrassing remarks aimed at any women, died with the great pub rebuilding since the war to tap new markets. Saturday night fist fights were common, but the police's and populace's attitudes were more tolerant as they were still conditioned by an even older rougher and coarser age. I once interviewed two male dancers from the New Forest whose side in the early 1930's would dress up in morris kit and go out to a local pub to provoke a fight. Not suprisingly there was a greater sense of fair play around, which reflected into limits on violent behaviour which are now often ignored. Unfortunately every time any group or person, trade unionist or animal activist, pushes behaviour beyond its previously acceptable bounds, it widens them for the rest of us, but this degradation is ignored by the perpetrators. Eventually it forces government to restrict all our freedoms.

People had uncritical views on what was claimed about the tradition. They were ill-informed and little experienced, and community value judgements were mostly against common culture. Most "research" was very limited and "authoritative" statements were mostly only opinions. Even today people need very little evidence to support what they want to believe. What was said was determined as much by marketing messages as it could not be "popular", consequently there were many outside persons publically critical of the movement because of its inherent inconsistencies. Many of the views held until recently have proven by better founded research to be incorrect, arising often from the immature state of the turn of the century social sciences. The morris was mainly seen as dances, not as something that was to be performed as an event but to be demonstrated.

Despite the widespread teaching and the grass roots involvements, a university class background and attitudes existed which dominated the movement's leaders. At Thaxted could be seen the vicarage lawn culture, and at the Cheltenham Summer School the public school. There was the goal of dancing complex Playford and Long Sword but

not the traditional and more primitive forms of social dance which grew up later with the public dances following WW II and the arrival of the American string and square dances. Morris in the late 1930's was discovering that the "tradition" as it was then understood could still be tapped in the Cotswolds. But the existence of good mss sources were largely unrecognised. That there were traditional dancers and details of performance to find elsewhere from Yorkshire to Worcestershire and the southern counties was unsuspected. There was a hiatus in the morris during WW II and it was not until 1949-50 before it started up again in a big way and even then it took several years to settle down. Attitudes and possibilities were changing. The early 1950's was the time of Peter Kennedy, being groomed to follow Douglas and collecting songs and social dances, and involved in the weekly BBC broadcasts from villages. It had been the policy to minimise impacts on the tradition other than by giving encouragement as even well meaning advice influenced the tradition. Violet Alford persuaded Marshfield mummings that the indoor style of performance was traditionally correct for all circumstances, based on some theoretical judgement, whereas the uninfluenced Crookham Village mummings now use the outside style exclusively as indoor performances don't happen. Peter Kennedy told Bacup that their fourth quadrille garland figure was modern and they hardly ever perform it.

The impressive achievement was fifty years of preservation. It was not really a revival, more of a transfer of interest from one section of our English society to another. We must be very grateful. There were too few numbers involved for there to have been a real impact on the wider world or on the interpretation of the roots material, although there was a drift in the stylisation of each Cotswold dance tradition. There was so little that morris was still unrecognisable by the public for what it was when seen on the street after WW II.

Before Sidmouth happened, the immediate pattern for participating events was set by the Stratford-on-Avon Festival and its programme of public displays and busking. But the initial freedom on the streets there was gradually curtailed, a trend that was to be echoed elsewhere. The attitudes of control and limitation showed an ignorance of the nature of the morris, for example in its role as a safety valve.

Inherently the morris is more than just a public display of pleasant movement to simple music. Yet, after all these years, we have not assembled the positive arguments in its favour but still treat them as self evident!

THE SIDMOUTH ERA

The SIDMOUTH Festival has reflected the changes in the attitudes that have developed over the last fifty years. It has been a showcase for new departures and a mecca for many fresh sides, especially since the advent of the massed performance on the esplanade at Sunday lunchtime. Unfortunately the growth in the numbers of Festival and of town visitors from 100 to 50,000 attendees has stressed the town's resources and forced many changes, not only in the moving to an ever widening range of sites, but also in an erosion of freedoms for the morris.

SIDMOUTH STARTS

The festival started in 1955, run by the EFDSS with 100 attendees under Nibs Matthews as dance director. It started on the August Bank Holiday Monday.

Amongst the foremost teams in the late 1950's were the Beaux of London City, with Jack Hamilton as fool, who had an annual Thames Valley tour, and Greenselves with their influential Chipperfield weekend. They could do a little of everything known, eg. at the first Broadstairs Folk Festival in 1966, Greenselves demonstrated Cotswold, Winster, Rapper, Flamborough, Royton and social dances, all with appropriate costume changes, and were praised for it. Headington, Beaux and Westminster came to Sidmouth in 1966 and Hammersmith for the first time in 1967.

This was the era of the Friday evening phone round to complete a side for the Saturday. There appeared to me to be a peas-in-a-pod attitude which expected interchangability, although in practice integration was often difficult, because the more subtle points of timing and emphasis had not been codified. When there were very small clubs and much less personal mobility, dual membership and moves to other sides were frowned upon. At the Chichester Ring Meeting in the 1960's, the Martlett MM put up the then unheard of number of twenty one men. Some of today's sides complain if they don't have three sets up at practices. Their performance limitations often led new sides to the

inclusion of singing, playing instruments, comic stunts, and to the use of jigs, all very traditional and a good step towards returning to what it should have been!

At first Sidmouth created displays from the paying attendees. A set of golden tabards probably still exists. After a Saturday evening get together they were formed into busking groups and had some rehearsal each morning to ensure a common if limited repertoire. There were bus tours for the buskers and money collecting shows arranged in the neighbouring towns, and these trips included the foreign teams once they started to be invited from 1965. As East Devon was involved in its sponsorship, the Festival was seen as greater than Sidmouth. For two years, 1959-60, the Festival was taken to Exmouth. It was back again in 1961 with Bill Rutter as administrator and Tony Foxworthy as dance director initially, then Ron Smedley in 1965. There were also small shows away from the town centre for the local population, eg. at the recreational ground by the Cross below the Balfour Arms. Because there was so little motor traffic in the town the buskers could use the esplanade all day and dance in the roads outside pubs. Morris was even danced on the eastern shingle bank before the beach changes occurred, as well as on the eroded western rocks at low tide! The crowd densities were much lower and major Festival shows could use the small Connaught Gardens site over by the western cliffs till 1970.

When the cohorts produced by the 1944 Education Act with its free Grammar School places had arrived in the folk world, the new professional people from the right culture rediscovered their roots. It appeared to coincide with a rapid growth in the numbers of new teams. We really need a histogram of the growth in the numbers with time to draw proper conclusions as to the timing of the influences.

There was an annual Ring Instructional Meeting at Cecil Sharp House, eagerly attended, covering new traditions, for example Lichfield, living traditions such as Headington Quarry, and the best of the current interpretations. In the 1960's the older Abingdon men volunteered an instructional because they wanted their dances to be accepted into the common repertoire and not to be continually denigrated. It almost happened but failed partly because of problems in transporting the men to London after Major Fryer's vehicles were no longer available. The existing morris repertoire was the eighty Cecil Sharp dances plus Schofield's Bledington, Fieldtown, and Bampton notations : published to be consistent with Sharp books : Peck's booklet with a better approach to Bampton, Schofield's recollection of Quarry : Kimber had said that EFDSS did not want to know about Sharp's books errors : Hamer's articles on Adderbury and Brackley in the English Dance and Song Magazine, and then there was Maud Karpeles' Royton and Upton on Severn. There was the start of new thinking with the creativity from Westminster Morris. To be invited to their Day of Dance in central London was an accolade. Some notes and interpretation on Longborough and Fieldtown had limited circulation. They created "Old Harry" and a leapfrog to the "Golden Vanity" and worked up dances from the Butterworth mss. Odd dance interpretations existed in the Cambridge and Oxford sides which could have represented the start of a traditional process but these were eventually rationalised away, eg. Oxford's Badby, where in the crossing figures the dancers went as far as they could in the first half rather than returning to place. This was a negative aspect of making information available and of bringing it to everyone's attention.

Oxford University MM, who when they restarted after WW II found that they were already a member of the Morris Ring, their offshoot the touring Ancient Men, and Oxford City, who were devastated for a time when Headington Quarry formed, did much to encourage and sustain the recognised traditional sides through their common love of the dance. Although there were perceptive folk who saw this involvement as ultimately damaging to the surviving tradition because it would have to adjust. The Cambridge MM with their associated TM week long travelling two or more times a year, and at least to the Cotswolds every other year, built on the idea of the traditional tours of the 19th century, often visiting areas that were weakly populated by morris sides. I have thought about encouraging a dancing trip more closely simulating an old week long walking tour. The Ancient Men prided themselves on a very wide repertoire, and often had to practice new material all week to avoid repeating themselves! Not all sides with dance innovations were easily accepted. The Farnborough Morris from Hampshire were much criticised by some people for adapting dances from other traditions into the Bledington style and probably for being proud of it. This was basically a Ravensborne Morris idea, and was encouraged by the then Ring squire.

WIDENING HORIZONS

Following the "discovery" of the Lichfield dances in the mid 1950's, they were interpreted and danced in the EFDSS annual Albert Hall show, at the Lichfield Ring Meeting, where all present danced the well remembered processional,

and at several Instructionals. This was progress within the then current attitudes and a bigger step forward than was then realised as it opened the door to exploiting other material. The recovery of dances from the mss on the Cotswold traditions began about 1960. I was inspired to start by the Helm index to the Sharp mss at Clare College and finding access to a microfilm copy in the Vaughan Williams Library. Besides consulting the Sharp mss, I met various major and minor collectors, including Carey, Karpeles, Schofield, and Hamer who were generous with access to their own work, and visited and talked with the survivors of the early TM tours and other key pre-war dancers such as Ralph Honeybone. He had been a young dancer under Tiddy at Ascott, his batman at one period in WW I, a post WW I scholar at Oxford and for a time a member of the HQ display team until he settled as a teacher at Evesham. The approach to the material that we had then still aimed for accuracy of reproduction in the dances rather than inspiration. The overall position was reviewed by the Ring Advisory Council who were provided with draft papers and lists of dances, tunes, titles, etc. but the attitude favoured was transmission only by word of foot. Dr Peck as Recorder kept all the copies of draft examples of publications. Via Arthur Warland I had seen an early version of Lionel Bacon's notebook, started in his Whitchurch days, when Arthur, an ex-Whitchurch man, was a Guildford Morris dancer and I had corresponded with Lionel about the dances that I found.

I had met dancers at Fieldtown, and one evening with Ewart Russell, the then Ring bagman, they got together to show us their dances. One played the piano for the dancing. What they did was good but unrecognisable, until they tried Bean Setting. We realised that they were reproducing not very well the Headington dances that they had been taught at school - no wonder the Franklin brothers had thought them rather poor. I also met the last of Sam Bennett's Ilmington mens side, who although only partially sighted showed us his photographs and told about the personalities.

The exploitation followed midweek Thames Valley Nights which started in 1961 at Jim Brooks' and then Chris Panton's houses. It led to Morris Ring Instructionals in Oddington and Wheatley. We were at Sheffield giving such an instructional the day President John Kennedy was killed in 1963.

In the 1960's in Bampton the weekend started with the shirt race and a barn dance on the Saturday, pub sessions and a practice on the Sunday, dancing all of Monday, ending with street dancing including social dancing outside the Horseshoe. They were so stiff on the Tuesday! The morris would stop in the late afternoon for milking until the key dancers took jobs at Smiths in Witney. It was in 1962 that I bought a cine camera because no one seemed to be recording any of the traditional morris and it was all on hard times. Later Bampton invited sides for the evening. Some dancers were so insensitive that they walked around all day in kit and often had to be shooed out of gardens well after the local morris party had left.

Until 1970 there were the annual Halsway Manor advanced morris weekends organised by Bob Bradbury, which influenced a whole generation of eventual leaders. Nibs Matthews led the first about 1964. There are many anecdotes from the Saturday nights and Sunday mornings, covering the outrageous social dancing and the inspirational sessions. Bob used to arrange for a coach load of women for the Saturday evening social dance or party, but at the magic hour of midnight it would revert back to a male morris event.

Much new material was tried, including the known North West morris and what became the Border dances. Typical was Ascot-under Wychwood of which Hugh Rippon later took an interpretation to Herga and then another to Coventry. Later I found after a Blackmore MM workshop that Royal Liberty had had an independent start into this tradition, derived I think directly from the Sharp mss.

In my workshops I was exploiting the differences between the publications and the mss, even though I believed that the publications were probably the author's best views, although there was evidence of adjustment for consistency with previous publications and of Sharp's modifications to collected material for his later editions. The intention was to force people to choices rather than to repetition, so that it was not a museum morris, and it could become a question of interpretations rather than replications. It would then be closer to traditional behaviour, a continual rejuvenating of the heritage, and with the dancers being in charge of the dances not the reverse. Changes to the root material were not encouraged, particularly those appearing due to ignorance, but the possibility was admitted.

Morris workshops at Sidmouth started about 1970 and were confined to men.

I developed a personal style of a tradition per workshop session. In one and a half to two hours I found that I said all that was needed on a particular tradition without imposing styles that would be inconsistent with a dancer's club's practice. The detailed teaching of unfamiliar dances was not realised by many leaders to be a fraud as they could not know the detail, so that it became just an ego trip. There is a difference between classes and workshops, one is to hone a dance and the other for the formation of attitudes. Creative morris material was not yet available as it is today. I found that it was a mistake to try and make annual workshop contributions at Sidmouth, the Festival deserves the best to be inspirational, and freshness is important.

One problem with my approach was that people left with various impressions of what they had learnt. The story got around that I taught it differently every time, although I did not. The issue was that the dancers did not remember everything at the time and substituted from their previous experience. It did not worry me as I assumed that Clubs could sort themselves out, but to have what they last did presented as authoritative was not what I expected.

This was a time of defined Sidmouth Booking busking sites which were booked and often advertised in the Festival's daily newsletter.

It is worth recalling the half a dozen people who profoundly influenced me with the morris. First was Alan Browning who introduced me to the morris and its role as an event. Then Mary Ireson who showed how to run a group and be involved locally. Frank Purslow introduced me to the surviving tradition and to its roots in the way society was. Jim Brookes had infectious enthusiasm and encouraged the recovery and exploiting of material. Eric Reynolds brought the inherent fun of the morris, and finally Tony Barrand gave me the appreciation of the aesthetics and fundamentals of movement. There are many others who made contributions, to whom I will be eternally grateful.

A great long term influence from the 1970's was the morris at Bath University. I first met Eric Reynolds, known as Tubby it was said because of a resemblance to Tony "Tub" Hancock, in the first National Folk Week held during 1967. He had danced with Bathampton and then Apley. That week I also talked with Hargreaves of Evesham collecting fame at Hereford while watching Chipping Campden, having seen earlier in the week the first public performance by Leyland. They were out with women doing country dances as well, so they were not drinking. Bath discovered that the folk world stopped for the Albert Hall Show so they created the "Albert Out of Town" weekend of workshops, dances and shows. Tubby and I became a well known double act, influencing each others styles of calling, teaching and playing. My personal debt to him and Betty is enormous. Later I was able to work up with the Bath City men on an annual cycle the Cotswold traditions of Ducklington, Stanton Harcourt, and Ascot-under-Wychwood, leading to a Ring Instructional in Ducklington, a first for a young side from a university.

Halsway Manor became too expensive, so it was followed by the Cardiff Morris weekends at Boys Town, St Athan, near Cardiff Airport and Barry Island, and mostly held in an unheated gymnasium in the depth of winter. But where else could you drink the place dry and have a lorry load of beer delivered on Sunday morning on sale or return!

PUBLICATION

How was it originally done? It is unknowable. One insight that I have gained through my failure has been that one cannot establish how it was done, how it was as collected, or even how it was taught from then onwards. No morris dancer appears able to show how their teacher moved, only how they do it themselves now. The dancing of some sides looks like that of their role model foreman, but also club style can persist for 25 years or more. This makes the current mature morris the reference for the traditions, as there is nothing else to tap.

All the early collectors and interpreters of the 50's and 60's have gone or are now inactive and the next two decades are going rapidly.

The key step following the workshops was the BLACK BOOK written and produced by the late Dr Lionel Bacon and drawing on the experience of the interpretation phases. It would have been unacceptable coming from anyone else. We now had 380 dances. The book production had to be a several stage process. There was an uneven result as the first sections were committed for printing before the presentation style matured. The Abingdon, Chipping Campden and Evesham dances were omitted. The latter because Russell Wortley wanted to publish them first in English Dance and Song.

There were further publications around including audio tapes and printed tune books. These did not face up to the problems of the music and the dancers working together. Country dance musicians learn to lead the dancers, which is not desirable in the morris as the dancers have normally a greater understanding of what they want to do than do the musicians. Dance booklets addressed steps not style, and books like Tony Barrand's are still rare.

The Morris Ring archives produced several evidence summaries, some rather unthinkingly as with Stretton-on-Fosse and Lower Swell, which were Bennett's Ilmington and a Longborough respectively. These summaries could be the basis for a new interpretation of an existing tradition, but not of finding new traditions from well worked over sources. The Fieldtown set was not a complete collection of available material. It would have been better if there had been some checking around before rushing into publication.

I circulated unsigned and undated mss on all the forms of traditional dance at workshops, Halsway and St Athan, and at any other opportunity. A set of early material was given to the Vaughan Williams library and to the Morris Ring archive. Then Tony Barrand in the USA published through the CDS of America a vastly larger five volume edited set of the material that I has passed to him privately because of the perceived need in the USA. I continue to produce sets of notations and essays based on lectures.

Sides are now producing publications of their own distinctive "new" traditions, not all of which are successful I have to admit. The origins of notations in circulation is now of less interest - the concern is with the quality of the dance. Good simple dances are still hard to create. Clubs are now happy to work over a new dance until it suits them.

SERENDIPIDY

I came to Sidmouth in 1968, the year after the branch line closed, with Griff Jones to film on 16 mm the invited Loftus long sword team in a quiet spot, we could still do that in late 1970's. They had long and short versions of their dance, depending on the performance circumstances. Other sides came to Sidmouth just for the morris despite the wealth of other available activities. They wanted the accolade of just being there, for example Adderbury, England's Glory, Shropshire Bedlams and Martha Rhodens Tuppenny Dish, and Windsor in skirts, came in the mid 1970's. Sidmouth Morris workshops were held in the Drill Hall and Ham Marquee. The informal Morris was performed in the ford, at the Ham turning, in the road at the Marine Bars and outside the Swan. The morris workshops excluded women.

The EFDSS staff had felt the pressure for something which would be widely acceptable for use in mixed sex workshops and eventually in public performance. Bill Rutter's women's ritual dance sessions were initiated in 1972, although it involved neither ladies or ritual. The terms were chosen to avoid giving anyone offence but were still a little denigrating. They were presented with otherwise seldom used material, including 19th century dances mentioned in the Dorset Friendly Society lists, eg. Spithead Fleet, enthused over at the time by John Kirkpatrick. There was not a great deal of material in existence in the mid 1970's. It was a trigger. Women went home from Sidmouth, talked and formed the first women's clubs.

There were no precedents, and the women had little self confidence. It was not known what a feminine morris would be like. There had been past children's and teenage teams, but most were thought then to be derivative from men's dances. The feminist position was then only beginning to be appreciated. I am still surprised how we all accepted the previous position without question. To be as good as a men's side seemed an uninspiring goal.

The dances used included North West Morris (what we called Knutsford I believe was really the Leyland Junior dance as seen at Knutsford), Garland dances, the morris like Isle of Man dance Mona's Delight, Wheatley, and Sam Bennett's morris at Ilmington which had been done by women and then children. The use of this version as a starting point led eventually to a dispute between the revived Ilmington village side and England's Glory which reached the media. Ilmington also scuppered a proposal for a linkage between the Cotswold sides because it would have involved women's teams.

This was also the time of Whitethorn in long Laura Ashley dresses, but it did not take long for such mistakes to be rectified.

A number of dance tradition types were initiated about this time.

There was little North West and Garland dancing around : Bacup, Manley, Manchester, then Colne, John O'Gaunt and Garstang but the folk world ignored Carnival Morris, survivors such as Altringham and other relics. Recognised morris had to come from within the "folk" world. There was still a looking back in time. Welsh "Border" morris, not the Welsh "Marches" which would seem historically more correct, although the majority of the counties are normally grouped as the West Midlands, has existed in its modern form only since the Ledbury workshop in January 1972. I know because my youngest son Reuben was being born. That weekend involved Tubby and left Betty babysitting the Dommets. I had published a set of notations called "Other Morris" because it included similar dances from elsewhere, such as Kimber's Headington Morris Reels and Steeple Claydon. Such had been used at an EFDSS weekend residential Staff Conference because of the already mentioned perceived need to have some easy morris that could be used in mixed sex situations. Then there were the Dorset and Wiltshire Friendly Society Stave dances taught to Bath by 1978, and worked up by Abercorn, but only Ursa Major have brought them to Sidmouth, although others, eg. the mixed Dorset Knobs and Knockers have danced them on the front. The dances have not been workshopped at Sidmouth because of their limited regional interest.

One influential feature at this time were the half hour talks at the Bowd Marquee before or between the morris workshops. The pressure on the workshop programme has eliminated such possibilities. The more recent talks at less convenient locations and timings do not get to the same sort of audience.

There were now three national coordinating organisations, rather than regional ones. That in itself is not a problem, other activities, such as the Carnival Associations, have many more, for similar aggregate numbers. The core of the men's problem with sharing the morris with the women appeared to centre on finding what was being lost rather than what was being gained. They had seen what had happened to the NW tradition when it had centred on the carnivals with their competitions for children and teenagers. The issues often arose because men had no relevant knowledge of our social history and therefore had a naturally inappropriate response. The issue was of "history", based on facts, versus the "past", which is the understanding in people's minds. Women as a group spent 25 years working on the issues and problems, but the men, perhaps not realising the significance of new perspectives, had hardly started into theirs in the same period. I expect to see change and progress still occurring as the balance swings again.

There was a Morris Ring Advisory Council meeting, of ex and current Ring Officials, mostly elderly, plus area representatives, which discussed the attitude to be taken towards the imminent growth of women's sides. It was concluded that the constituent clubs would not welcome any compromise, despite the fact that all the members who spoke owed something about their morris to individual women as teachers, organisers or musicians. The Ring initially took a destructive attitude towards the Morris Federation and to avoid being swamped and closed down the Federation had to be centred on Women's sides. The Open Morris which formed later did not face an equivalent threat and never seemed to understand that initial condition, however it proved that a realistic third position existed. It has adopted stances very similar to those that have been found desirable abroad. Perhaps it is consequence of a greater dissociation from the past and it may well produce the healthier attitudes. The conflict still consumes some individuals. I believe that such internal dissent leaves self inflicted wounds that we still can't afford. Today the organisations interface well and are collaborating in a number of areas.

I believed that the attitude had to be that if anyone must dance, they should dance well and not be given second or third rate tuition, as poor morris reflected onto the standing of all morris. Times have changed, most formerly chauvinist sides in my experience now coexist with their neighbouring women's teams, although some people do not agree with me.

The so called Village revivals in the Cotswolds provided a new attitude to the handling of the available material. It had all to be exploited, interpretations rationalised and perceived repertoire gaps filled. We can see the wider effect of the Eynsham revival on the style of performance of their tradition elsewhere and no one ever dances Brighton Camp in the old EFDSS way.

The 25th Anniversary of the Sidmouth Festival occurred in 1979, the year that Bill Rutter retired, and the organisers arranged for two dance platforms to be available by the arena all weekend for near continuous morris and many sides volunteered to come from both far and near.

COMPETITIONS & OTHER BENEFITS

They had occurred regularly in the 19th century at Stow and occasionally elsewhere as discussed in Keith Chandler's book. Competition exists in achieving grades in Arts and Musical Festivals and even in the degree of needle when any sides meet to dance to each other. Probably there were always some competition as most people will try anything if there is the prospect of a reward at the end, as at the 18th and early 19th century ales.

The ritual competition at Sidmouth always produced problems with the judging as it is a premier competition, partly because of the spread in the standards of the sides who have entered such varied traditions. My experience of Llangollen was that there the judges were hot on authenticity and tore into the Scots for wearing unhistoric costume and the Israelis for inherently not having an old dance tradition. At the Bath Festival competition the majority of judges applied purely artistic standards knowing nothing of the tradition. How else could Bampton come last, just because they could not dance in shoes a very slippery ballroom floor and took them off!

The concept of "Meet-the-Teams" or "An-Hour-with" at Sidmouth has been stimulating, it stretching back in concept to the "Swappers Club" started in 1966. It has brought to our notice "ritual" material such as a Czech sword dance, the Flemish and Provence garland dances, the Italian Carnival dancers from Ponte Caffero with their longways dances in masks, many solo and group dances using sticks and the Basques of course with something of everything. Seen also have been the comic dances, the equivalent to the UK's morris skits and stunts and which has helped fill in what the earlier English collectors had missed or ignored. As the English role model was often old men, the young disciplined overseas sides appeared so stimulating. I have realised that dance body language depends more on age than on differences in a dancer's initial training. Although there are always a few older dancers around foreign groups, they are seldom prominent in the dancing.

For a while there was an English afternoon at the Connaught Gardens using small size stage which looked like those often seen for sideside perriots.

The discovery of creativity which was the aspect of tradition naturally ignored by the collectors has been a significant gain. Now teams teach from own repertoire which solves the problem of how to approach the finer detail of performance without imposing outside standards for the well known traditions onto clubs and it is a positive advantage in that the teachers are fully conversant with their material. With so much morris now around, hopefully regional versions of all the types of "traditions" will evolve, as with other performing arts which do not have nationwide exposure.

INVITED TEAMS

A significant impact of the SIDMOUTH Festival has been from the invited English teams which have all been of the highest standard and represented all aspects of the current interpretations of the traditions. We have seen orthodox Cotswold with Kennett, enterprising morris with Great Western, revivals from Adderbury and Kirtlington, the old tradition from Bampton, the developed traditions from Old Spot, Jorrocks and Windsor and own traditions from Sheffield and Bantam Cocks amongst others in recent years. There have been border and street dance teams, and the unclassifiable Seven Champions and Lizzy Dripping. There have been North West teams from Lancashire, Cheshire and the neighbouring counties of Yorkshire and Surrey, both mens' and womens' sides dancing collected and newly created dances. The performance of invited sides at Sidmouth is more telling than at the other massed morris festivals and meetings or days of dance where sides are not really watched and thought about in the same way.

There has been some success in that dances have been given back to the people, but only as dance troupes, not to communities as part of their repertoire of means of expression, therefore there is still a need for historical research as to actual happenings as models and the need grows increasingly important, as society becomes more a set of loose network of contacts and not neighbourhoods.

Over time it has been obvious that side's standards plateau and their repertoires settle down after a few years. It became a good policy to see a new side in its second or third year while its initial impulse was still there. Another lesson has been in realising the different rate of progress as sides and people age. The urge to bring in new dances and traditions to a Cotswold side is perhaps a response to wanting to regain the early excitements. It is not driven by outside objectives such as a community interaction. In practice you don't need much variety but stamina for a one and half hour carnival procession.

THE GOLDEN AGE

I had contibuted workshops to the Morris Federation from its beginning and it eventually settled into a series of weekends dotted around the country, Norwich, Brighton, East Grinstead, etc, but then they found Lains Barn, recently restored near Wantage, with a Youth Hostel on the ridge above the town. It proved an excellent base for weekends, held every 18 months to alternate spring and authumn. As many of the dancers attending were very experienced, it was possible to work on dances which would have been impossible in other circumstances, Matachin, Irish Mummers, Sand Dance, etc. I felt that it would lead to a better appreciation if the dances were experienced rather than just watched, although it was very unlikely that anyone would try to introduce them to their own club! The last I led was in 1998. My very last workshop was with very old friends Knots of May at Lewes.

However the days of instructionals based on traditions or particular dances was now largely over. The need was for the more subtle issues to be addressed which had only made in passing at previous workshops, such as the fundmentals which all should learn without having to reinvent them in each club.

By the late 1980's the morris at Sidmouth was being marginalised with reducing involvement and dance opportunities. There was a general feeling that the morris was difficult to control in a fast paced public show. In 1991 the morris workshops were not programmed until the last minute and could only be fitted in at an unsocial time for the morris dancers (lunch time).

Sue Swift and Sally Wearing, who had extensive experience of running workshops and forman's weekends, took up the situation with the Festival organisers, and the result was that they were in charge in 1992. Their intention was to raise the public profile of the morris, it took six years! First they introduced the Morris Party, and the idea of sides coming to perform outside of the arena having half price tickets. The workshops covered various dance idioms, with exciting titles and dfferent teachers each day, and including topics such as jigs and presentation.

In subsequent years the workshops included, presentation of the morris, Crookham Mummers, preparing for performance, fools and announcers. 1994 saw the introduction of tasters for traditions. Then followed alternative therapy, shouting for the morris, jig masterclass, morris kit design and voice projection. An ever widening range of dance workshops were held. More workshops were on massage, and the public image of the morris. Finally in 1998 was the first Whistlestop show in the arena, then Flashback in the evening on the arena in 1999. Flame and Leap appeared in 2003 and 2004. But then you all know about what happened in the last few years!

MORRIS OVERSEAS

I have been lucky to have had several morris orientated visits. I felt it to be important to see what is universal, what is dependent on local culture, and what reflects greater social needs and activities. The first visit to each country occured at about the same stage of their development. Each country had a long history of morris teaching, but a recent morris culture, like a average age of four years at my first visit, and they were bootstrapping with a lack of good sides to emulate. I found that there was no experience around of workshops given at any real pace, and a general expectation of it providing dances rather than conveying ideas and concepts. Pleasurably I have brought back good dances from every visit. The last three women's sides with which I worked, Fleur de Lys, Minden Rose and Fleet Morris owe something of their repertoires in my time to my travels. I like to think that they have the best dances in the world!

I was in the USA in each of 1978-80 and then in 1994 and 1997. They have an old tradition going back to Sharp and Neal, and probably a better continuity than in the UK. Florrie Warren went out with Mary Neal before WW I in 1910-11, and she stayed and married an American in February 1912, who had followed and caught up with her

before the return ship sailed. Her story was been established and published. She only came back to the UK for Mary Neal's CBE celebration in 1937. May Gadd had provided the continuity. She was invited out soon after Sharp died, and she was still active and attended my first Christchurch UK Festival workshop on the Abingdon dances. She was a stickler, and still teaching in her 80's, as she admitted to me to having lied about her age to remain in employment. Another key person was Mrs Storrow, after whom a room is named in Cecil Sharp House. She was like Rolf Gardiner with a passion to involve the hearts and minds of young people.

The US morris of necessity has to have two short seasons, which keeps it fresh. They talk of regalia not kit, which a healthier view. It could be quite different in odd ways. Berkeley at first practiced on a hired tennis court. At Knoxville I did a workshop on an empty building lot, which was advertised on the local radio! Tours can be difficult because settlements can be up to forty miles apart, except around Boston, with few or no pub equivalents. There are dry counties, including Beria where we had an ice cream parlour tour. Students there sometimes spread empty beer cans in the street in the small hours to upset the local law enforcers. Fall craft fairs can occur in woodland miles from anywhere. I saw on TV a stave dance with bamboos as a background on a Whicker's World broadcast. The dancing reaches high standards, perhaps they have not realised what we put up with in the UK! Perhaps also there are few authoritative voices to spread confusion. Costumes are good, there is more money around and they do not have such a penny pinching attitude. There is a current growth of clog and border morris but there not sufficient information available to their clubs and much is owed to videos of a few UK sides,

A great experience was conducting workshops in mirrored dance studios. Seeing oneself directly comparable to the session leader is a powerful leaning tool and I am surprised that English clubs do not exploit the possibility or the Morris Organisations arrange a teach-in with such facilities occasionally.

The annual Pinewoods Camp occurs near Cape Cod on a permanent site between two ponds and has several dance platforms. I went for three weeks in 1980. There is nothing like it and the experiences gained anywhere else. Each week has a different theme. But the children's programmes in family week are compulsory as my children found. This is where a small group of morris dancers, who met annually, became very skilled and danced uniformly, and in 1968 had the first tour of a USA club into the streets. The Pinewoods team joined the English Morris Ring at Nibs Matthews prompting, even though it did not meet all the admission requirements, and has toured around the UK.

By 1973-4 other sides begun to form, and in 1976 the first ales started. Perhaps that at Marlborough, Vermont, remains the most influential. Often they were mixed sides. They failed to recognise any value in single sex social functions. Perhaps it was for fear of being split and reverting to older cultural models. There was a strong interest in Morris because it was not competitive, which made it a less usual activity in the USA. They did not want a Ring like super-organisation, a newsletter was enough. Perhaps the distances and isolation are important to forming their attitudes, leading to other modes of interaction. Even within the UK there are many sides who don't want to be in an organisation, and others who are only there for the third party insurance. The audiences have no expectations. My own experience was of them offering helpful advice when they saw mistakes and giving very un-English vocal encouragement. The US lacked fools at the start, but now there are several even trained in the art of mime. Clowns and characters must be seen as an indicator of a stage of morris maturity.

In 1994 I went to the South East to see mostly garland teams, and for the only time to video them dancing in kit as well as teaching new dances. The side from Little Rock travelled about one thousand miles to attend one workshop. It coincided with the coldest winter in ages, we were frozen in near Charlottesville for a week. Because of their relative isolation and limited access to existing dance notations the sides needed reassurance as to their standards and achievements, which in my opinion were fairly high. Although I did get lost in finding a workshop in a micro-brewery in Richmond and had to deal with a well lubricated Border side!

In 1997 I went to the West Coast at a time when serious doubts were growing about my health. The flight out coincided with the death of Princess Diana. Besides a number of specialist workshops with sides in the San Francisco Bay Area, there was a Cotswold weekend at a camp in the woods behind Santa Cruz. I taught choruses non-stop that I had seen in the UK. It was the first time I found that what I taught was being relayed on the internet. We went onto Seattle where the workshops turned into a series of lectures using the vufoils I had taken, just in case. Yet again the dancing level was high but the isolation of the clubs was a handicap.

From outside everything may be seen as a borrowing, but, if you think it out, the "borrowings" are extensive in both directions, various sports, cheer leaders and pom-poms, etc. They see the morris as part of their own heritage! But the public image is strongly influenced by the appearance and behaviour of the other ethnic groups that exist in the USA.

Flying visits do not indicate the local community involvements, although there are many communal procession opportunities. We need in the UK more understanding of the US morris viewpoint on audiences and street entertainment to help us discover the universal truths. Of my 132 visits to the USA, the vast majority were professional, involved with Anglo-American missile related projects, but the few morris orientated ones at least allowed of the meeting of ordinary people.

The early visit of the women's side Ring O'Bells of New York to the UK was fascinating. They came at a time when some of the UK's women's sides were still being treated as third class citizens. The inquest as their tour ended at Tunbridge Wells was animated!

Australia in 1983. They were boot strapping with too few excellent sides to copy and being too far apart for any to make much impact. The sides seen were single sex. Their annual get together occurred at Easter and I went to an Adelaide meeting and then to a following wine Festival. The massed dance used was the Abram Circle, and with the numbers available it was impressive! They have pubs, and in them we just cleared space for workshops. As major cities are five hundred miles apart they often travel to meet overnight, taking turns to drive and sleep. Other than the formal workshops for the weekend, I was kept away from many of the visiting sides and did most of the work with the Adelaide men.

New Zealand in 1990. Mr Reynolds had been there before me and was probably the best person from the UK to ever go there to encourage the morris. This is a country of mostly mixed sex sides, which has led to problems in associating with the Australian organisation a thousand odd miles away across the Tasman Sea. Their lively newsletter is called the Sphere and they have listed every dancer's address not just the club contacts. They get together at their new year although it is out of season. Distances are also a problem. Erehwon, from Christchurch on South Island, was started by an ex-Bath lecturer but they had no musician for three years and used UK supplied tapes. A success has been that morris was included in the opening ceremony at the Auckland Commonwealth Games. The morris world comradeship is unbelievable by English standards. There is steady flow of dancers to and from England.

The tour to New Zealand, from Boxing Day until February, had the most profound effect on me of all my trips abroad. The people, the attitudes, the places, the food, the morris, and even the beer, left lasting memories and the searching for New Zealand's products in English supermarkets.

A common problem abroad is being English, where for historical reasons it is often considered related to colonial attitudes and has to be lived down.. In Vancouver with so many Asians, the local men's side has three short seasons, cotswold, clog and border, to uphold Englishness.

I did one workshop in Scotland, for the Caledonian Morris in Edinburgh, made particularly memorable by teaching North West processional dances in a street in front of a crescent of grand houses.

I have talked to people about morris in Denmark, Holland, Hong Kong, South Africa, Abu Dhabi, a team of Lascars on a tanker with mahogany sticks, and one on the Antarctic supply ship. This is only done going south. Perhaps there is a cove there full of penguins and morris dancers!

OBSERVED CHANGES TO THE COTSWOLD DANCES and TRADITIONS

Much of what changed within my knowledge can be traced to the influence of Russell Wortley during his long period as Ring Bagman and then subsequently as an editor and publisher of articles in ED&S.

Bampton

Many of us have looked at the village dancing and adopted to a greater or lesser extent the style, the jigs and the new or revived dances. Others have claimed authority for their style of Bampton in past sides, although it has been difficult to find evidence from village memories or on film for them. Perhaps the obvious choices are in turning in in Foot-Up, ending All-Up not All-In and in the manner of dancing sidesteps.

Bledington

The Sharp published dances represent the early Bledington style collected by Butterworth and Tiddy and which Tiddy taught to his Ascot boys to the satisfaction of Miss Sinclair an early EFDS tutor. The Travelling Morrice contacts with members of the young Bledington side raised by the fiddler Benfield and the fool Hitchman had a significantly different style, dancing close to the ground in contrast to Longborough, having hook-legs instead of galleys and shuffles, flowing the arm movements through the dance and having markedly different slow capers. Russell Wortley introduced most of these changes beginning in the 1950's, but very few ever accepted "hooking-to-rule".

Brackley

Fred Hamer widened the available repertoire by bringing out many of the notations in mss, Sharp, Schofield, Putterhill and his own collecting and by running stimulating workshops even after he was blind. He and the Bedford MM set the style and introduced long Jockey, Beansetters and Captain with his Whiskers and pioneered a flexibility of figure order in keepig with the mss.

Bucknell

Cecil Sharp's book made this tradition more like Fieldtown than it really was. Butterworth's and Sharp's mss were not clear on details, especially the back-step and the hey. Russell Wortley decided that one clue was that the major source had danced at No.2 not No.1. However once it became uncertain what was done, many sides found their own interpretations. The arm movements of teams do not match the descriptions of what was collected, but show a considerable cross feed influence from other traditional styles.

Eynsham

It is clear from examination of Sharp's mss that his published notation is incorrent in that the figures were intended to be duplicated as the dance proceeds and not repeated from the beginning. The local style of stepping and the break does not appear to have changed over the years so it is not known where the EFDSS manner arose, except perhaps to make the dance more dramatic in performance, as was done by the EFDSS with the Abbots Bromley Horn dance and some long sword. Some teams became convinced by Dr Bacon's 1937 film and adopted a similar style. Now that a fuller set of dances exists it is difficult not to perform in the current revived manner.

Fieldtown

Henry Franklin told Sharp that he was uncertain of all the details and differences occured between collecting visits, eg. in whether there was a galley in Foot-up-&-down, and which dances had long figures, and whether they all ended on a chorus. Before WW II all sides danced the rounds rather as Bampton, backing round the set on the backsteps and not going into the centre which was only proper to The Rose, but this has now been widely adopted, even for stick dances. The variety in dancing the slow capers that has proliferated has made it difficult to ascertain what was done originally in the revival, let alone in the tradition. One certainty is that it was much more energetic than is often seen today. Ignored is the Sharp description of the backstep under the pressure of least common denominator morris. Also this tradition often suffers from dancers who confuse large arm movements with handkerchief movements, making the arm not the cloth do the work.

Headington Quarry

In the late 1930's it was discovered that Sharp's collection of Headington was not as accurate as it had been supposed. It had been published when Sharp had had less experience, and probably the arguements on authenticity

had made him hesitate to make changes. The alternatives at the ends of his Morris Books are the correct versions. When the Quarry side was properly reconstituted after the end of WW II, Kimber inspired changes and additions which could not be argued with, eg. Getting Up Stairs which was according to Sharp-Kimber pre WW I letters was not a Headington dance, a two stick Constant Billy and a Princess Royal jig, which both appeared after being reminded by seeing a similar dance by another team. Of course Sharp's mss is not the only source for Headington pre WW I although the others have been little exploited in the revival.

Ilmington

The variety of historical Ilmingtons that have happened were not appreciated till recently. Sharp published a reconstruction of the morris as he believed it would have been in the 1860's based on oldest memories and this was the basis of all interpretations. Jockey MM were an influential exponent introducing a more effective cross-&-turn movement. Schofield taught Sam Bennett's final version to Oxford City but it did not spread far until it was taught to Morris Federation sides at workshops. The Ilmington village team has looked at the tradition as it was after Sharp's interpretation but before Sam Bennett's sides. The indication that the tradition once included galleys has led to exciting experiments in interpretation.

Sherborne

This was once considered the pinnacle of the morris for many sides. The spread in notation material resulted in Orange in Bloom replacing Lads a Bunchum in popularity, perhaps because of the lower demands on making good shuffle and sidestep movements. Mostly ignored was the Sherborne form of the galley, and seldom realised was the up and down nature of the shuffles rather than it just being a side to side wriggle. Russell Wortley interpreted George Simpson's arms movements as recorded in one of his jigs into the set dances which style has been followed by some clubs.

There has been a strong effect on modern morris of good interpretations, most of which have actually extended the stylisation of the traditions : Westminster for Longborough, Jockey for Ilmington, Ravensborne for Fieldtown were early ones. Much of the UK has been fortunate in having such a density of sides that no one feels isolated and all can be inspired by meeting others. A problem facing sides that work up the traditions with only small surviving repertoires is how many dances can be added before it becomes something different.

Besides the cross interactions on styles of dancing several traditions, even though we practice a stylisation of the traditions that probably was not there a hundred years ago, there is drift occurring in the manner of doing things, particularly hand movements, which is not towards aesthetic improvement but are the consequence of not thinking about overall appearances. The worst is the "dip-and-up" sidestep hand movement which must have appeared through laziness. Movements with body movement emphasis "into-the-ground" are poor and usually untraditional. Another is the use of a very high lift of the arms and stretching up before the drop in a down-and-up swing doing what was intended for the handkerchiefs with the hands and thus changing the timing of the movement and throwing the more natural body movement out. The striking appearance of the handkerchiefs from a long distance does not compensate for the other changes, especially as these are often carried over into other traditions. A further example is the degradation of the Ducklington show or salute from an expressive into a more rudimentary linear motion. If foremen are not following excellent models of the movements why not look, think and talk about what is being done, as these are the unrecorded aspects of the old tradition and it is foolish to follow some intermediate person's sloppy performance.

The most obvious difference between sides is in the speed of dancing. The better sides have fuller movements which take longer and hence they dance more slowly. The old morris was sometimes recorded by uninformed spectators as ludicrous or grotesque so I deduce that some of the extremes of interpretation have always been with us.

Sides seldom hesitate now to introduce good new dance choruses into the traditions. I notice that there is a growing interest in formations that break away from the six in two columns.

THE FUTURE

There has been little added to the morris traditions in forty years other than new ground patterns. There are no really new traditions other than the music hallish Seven Champions, even though the performance of some of them might not be recognisable by the previous generations involved. The style of stepping and body movement seems to be wedded to each particular type of tradition, Cotswold, Border, Molly, Cheshire or Lancashire. It has proven very difficult to invent new slow capers for Cotswold traditions that don't have them, even though in other areas cheer leaders have a score of different jumps. Looking elsewhere at Scottish, Irish, English Step and Appalachian display dancing in groups is no guide, growing as they do from solo stepping and being rhythmic and percussive rather than expressive in movement. The modern ballroom Formation Dancing as seen on "Come Dancing" also emphasises steps and static not dynamic patterns. To grow the Cotswold morris in variety would require new step sequences as at Sherborne of four or even eight bars length. The Cotswold morris appears to be based on a rigid torso, but is this an English posture characteristic, or an effect of most of the sources having been old men? There has been much more posture variety at Bampton where young men have always seen young role models.

A problem arising from the transfer of leadership to a more middle class community has been an isolation of the morris from current cultural influences. In rhythm and movement the characteristic of the 20th century has been the off beat which has influenced the pulse of the stepping at Bampton and Chipping Campden, but by staying with the 19th century it has been difficult to fit to modern tunes and movements. A consequence is that the morris is and will be rejected by many youngsters and the commercial music and dance world influences will continue to dominate them. Perhaps the modern Border dances show the way, with a freedom for individual expression, strong rhythmic movements of any degree of complexity and infinitely adjustable patterns. I would like it if the future of the morris grew out of what was considered by the early collectors as the degenerate morris! Some interpretations in dance are now so far from traditional forms that a new term is needed for them - it was going to be "street dances" but the pop world has taken that over as well.

One feature that has been largely lost is regionalisation of the styles. Examples of each idiom can be found far from its origins. The clubs today have very overlapping catchment areas.

FAILURES

The major problems with modern morris arise mostly from its inclusiveness, the desire to accommodate as many people as want to join either the dancing or the music. The result is that public shows are just practice nights in kit, with everyone behaving as they do at practice, socialising and ignoring what is going on, and worst of all ignoring the needs of any audience. Inactive dancers treat the audience as just another wall, standing to block their view, ignoring the needs of the elderly and other disadvantaged persons, and often being quite offensive when their anti-social behaviour is pointed out to them. Yet no side appoints a stage manager for public shows.

Letting everyone play is another issue. A series rank of melody instruments is all too common, standing in a line in front of the dancing set, again blocking the view of many of the audience, but worst of all, just playing the tune and not playing to the dance. Phrasing means reflecting on the effort profile of the dance movements, which requires some understanding of what is happening in the dance and adjusting to it. Without such a response, the dancing is always much poorer, and the public impact much less.

Why do these persist? The majority of a club are usually not even aware of the needs.

CONCLUSION

Much has still to be written to put both the historical and the modern morris into their social context. Also to be addressed are the psychological issues, why there appears to be this need to relate to a near mythological past, what is ritual or magic about the performance of the morris, what should be the messages conveyed by body language. If one stops to think about it, the morris has always been in a state of change, at least as far back as we can examine, say to 1860ish. It is happening now as teams "improve" their repertoires. It must be a natural and a healthy characteristic.

To end, there has been nowhere quite like Sidmouth!

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