WHAT YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE MORRIS

The performing arts are ephemeral, needing to be constantly recreated to exist. The morris therefore is about its performance not its history. In Britain it is not exhibited as a cultural museum as so often seen in Europe. However much cherished but unsupportable claims have been made that persist and influence the public's perceptions. Unfortunately no short statement would be adequate to clear the air.

What is Morris?

The Morris is properly an event. It involves dressing up together with a performance of dance in public, possibly with simple accoutrements such as bells, handkerchiefs and various length sticks. The term has been used to cover a very wide range of styles, but recognisably having a common spirit. British morris is *traditional* in that the form owes little to 20th century social or art dance. It is a means of personal expression through organised, practised group movements which make limited, but not insignificant, technical demands on the participants. The strengths are its flexibility, the spontaneity and the live responsive music. The historical morris may have been spread initially by an involvement in civic pageantry and then other local festivities, but, because it has an inherent flexibility of use, it later developed a life of its own, dependent only on private patronage and largesse from the public. Its basic simplicity allowed it to absorb and transmute elements of other *customs.* The content and the appearance is not prescribed and is now certainly a *folk art*. The history of the morris is a mirror to the changes in society, being peripheral and dependent, reflecting the continual natural adaption to new circumstances. The modern claim of continuity is attractive, although by necessity any link is tenuous, and there is little to connect any aspect of it with the morris of only 150 years ago.

Despite a century of academic searching, there is still no evidence to support a postulated direct link to any ancient pagan or fertility rite. What these might have been is never explained. How could such rites start and create the activities? Morris is a form of sport. The arguments for ritual origins apply to sport in general not to morris in particular. Some people would claim that there *must* have been something before the morris under another name. What ever it might have been, if it ever existed, its function for society was absorbed by the morris, not the other way round. Too much is made of single references by those unfamiliar with the history, forgetting that they were as likely to have been noted because of their oddity not their commonness. The little evidence that exists suggests that folk activities always have a prosaic origin that accretes explanations and justifications as it becomes obscure.

This statement is primarily concerned with the *Cotswold* form of the morris, but it is not the geologist's definition of the area as this 19th century morris extended through Oxfordshire north of Oxford, and spilled over only into the edges of the neighbouring shires of Gloucester, Warwick, Northampton and Buckingham. The southern area, once associated with the forest, particularly Wychwood enclosed and cleared in the middle of the 19th century, contrasted with the emptier stonelands further north, and the styles of the dance appear to have varied as well. The form has adapted since World War One to social conditions throughout the British Isles and spread abroad to English speaking communities as well as to Denmark and Holland. Today the creative part of the morris has resurfaced and most teams have unique repertoires and/or interpretations of the common stock.

The Beginning

The hard beaten ancient paths around prehistoric monuments and the discovery at Stone Carr in Yorkshire of deer horns modified so as to be worn are suggestive that dance or some similar organised activity has been with us for a long time. It would appear that its universality is fundamental to human societies. The associated emotional and subjective side has much in common with other activities that involve practiced movement skills as diverse as the martial arts and the making of music. The difference between the morris and *folk-life* survivals, such as superstitions and songs, is that the latter depended only on one-to-one transmission, whereas the morris requires a consensus group to perform and another to watch, and its very existence is dependent on acceptance by the local community.

Some things appear never to change. The continued throwing of money into wells or fountains is nearly as old as coinage itself. But we forget how precious and poorly understood were sources of unpolluted water before the public provision of piped supplies from the end of the 19th century. It has been too easy to see the concern as superstition or even to have religious overtones. Ideas live on as they are adapted to new circumstances, as a possible extreme

example, obligations were once placed on settlements to provide hides in medieval forests to allow the watching of does fawning. These could have inspired eventually the chimney sweeps for their similarly constructed perambulating *Jack-in-the-Greens*. Why sweeps? Perhaps it was through the early linkage with charcoal. The prime problem in tracing back the contributing threads to the morris is in recognising what has been lost and replaced over time. The difficulty exists when people directly relate the later performance to the older and probably irrelevant motivations.

The word *morris* was first used in the 12th century for community celebrations following the stages of reconquest of central and southern Spain from the Arabs, and where the morris or *morisco* still occurs annually between groups representing *Christians* and *Moors*. But these activities little resemble our morris. However they are now just for fun, unlike the sectarian rituals in Northern Ireland, as unhappily all the Moors were ejected or forcibly converted by the reign of our Henry VIII, during the lifetime of Catherine of Aragon. The earliest surviving mention in England is from the end of the 15th century, occurring before the social changes initiated by Henry VIII, which grew out of the dissolution of the monasteries from 1536. The dancers were sometimes mentioned attached to the Robin Hood Games. These in turn had followed the themed King and then the May Game entertainments, which were simple and often participatory sports similar in spirit to modern fetes, but perhaps less sophisticated and uninhibited with more horseplay and greater vulgarity. Think of the older Robin Hood stories and the number of times someone falls into water!

England was invaded or overrun by the Saxons and then the Vikings and Normans, but nothing like the morris survived in their home territories to suggest that they might have brought something like the morris with them. There is also no evidence that such existed in Celtic communities except where introduced later as part of their Anglicisation.

The inspirationn for the early form of morris is thought to have come to England via the various involvements with the continent, perhaps from what is now Flanders, Belgium and Holland, once the Spanish Netherlands or Low Countries, where similar sounding words had been used for their equivalents. In those days such places were closer by sailing ship than most of England was to London by horse. England in the late Middle Ages was to be thought of as only an off-shore island and a source of basic commodities, particularly wool, rather like modern ex-colonies. We gained a considerable range of new technologies, many crops, and our modern business methods from Flanders and Holland during their Golden Age, which contributed greatly to our later Agricultural Revolution. That part of Flanders now in France has only been French for a limited time. During the last war, the Germans saw them as more German than French and ruled them together with Belgium. Incidentally a Dutch history of the early morris was written during WW2, but was not allowed to be published by the Nazis because of the mentions of the English!

Another example of the debt to the Netherlands is probably the earliest form of cricket, first mentioned at Guildford in 1598, believed brought by immigrants, along with words like *krikets* and *stomp*, which also developed into a singularly English pastime.

The Wide Distribution

Most wrtings about British folk customs ignore the wider analogues in other cultures. Unfortunately Frazer's *Golden Bough*'s cavalier lumping of material from many cultures much reduced the credibility of comparative studies.

Across Europe there are males who dance to show off, for socially acceptable boy-meets-girl encounters, for good luck visiting or the feel-good factor. Superficial similarities with aspects of the English morrisnaturally abound. Recent contacts with the folk performances in Rumania show that most of our folk expressions have an analogue there, without there having been a positive historical link, because both cultures have exploited almost all the things that simple people can easily do. In America the Spanish stopped many unacceptable native ceremonies but soon found it expedient to replace them, therefore they taught them some of the Spanish morris and the *matachin*, or stick dances, a separate style in the 16th century and then not part of the morris. These dance forms can still be seen in Arizona and Mexico performed by peoples of both Spanish and of native descent. The films in the Smithsonian Museum, Washington, show a fundamental similarity of dance overlaid with Spanish or Pueblo culture style. Troupes of men in northern Nigeria, on the other side of the Sahara from the Moors, still process in late medieval armour organised and looking like the morris. The link may have been two way as there are similarities between the

appearance of some west of England *hobby-horse* customs and their supporters and West African performers. Such possible relationships are not understood as yet and require exploration.

We recognise many recent male dances in Spain, Portugal and Southern France as belonging in the morris family. The Basques have some that appear even closer to ours, elements of which dances are easily incorporated into modern morris dances. On the losing side in the Spanish Civil War, they then shared their dances between the men and women to help preserve their ethnic culture as they were officially scattered around. This very ancient race, with a language that predates the Indo-European group, consider that they gained their dances from passing peoples. The English kings held Aquitaine, what is now France south of the Loire, from the 12th to the mid 15th centuries, on the pilgrims' route to Santiago de Compestela. English armies or regiments commonly fought as mercenaries in the Reconquest and the other wars in Europe, and some settled in the cleared interior of Spain. But the closest connections were in the fishing fleets off Newfoundland and the mountain of very rich iron ore which was mostly exported to Britain. Commercial and social contacts with the Iberian peninsular were not surprising. The best long weapons for the Tudor English infantry were imported as *Morris Pikes* meaning to a Moorish design, considered the "best". However persuasive past suggestions that the morris was first brought by notables, such as Eleanor of Aquitaine, John of Gaunt or even Catherine of Aragon, are not supported by any evidence and the dates would be wrong. But Henry VII was exiled in France before gaining the crown and could have been exposed to a form of the morris there, at least it was performed later at his court in England.

There is no contemporary mention anywhere of any ritual significance in the morris at this early or any later period, nor that it was in anyway associated with a survival of an older culture. But the then Christianisation of the country is hard to grasp now after centuries of *dissent* and *reformation*. Before the Black Death about one in a hundred of the population was in regular, monastic or minor orders, and the church was by far the largest landowner. Supposed survivals have not stood examination. The modern view is that what is now called the *old religion*, wicca or witchcraft, like the masons' stories of the origins of the craft, has mythical roots created from the 17th century onwards, even though they both have a complex set of rituals, performed with great seriousness and guarded with secrecy. That something is not as ancient as is claimed does not invalidate its current form or its achievements. Far from being a folk expression, the morris was at first also in the repertoires of professional or quasi-professional troupes. The literary evidence indicates that is was first recorded in England in towns where the court would often be, then it spread as a popular entertainment across the country. Something in attitudes changed because it began to meet official hostility and had eventually to depend on private patronage. In any age the cost of newly outfitting a dancer was high and beyond normal pockets in the days when everything was hand made, often representing at least a trained man's month's income, not that of a labourer.

During the 19th century the morris was thought of as contemporary with Shakespeare, and only by the end of it was the idea of older roots hypothesised. A limited amount of *morris* appeared in the theatre, although the form is unknown. Until 1840 the morris was regarded as a continuing popular activity, but after it was one that was only *remembered,* even though we know that it lingered on for half a century or more.

The Form

Early English references are for three formations of the dances, solo, a ring with a central person, and two-by-two. Solo morris dancers were last seen in Surrey, at Puttenham, and in Sussex, near Horsham, but there is no longer any indication of their style or of the dances. Dancing in a ring survived in children's games, as did so many other former adult recreational play activities. The early form had an individual, usually a woman, standing in the centre and the rest dancing around her in a circle in an uncoordinated manner. More recently the Basques in their *sauts* simultaneously perform in a ring complex step sequences to the calls of their leader. But the form of a circle is so simple and obvious that its common occurrence could have arisen from independent invention rather than any long term survival.

The *two-by-two* form is a processional, as at Helston and the other West of England Furry dances, and as once at Shaftesbury and in Parkhurst Forest on the Isle of Wight. It is a natural for any custom involving travelling or visiting, particularly when it is for mixed couples. As a form it was so familiar that early Quakers were accused of going out like Morris dancers because they went in preaching teams of two! This simple format survived into 20th century ballroom and sequence social dancing. There is suggestive evidence that processional forms grew out of the

medieval Guild activities, with their dressing up in a common manner and going to church or chantry in ever grander ways with music and spectacle. The devotional orientation switched to secular forms of expression following the Reformation. The procession with symbolic displays on wagons, today suggestively called *floats*, is probably as old as the vehicles. In the early Middle Ages the culmination would be a replica ship, the largest and most impressive thing known to the people of the time, and manned, as today, with men and women dressed fantastically, to be known as *a ship of fools*. The modern style Carnival procession probably dates from the middle of the 19th century, one of the earliest in the south being at Shaftesbury in Dorset, with its tradition of jokey posters in the style of contemporary theatre bills, giving comic names to all the entries. Carnival still pulls a community together and attendance is a public social statement of local allegiance. The public visibility and good feeling generated by processions was and still is exploited by club and church walks, and even in the revivals of *beating-the-bounds* and the walking of parish boundaries.

From the number of references, the early morris had reached a peak by the beginning of the 17th century and was dying away by the Civil War and the following Interregnum. The Puritans did not oppose dance or music, or even maypoles, but did object to its performance intruding into Sundays and to it occurring in the church. The division of the country into supporters of the King and of Parliament appeared to be as much determined by the people who wanted either a serious or a festive approach to life, particularly outside of work and especially on the Sunday so called day of rest. The Puritan legacy of Sunday is only now being eroded under modern circumstances.

The Restoration of Charles II appears to have deliberately encouraged a *revival* of older remembered celebrations, including seasonal bonfires and the morris in central England, where the new dioceses formed by Henry VIII appeared not to have prosecuted the morris to extinction, as happened elsewhere.

Set dances involving a finite number of dancers, from four to eight, appeared in 17th century social life as *Country Dances*. They were probably adopted by the morris somewhen after the Restoration in 1660, because there are many obvious similarities. The oldest dances of the country people were likely to have been the reels and stepping, as explained by Thomas Hardy. The name *Country* was not a reflection of a folk origin but of its lively contrast with the formal Court dances. Even today we talk of Town and Country! This usage is in the sense of a wider district, but smaller than a county.

Social dance is essentailly for participation not watching. But there have always been some more elaborate display dances for showing off skills which required both training and practice. As the older dances fell out of fashion they would be remembered only by the elderly and the country folk and were then *collected*. Many have been recovered and become the *stock-in-trade* of modern local folk groups all over Europe. In England the Old Time Dance community rather than the English Folk Dance Society preserved many Victorian and Edwardian set and couple dances, such as the Quadrilles, Lancers (1850), Valeta (1900), Military Two Step (1904), Boston Two Step (1908), St Bernard's Waltz (1913) and Gay Gordons (1915), known for years as *party* dances. They have moved off onto modern *sequence* dances, whereas the folk dance world built on the remembered *longways* party dances of Old and New England. But like the Scottish Country Dance Society much was made also of reconstructions from manuscripts interpreted in a consistent but modern manner. Other party dances which have reached a folk status since were the Palais Glide (1928), Lambeth Walk (1937) and Knees Up Mother Brown (1938).

Although stick dances are now common, they were not once, perhaps having diffused down from the Midlands, where it may well have been known as the *Bedlam Morris*. Although the distribution data on stick dances in the Cotswolds do not provide such a clear pattern. Their modern popularity is due to the undoubted impressiveness linked with only limited demands on the dancers' technique. There has been no connection with sword or other military drills, despite the wide experience of them by country folk, or with the one time English Martial Art of cudgels.

A Country Sport and its Decline

The morris is dependent on the social structure of the communities served. In the middle ages attention was more focused on the church and the vast number of clerical orders with only a small aristocracy. The secularisation led to a growth of minor gentry, and the funding released led to the *great rebuilding* of houses and farms. The development of a genuine middle class provided a wider base for patronage but also led to the greater separation of classes and

more exploitation. Land owners moved into other areas for income and became less concerned over the impact of land exploitation and the consequent depressed conditions for their workers. There are accounts of teams travelling up to London to dance ahead of the seasonal harvesting in the market gardens. The morris seemed ever to be opportunists. The second half of the 19th century had a series of wet years with bad harvests and, together with the importing of cheap stable foods, it lead to many emigrating, but they did not take their dances with them.

It has been a common experience since the 16th century that native community-involving customs are seldom immediately maintained by immigrants to the new countries. Although they might be "revived" much later to preserve a distinctive culture under threat.

The Cotswold Morris flourished until the start of the 19th century, supporting events like fund raising Church and Morris Ales, then Village Friendly Society Club Days and similar occasions, as well as having an annual outing in their own locality at the recognised holidays about May Day, Oak Apple Day or at Whitsun. Naturally teams gravitated to the local market towns to dance on spec. In England this was a slack time of the agricultural year before the first hay making. There were several widely known annual events which had the morris attending, the Cotswold Olympick Games on Dover's Hill by Chipping Campden and Kirtlington's Lamb Ale are examples which still occur. But the Much Wenlock Olympic Games started by Dr Brookes in copy of Dover's Games never had the morris, because, for example, the local dance tradition was a mid-winter not a mid-summer activity. The morris was noted as present at some major celebrations, such as the laying of the foundation stone at Blenheim Palace and an heir's 21st birthday at Stowe House. Later the growth of *improving* Victorian alternative activities such as flower and produce shows also provided performance opportunities, although they also drew off many potential participants.

The early 19th century was a period of growth of ideas of independence and self help and the beginning of major confrontational politics. It perhaps started with the degradations of the Speenhamland system of Poor Law and included Chartism, the village Friendly Societies, which grew into national organisations, and Trade Unionism, with its eventual spread into the agricultural areas. The Cotswold morris had mostly collapsed by the mid 19th century, although we now know that it faltered on in many places, even up to World War One.

In towns it had became customary for groups from some occupations t*In to*In towns it had became customary for groups from some occupations

elections of *Mock Mayors*, one of which at Abingdon still happens on the Saturday nearest the 19th June, the date of the old horse fair, involving the inhabitants of Ock Street, and organised by the local traditional morris.

In north western Europe, when looking at the full content of a culture, it always appears to be changing. The *loss* of customs and other *traditional* non-essential behaviour is a part of the natural progress of adapting our society to current opportunities. Something has to be dropped to make room for the new. *Tradition* is a lagging but still a moving window on to any society. It reaches back to the limit of local memories, perhaps about two generations or roughly sixty years. The morris is not immutable but a heritage and not to be treated as if it should be in a museum.

The 19th century saw the morris as one of the relics of 18th century life, coarse and leading people into disrepute. *"Morris Off!"* was a slang alternative to a vulgar request to depart. Those who recorded such comments now appear to have been biased. Others saw them as nostalgic survivals. The 19th century rediscovered chivalry and the developed *correct* attitudes for gentlemen such as fair play and the value of *improving* behaviour. The *women question* exercised them as to the proper place of women as in the home and not in the workplace. It became less acceptable that young or married women appeared in public displays. It is not surprising that there was little reference to women in the morris in the 19th century, although a third of those mentions of the gender of dancers in Tudor and Stuart times implied that they were mixed groups. However most women in the 19th and early 20th centuries went into *service* at thirteen, with only half a day off per week and little pay, and aimed to be married by twenty one.

In its decline the social background of the dancers fell. At one time farmer's sons were proud to join, but by the end they were mostly farm labourers dancing for the money, and linked by family and workplace rather than dance skill. But the atmosphere had changed and dancers spoke later of giving up because it *got like begging*. The running costs

of a dancer were not trivial, new shoes, bells in dutch metal at 6d a time and a dancer might need thirty six or more, so most were dependent on patronage or inheritance.

We have today some knowledge of only how twenty three teams or *traditions* danced out of several score that are known to have existed in the Cotswolds. Each was deliberately distinctive with variations on only a maximum of seven *steps*, which were simple movement sequences, and built around four to six regularly included *figures,* each with a descriptive title. Those that survived longest were actually associated with what were thought of as small towns rather than villages, for example at Abingdon, Bampton, Brackley and Chipping Campden. Of course urban events are more likely to be recorded than rural, but the number of houses in towns and villages encouraged the begging customs such as Jack-in-the -Green and Milk Maids with their garlands. The old teams would be linked by name to their current leader and where he lived or could be contacted, thus they could appear in the records to drift around their catchment area.

Most would have been irretrievably lost if it had not been for the local responses to Queen Victoria's Jubilees and other national celebrations.

Rediscovery

The morris was not the first of the dance types now considered traditional to be discovered. The old maypole was a tall decorated post which could be danced around as a symbol of rights and licence, not fertility. The plaited ribbon dance form, familiar now for a hundred years, was, along with garland and other ribbon dances, part of the stock in trade of entertainment arrangers. It diffused into schools via the teacher training colleges with the invention about 1880 of May Day with May Queens and other Victorian make believe.

On Boxing Day 1899, a team of dancers from Headington Quarry by Oxford, appearing out of season to raise some money for themselves, went up to a cottage and met Cecil Sharp, who was staying with an aunt. He had taught at the Adelaide Music Conservatoire in Australia for a while and on return had had a post tutoring royal children. He was just starting his monumental collecting, publishing and lecturing about English Folk Song and was soon to become an national celebrity. In 1905 he was approached by Mary Neal, who had founded the Esperance Club for young seamstresses in London and who was teaching them Sharp's folk songs inplace of art music, to ask if there were any dances. He had none but put her in touch with William Kimber, the musician he had noted a few years before. She went to visit him and invited him to London to pass on his dances directly. The public displays by the Esperance Club from that December soon led to the teaching of these morris dances throughout the country, but mainly to girls. Many an old lady has remembered learning Beansetting at school.

Sharp started to assist the Club, but Mary Neal and her colleagues had become involved with the Women's Suffrage Movement. She had campaigned against social injustice, the Boer War, food adulteration and the like. Several of her colleagues were involved in the violent WSPU protests. Through a dispute over standards and accuracy of reproduction, Sharp was led to form the separate English Folk Dance Society, based at first at the Chelsea Polytechnic, which amongst other topics trained Physical Education teachers, and he worked hard to have English dance and song included in school activities. But even Sharp had been a theoretical Socialist of the Fabian sort.

Although a great debt is owed to Cecil Sharp for capturing details of the Cotswold Morris of the mid 19th century, he largely ignored dances that were or had been done elsewhere. Other collectors such as Clive Carey and friends of Mary Neal, George Butterworth and Tiddy, collegues of Sharp who died in WWI, and several men since, particularly Professor Kenworthy Schofield, Dr Arthur Peck and Dr Russell Wortley, also recorded extensively. Documenting the social background and identifying the 19th century Cotswold performers had to wait until Keith Chandler's recent books. A modern assessment of the origins, growth and decline of such activities are given in the books by the historian Prof Hutton of Bristol University.

The morris was practiced between the World Wars by essentially clubs of professional people and by working people but as members of EFDS local evening classes. Skills were judged by the award of certificates and medals. It was the Society's aim to give the dances back to the people but it largely failed because the time was not yet ripe, and the participants were too few. In 1924 the idea of morris tours was evolved then as well as the modern roles within a club of Squire and Bagman, rather than the more traditional names of Captain and Secretary. Morris

dinners with guests became Feasts, and with dancing Ales, reworking old concepts into new usages. By the mid 1930's there were enough mens' sides in England to form the first linking organisation called The Morris Ring.

The revival fossilised the morris, fixing the dance forms and the music, and losing temporarily the creativity that was steadily and naturally occuring. This was not necessarily a bad thing for the time, as it preserved a form that might have drifted otherwise, until it could be revitalised.

The *revival* of morris was exported to the USA, especially to the Appalachians where Sharp had collected so many presumed ancient English songs, but also to Australia and New Zealand. There is a record of a morris visiting America very early in the history of its settlement, but it did not stay. The establishing of colonies in New England, Virginia and the backlands of the Appalachians occurred in waves, attracting people of different types and each drawing on particular regions of the UK. They went as families and not communities, and, despite the attempts in Virginia, did not recreate the old social structures needed to support seasonal visiting, nor were there the need for public exertions for maintaining *rights*, as was the explanation for some seasonal community customs in England. The morris appeals for several reasons, one of which is its Englishness. On the east coast of the USA it is thought of as part of their own heritage. But in the dominions, pride in being English meets overtones of the consequences of racial attitudes of the past, and the morris can be disadvantaged.

Other Forms of the Morris

There was another form of morris in the Forest of Dean in west Gloucestershire. It too was a summer dance, perhaps related to the Cotswold type, but it died too just soon to be recovered. A unique feature was that it was often accompanied by a swordsman with one or two swords which were manipulated to amaze the crowds.

There are other English dance *traditions* to be seen today, most of which have reappeared in the last twenty five years. What might be older than the Cotswold morris are the *long-sword* dances surviving in Yorkshire with six or eight dancers in a linked ring, but these are seen infrequently in the south. The *sword* is a rigid wrought iron bar, not a true sword, of the sort that a blacksmith had carried for centuries as the raw material which could be transformed into whatever was needed, including fighting swords on demand in periods of crisis. Today ceremonial swords are made from steel bars that are initially one foot by one inch by half an inch. More likely to be seen is the short-sword or *rapper* dance of Durham for only five dancers and one or more comic characters, which is a derivative dating from the availability of flexible spring steel in the 18th century. Sharp found most of the sword dances and his final assistant Maud Karpeles many of the other forms of morris dances after his death in 1924.

Sword dancing was mentioned as long ago as 1389 in Bruges. It has only occurred in northern, western and central Europe. The hey-day of references was the 16th and 17th centuries. In Britain the first was to it in Edinburgh in 1590. No single region, people, social group or occasion ever appeared to have a monopoly. But early comments did not describe the dancing but sometimes mentioned fencing masters and could easily have been about fighting simulations or dancing over swords on the ground. From 16th to 18th century detailed descriptions it is difficult to tell if linking hilt-to-point in an unbroken circle was an element of the dances. Except for one mention in the Basque country (1660) the first clear mentions of linking anywhere across Europe occurred after 1770. Certainly the linked circle is not common in recent Basque sword dances. The figures commonly given before were a long snaking line, bridges, roses or platforms and fencing. Dancing in a *line*, as thread-the-needle and other simple forms, is very old and has survived in adult and children's games into living memory.

Common now are the *Border Dancers* and *Molly Dancers* who perform in a style derived from the 19th century performances on the English side of the Welsh Border and East Anglia respectively. The collected Molly was essentially country dances of the recent past. The Border used country dance figures interspersed with stick tapping movements. The common feature was that the dances were simple, needing very little practice beforehand, and were usually variable from outing to outing. Once to be found over the twelve days of Christmas, and the related Plough Monday, there were no survivors of old groups to show how it should be done, and most of what appears is a modern invention since the mid 1970's, including the rag jackets, which were once an indication of extreme poverty. Neither form has a history similar to the Cotswold morris and cannot claim any great age, although they do! Some kind of ploughing ceremony existed in 1413 but nothing else is known. The teams have been very creative with their dances and adaptive of ideas from all sources, for example, *The East Acton Stick Dance* is from an early Tony Hancock ITV

broadcast! Few of the eleven Border dances actually collected are in use today. The emphasis is on patterns of movement, not on steps and movement skills, and the participants compensate with yells and lively action.

The most obvious feature of them today is the face painting. Once the wearing of masks were common in entertainment. *Blacking Up* was always considered exotic, even Henry VIII and James I's Queen had done so, but there is no real mention of it with any of the morris, except the sword dance, until well into the 19th century, by then the minstrel troupes were already popular. Disguise to avoid recognition and a full face colouring that was frightening were hardly the way to ensure monetary gifts and repeat invitations. All over face cover is disturbing, which is why clowns have designs, and has been associated with those up to no good such as poachers or with covert operations such as the recent SAS. The 1731 Act and subsequent renewals made blacking or even covering the face sufficient evidence of intent to poach or cause mischief. The rather different smudged black face of the sweep was considered lucky, although such are no longer to be seen. Colour prejudice in England fell sharply after the abolition of slavery. Black face is also seen as not politically correct because of 20th century racial sensitivities, largely engendered in the UK by the US attitudes imported during the two World Wars. Before then *coloured* people were recognised as exotic and servants would be dressed grandly. They and those performers in black face in Minstrel Troupes would also be called Ethiopians and Nubians. In Victorian times "nigger" included the peoples of the Indian sub-continent. So popular was minstrelsy by the turn of the century it was the most common form of entertainment available in London. After World War One it became a typical amateur entertainment replacing many older traditions until overtaken by the *concert party*. However today it does have the advantage that it reduces gender identification in mixed sides and so does not distract from the enjoyment of the dances. Different cultures have other attitudes. *Black Peter,* not Santa Claus, visits children in Holland and gives presents on 5th December.

Sometimes called morris are the folk plays, which might include an incidental element of singing and dancing. The most common has been the Hero-Combat involving Father Christmas, King George who fights a Turkish Knight or two, a doctor who restores him, and other characters. The plot is minimal, the objective is humour. *Death and Resurection*, far from being deeply symbolic, was the easiest to simulate disease or injury and cure, for audiences very familar with illness. In the later middle ages and early modern times the Ottaman Turks were considered the best soldiers in the world, and the most difficult to defeat in single combat. Incidentally, they trained to music and drums. In the Midlands there was the Wooing Play and in the north a play associated with the sword dance. The evidence is that the Wooing Play existed in its modern form from about 1760. The earliest recorded Hero-Combat was in the 1730's. As the surviving chapbook plays date from 1757 it is suggested that all plays may have had a literary origin. Mystery plays were urban and none survived in performance, being inflexible and too demanding for unsupported local groups. All earlier references to mummers and players do not indicate the nature of the performance. Incidentally Dr Cawte has shown that "dying out" is one of the main qualifications for any traditional custom! He further showed that customs recorded since 1800 are generally found in different parts of the country from those recorded before.

Then there is the north western morris, mostly in Lancashire and Cheshire but extending into Yorkshire and the Lake District, once a processional dance and at first associated with the annual taking of rushes on carts to church for floor covering. festivities which grew from the middle of the 19th century like Rose Festivals and Knutsford May Day provide many new performance opportunities. The dance form grew in popularity during the second half of the 19th century. It suffered great losses of dancers during the first World War and was restarted often with teenagers or children. It is now a well developed folk art with its Carnival Morris Troupes, Jazz Bands and Acrobatic groups. Many of the older dances have been collected in recent years and learnt by adult groups. For many years it has been performed wearing clogs, and for the men breeches, although these were never the common people's *dressing-up* in its first heyday. But now nostalgia is the mood and performers feel that it is right. There is no recognised English national folk costume, to compare with pearly kings and queens, because the dress of the ordinary folk did not lag sufficiently behind current fashion.

Appearance

The *bells* are normally worn below the knee, or sometimes around the ankle, on the shoe or the sleeves to accent the rhythm of the movements. Although some costumes had bells all over. The skill of the team can be judged by the degree of simultaneity of the jangle. There should be one or two rings to each *step*, depending on the movement style pursued. Once bells were more musical, being made of better metals than today's, and could be selected for pitch, so

one could tell which dancers were not on the proper foot! Pocket handkerchiefs were ieity of the jangle. There sh*, depending o*, depending on the movement style pursued. Once bells were more musical, being made of better metals than today's, and could be selected for pitch, so one coul*, depe*, depending on the movement style pursued. Once bells were more musical, being made of better metals than today's, and could be selected for pitch, so one could tell whic*, dependi*, depending on the movement style pursued. Once bells were more musical, being made of better metals than today's, and could be selected for pitch, so one could tell which dancers were not on the proper foot! Pocket handkerchiefs were ieity of the jangle. There should be one or two rings to each

Usually they were the fashionable shape, tricorn, top hat, bowler, or straw, as worn in other sports.

Suggestions that such things were to frighten devils, wake up the earth and promote plant growth are fun but unsupportable.

One of the "traditional" features was dressing in white, although not that many teams actually did so. Cotton became readily available in the early 19th century that could be bleached white and easily washed. But later in the century it was possible to have the material in stripes and strong colours and these became the norm in most sports, except cricket which like the morris was already well established. W G Grace wrote that white was appropriate, and that it was best to hold the trousers up with the club tie around the waist rather than using braces or a leather belt!

The dancing should be lively, with good springy stepping, not just barely lifted. It should convey the dancers' enjoyment and self expression. But it is the *jumps and capers* which are characteristic of the Cotswold Morris, some of which are done in slow time to allow of a greater effort in the leaping.

The Music

Morris music was always different. The tunes often difficult to distinguish. Perhaps the term morris meant *moorish* from its strident tone, rather as a so called *Turkish* sound had a vogue in music in the late 19th century.

The oldest instruments used for the morris were the *pipe and tabor*, being a three hole pipe played with the left hand and a small drum, beaten by a stick in the right. The pipe or whistle is seldom heard today because its volume does not compete well against modern background noise. There are two different tunings for the three hole pipe, the English and the Basque. Both play an octave on the overblow, but differ in fingering. Cheap violins did not become available until the middle of the 19th century, and the concertina and other *boxes* based on Wheatstone's free reed, not until the end. Other instruments are often used now, flute, banjo, accordions, even bagpipes and brass, and various rhythm instruments, such as drums, tambourines and bones.

Playing for the morris is a different idiom from anything else. The dancers usually know what they are going to do better than the musicians, and do not need to be led as in social dancing. As the individual steps vary in timing and stress, they need the music to reflect what they do, as a mnemonic, but not to constrain them. The dance can be brisk, but no more than at four bars in five seconds, which is only suitable for the inexperienced or non-athletic. More dance skill does allow of slower speeds, but only at a loss of the *foot-tapping* excitement in the music, and often visibly the lower rate of effort of movement. As dancers get older and less athletic, the slower speeds can look pathetic!

The tunes used are mostly in the old rhythms of hornpipes, polkas and double jigs. Only a few, such as Trunkles, Shepherd's Hey and the Morisco, are very old, but many others of the widely known tunes are still 100 to 300 years old. Few modern tunes are usable because the main stress in the morris movements are on the strong beats and so much of 20th century popular music emphasises the off-beat. There is also copyright and the Performing Rights Society!

The Characters

There are a number of tasks associated with a public show which may be handled best by extras, supernumeries or *characters*. The necessary one is of *leader*, announcing to the audience, choosing the next dance, calling the names of the movements to remind the dancers, thus allowing for flexibility and a control of the *show*. The most obvious

will be the *fool*, dressed differently from the dancers, from a circus clown to a tooth fairy or whatever takes their fancy. This person sort of represents the audience in *dealing* with the dancers. But they should know it all and be able to step in anywhere. The fool's role is much older than the morris, but is made difficult because they are heirs of all the types of comedy that have been created over the years in circus, pantomime, radio and TV. The traditional gags were more like now unacceptable horseplay. There are echoes of the nonsense of the Quack Doctor or Montebank, and the organised spontaneity of the Commedia del'Arte, but not of the classic circus clown stunts which were to come later. Likely to be missing today are the *collector* who works through the audience, but who can be talked to at length, and the *ragman* who discretely looks after the coats and equipment.

Today another character, the *hobby-horse* or other animal, is likely to be met. Although they predate the morris they have had no part in the morris since Tudor times. They were reintroduced to the morris at the end of the 19th century by antiquarians. These are representatives of the class of *beautifuls,* meant to be admired as much as causing fun or mayhem. The English tradition has at least three forms, the two legged *tourney horse* which has a simulated rider with dummy dangling legs, the *stick animal* with a person underneath a cloth holding the head for manipulation on a short pole, and a similar design with a longer pole that can rest on the ground in front so that the carrier becomes its apparent back. None was like the child's toy leg across riding *cock-horse*. Sometimes tourney horses had heads and jaws that could be worked by strings. Today you might see one designed to appear as a camel or ostrich, with a flexible neck that can be steered. Beginning to appear again are *giants*, once common on their own, only that at Salisbury survives, but they are still frequently seen in Flanders. Of the modern ones there are two in Alton.

There are *Horses* which have never been directly associated with the morris, at Padstow, Minehead, Combe Martin, the *Dragons* at Norwich, the *Hob Nob* at Salisbury, the *Hooden Horses* in Kent, the *Mari Llywd* in Glamorgan, the *Old Tup* in Derbyshire, and the *Ooser* with a bull's head in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

Today

The most obvious feature of the scene today is that the various regional dance traditions have spread everywhere.

The morris is no longer just another working class way of supplementing income, as it was in its 19th century decline. It has to attract attention by the quality of the performance and not assume that audience respect is due because of some inherent antiquarian value.

History shows a continual reuse of old activities. The occasions for performance have changed markedly. In most of the English traditions a team learnt a single dance or two which was enough for all performance opportunities such as they were. Now the teams are clubs meeting regularly throughout the year and wanting a wider repertoire for which they draw widely. Few of them dance for the money colected or charged, but give the surplus to charity after paying for necessary expenses such as the rehearsal hall.

The morris may appear in competitions and art festivals but it is essentially non-competitive. There are a few other activities which provide similar social situations involving peer groups such as bell-ringing and choirs.

In the past the dances were transmitted orally and were therefore rather localised. Invention was a significant part of all the traditions although that was forgotten by academic folklorists. The middle aged leaders, Kimber, Wells and Bennett, were always trying to introduce new material to their teams. Today communications, travel and freedom allow international contact and good dance ideas can spread quickly around the world.

The morris is an art that exists only in performance and has to be continually recreated. Natural spontaneity ensures that it never exactly repeats. As a group activity it should be expected to reflect a consensus of those actually dancing rather than some absolute standard.

A major challenge is that the older caring attitudes about the morris are being lost by the practitioners for whom it is no longer a source of pride or an expression of prized individuality. The same problems exist for the traditionalists in martial arts when contrasted with the modern combative element. The growth of *sport* as leisure and a business has emphasised new attitudes, a fresh motivation for the seeking of excellence but also a trivialisation of the activities, reflecting changing degrees of commitment.

The major problem facing the morris and many charity raising organisations and other such activities is the relative lack of young people and the growth of the number of fortysomethings. Young people are now too busy with too many demands on them, besides the generation gap in attitudes. It is the older person, with lessening family responsibilities, more time and money, and still fit, who finds expression through the morris.

At one time everywhere in England was within reach of some annual or regular event which allowed them to relax and enjoy themselves, either as participants or onlookers. Today it can be difficult to find casually a morris side dancing out, as few of the clubs have regular annual spots where they can be found on some easy to work out date ever year. However there are many festivals which bring groups together from all over, if there is an interest in just seeing a variety of styles.

The dancers enjoy clinging to myths and love to tell the tale. The spiel is to be enjoyed but not believed! The worst aspect of claiming pagan roots is that modern practicing pagans actually believe them!

Under the right circumstances the morris is magical! The dancers get a lift, the audiences feel good, and the morris is often welcome at weddings, parties and fetes. It needs to be intimate and not lost in remote spaces far from the watchers, as in an arean at a fete.

Women and the Morris

There is an estimate that there are about 10,000 people in the British Isles performing the modern morris, which makes it comparable with many other active hobbies. The limitation is determined by the density of practicing clubs and the overlapping of catchment areas, which has greatly increased with the widespread availability of so many of what were once very local traditional styles with their different performer appeals. Women started dancing morris forms regularly in public from the mid 1970's when suddenly it was realised that it was acceptable, although for a while they only did dances not used by the men, and yet still met considerable hostility, now mostly gone. Many such deeply held views are Victorian and need reevaluation. A consequence was the growth of other morris associations, the *Morris Federation* which was begun to represent women's morris and is now open to all, and *Open Morris* which was reaction to the apparent conflicts between the first two organisations. The cooperation between them all now is close and they do continue to reflect the different needs of clubs.

No one will deny that there are some physical differences between men and women. Sex was a discovery made long ago by single cell animals from which all subsequent evolution became possible. For various reasons there are no surviving indications of the traditional dances which were considered the property of or characteristic of women, so the known dances and their modern derivatives are shared. But the differences in height, build, strength and cultural ideas of what are suitable forms of movement ensure a different end product. There have been many indications of what men thought women's dances should be like, mostly decorously ladylike! But women often work together better as a group, and can move around quickly and can seem to fly through the air on capers, if their choice of costume allows it, so that it is not worse than the male dance but an alternative. In England women usually opt for a skirt whose extra movements can be eye catching. However it is difficult to produce a costume that dances well and can suit a variety of sizes and shapes.

Warning

Unfortunately morris dancers are no more socially skilled that any other, often appear to be less, and will unwittingly show bad manners by standing in front of their audience, imagining they are invisible because they are in costume, turning up late compared to the postered advice, indulging in *in-jokes*, being more interested in talking than dancing, etc. Large bands will stand in a long line in front of the dancers and the audience being danced to! These are all the habits arising from the way in which they practice, forgetting to do it then as they would intend to do it out. Spectators should remind them of good manners, in return for the courtesy of not moving around or off during individual dances and disturbing those that are watching. Standing in front of people, especially the less mobile elderly, to take photographs, or just to be closer, also gives offence to many.

Towards a Theory of Morris

Human behaviour is inordinately complex, but a satisfactory theory for the morris has to answer three key questions.

a **Why do humans engage in such activities.** We have no idea whether a morris like activity or organised religion came first.

b **Does it account for its persistence** through the various stages of society's development. It is essentially conservative.

c **Can it explain the apparent diversity of activities** under the common title. What is the common element?

This paper is based on a lifetime's interest and a close following of relevant research in many related fields. It is believed to be the best position statement currently possible. The acknowledgements should be many and the bibliography and references enormously long, but such are inappropriate to this paper. However constructive correspondance is welcomed.

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Roy Dommett
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