The American Travelling Morrice
will dance in your streets
American Morris Newsletter

Volume 8, Number 2

Notes from the Editors

AMN has received a wonderful gift in the form of a new cover and front page masterhead in recognition of our efforts to improve the format and appearance of the newsletter. The artist and donor is Barbara Frances O'Boyle, now a resident of Oxfordshire, England. She presented the material to us during the Minnesota Traditional Morris' visit to Bampton this past July. We are eternally thankful for Barbara's professionalism, talent, and thoughtfulness.

AMN is proud to initiate a new feature section in our pages, the concept of "The History of Morris in North America" is to recount the process of how morris dancing, in all its forms, was introduced, how it spread, and how it has developed across this continent. The project was initiated in the fall of 1982 while I was on sabbatical in London, England. While all the archives, diaries, letters of correspondence and lost unpublished autobiographies are found and analyzed, we start the series by recounting the more recent history of the establishment of today's North American sides. In this, our maiden presentation, we take note of one of our oldest, most western and most northern of sides—Hollytree Morris from Victoria, British Columbia. Your comments about the progress of these features are always welcomed.-- J.L.R.

Team News

Berkeley Morris, Berkeley, CA.

Having just finished our eighth touring season, Berkeley Morris capers on. We now have a new bagman, Tom Whitmore, who has proven himself incredibly able at both chairing our annual meeting and coming up with outrageous puns. As for our other officers, we don't really have a squire or foreman the way other teams do. Terry O'Meal teaches Fieldtown to our beginners, David Hewitt teaches Bledington to the more experienced dancers, and...
Cliff Rainey helps out with both groups as needed. Where we dance, what dances we do when we get there, and other such decisions are decided democratically, or, just as likely, anarchically (i.e. whoever wants to get up the next dance at a tour stop picks what to do).

Despite the fact that we did twice as many dances this year as in the past, the quality of the dancing has noticeably improved. We now do most of the fieldtown dances, much of the Bledington repertoire, and some Adorbury stick dances. Our numbers now hover at about two dozen members, down about ten from last year, and general consensus is that the decrease in size has helped increase the quality.

We danced out at an amazing assortment of places. On May 1 we danced at dawn at the top of Tilden Park with 100 people to watch. We also toured the Berkeley City Fair and parade, a Shakespeare session, English-style pubs, a nursing home, the Folksong Festival, and everything in-between. Eight great tours, dozens of exhausted dancers! We also remain about equally divided between ice cream eating and beer drinking factions—the great debate remains unsettled, although the ice cream eaters have a slight majority. We dance mixed and practice every Tuesday the year round. Drop by if you're in the neighborhood, or give a holler if you're passing through.

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Barry Smiler, 1739 Ward St., Berkeley, CA 94703.

Westerly Morris Men, Westerly, RI

ED.-This item is condensed from assorted issues of the colorful Westerly Morris Newsletter.) On Saturday, May 19th, the team danced for “A Taste of Hartford,” an event sponsored by the Greater Hartford Convention and Visitors Bureau. This was followed by a trip to the 600 ton. Morris Alle June 8-10, E.D.-This sounded like great fun, but we have no reports. On June 16th brought the annual South Phebe Concert with the Rhode Island Philharmonic and Community Chorus. On June 24th, we participated in a tour by the Banbury Morris Men from England in Framingham, MA. Utter writes, “Remember the half-priced drinks every time a train went through?” On the June 30-July 1 weekend we attended the “Jupiter Meadow Morris-sponsored ‘Dregs’ in the woods of Western Massachusetts. July 7th was International Day in New London, CT. We expected out to be a two day affair; one was wet, the other dry. Jupiter Meadow showed up with a good group.” On July 29th we performed in Andover, MA, and over the weekend of 21-25 July attended the Canterbury Fair in Canterbury, NH.

George Utter, c/o The Sun, Westerly, RI 02891.
It has been an eventful six months indeed for MTM. We had no apprentice dancers this year although Dick Lewis and Nick Dunning are both on long-term loan from their teams in Portland and Chicago, respectively. This allowed us to concentrate on trimming our repertoire and working on distinguishing traditions. Aside from adding dances to traditions we already do—Ilmington, Bledington, and Adderbury—the only new material we’ve worked on this year has been four dances from Longborough: “London Pride,” “Lass of Richmond Hill,” “Moresque,” and “The Gallant Hussar.” (The latter is occasionally renamed “The Gallant Hoosier” in honor of a substantial contingent of such folks among our members.) At the team ale this year we elected new officers: David Rutledge is Squire, Dan Hanson is Bagman, and Rick Mohr agreed to remain as Ragman until he leaves.

Notable events this year have included a May Day dance with the Bells of the North in 1 1/2 inches of snow followed by a stand on Minnesota Public Radio’s PM morning show, the Fourth Midwestern Morris Ale held this year in Bloomington, and, of course, a tour of England which will be covered elsewhere in AMN. We look forward to seven weekends at the Minnesota Renaissance Festival. The burden that this places on everyone’s time and resources will be lightened this year by the Festival’s request for an expansion of our customary Labor Day Weekend Morris event. In addition to the usual guest teams (Bells of the North, Oak Apple and Prairie Waves), we will host Maroon Bells (Boulder, CO), Capering Robbers (St. Louis, MO), and two teams each from Chicago and Winnipeg. Post-Festival, we hold our tenth anniversary celebration, hoping to see all of our emeriti again. We are all chagrined to see several Minnesota men entering the emeritus category, as usual, before their time. Long-time fiddler and “Post-Mortem” impresario Gary Schulte has moved to the Boston area; Portlander Dick Lewis, whose cool head and doctoral talents in medieval English literature came in handy on the recent England tour, is headed back to Portland; finally, we lose a graceful dancer and prodigious musician when Rick Mohr ventures to New Haven this fall in search of doctoral issues this fall.

Itinerant morris folk of all sorts are invited to seek us out on their travels (as always) for charming company and hospitality!

Steve Parker, 436 N.E. 4th St., Minneapolis, MN 55413
Exercises and Exhortations
by Larry Jennings, Black Joker

Some years ago I prepared a set of notes for the use of the Black Jokers. They began with a lengthy pep talk which would both

encourage a beginner and an experienced dancer to practice at home and

encourage a beginner and an experienced dancer to practice at home and

elsewhere so that footwork worries do not present any problem

when dancing as part of the side. The rest of the notes may be of
general interest, and I offer them here in slightly edited form.

These exercises might be used for a team practice, at which

you probably have live music. When you are doing them alone, use

a recording or hum to yourself. In any case, a measure of Morris

music may be counted "1 & 2 &", with the second "&" being the

all-important upbeat.

A distinctive characteristic of Morris is the REBOUND.

Exercise 1: Step onto the right foot, say (count 1). With a
light spring, land on both feet (count 2). Quickly and surrepti-
tiously, let the weight go onto the left foot and REBOUND as high
as possible on the upbeat. Come down (count 1) on the right foot
in shake position (see below). On this using all four combina-
tions of right and left feet. Counts 1 and 2 are called "step and
jump" in textbooks.

You can rest with...

Exercise 2: Hold the body erectly on one leg. The other leg
is held thigh to knee at a 45 degree angle and knee to ankle
vertical. I call this SHAKE POSITION because one could shake
bells handily, but don't worry about actually shaking.

Hand movements vary with tradition. I suggest for now...

Exercise 3: Thrust your hands up on the upbeat; then gravity
GENTLY bring them down and let them softly rebound during
the rest of the measure. When combined with footwork, this motion
will help you get the elevation you want and never drag you
down...

Here are the basic movements:

Exercise 4: Starting with Exercise 1, you arrive in shake
position on count 1 with your weight on your right leg. Say, Hop
lightly on the right foot, perhaps shaking the left leg very
slightly to verify that it is in the proper position (count 2). CHANGEx
to shake position, left leg supporting (count 2). Hop and
verify (count 4). This measure completes two simple steps. Conti-

Continued doing many of them: "change, shake, change, shake..."

When you get tired, rest. Start next time with the other foot.

Exercise 5: Again using the introduction of Exercise 1, in
each succeeding measure do three changes (counts 1 & 2) and a hop
Note that (after the introduction) you are in shake position on each beat and off-beat, that alternate measures start on alternate feet, and that the first change after the jump is different. It has you rebounding, rather than hopping, on the previous beat. Furthermore, you do not change from shake-position to shake position, but from feet together to shake position.) The footwork for each measure is called a double and may be counted "change, change, change, shake". Do a million of these. Then rest a bit and do a million starting on the other foot.

Exercise 6: Start with the same intro (no somehow get yourself well off the floor on the upbeat). Then repeat many times: two doubles, two singles, setp and jump (with a rebound). Check that your changes have the strength of a morris step, that you are neither prancing with your feet under you nor goose stepping with stiff knees, that your toes never land with a plop but rather with a rebound. After you check, dance with your head up, which both gives you lift and enables you to make contact with a (perhaps hypothetical) partner or audience.

- Moving SMARTLY is important.

Exercise 7: Set your attention on a spot 3 feet in front of you. Using the footwork of Exercise 6, advance as rapidly as possible (one or two changes) to the chosen spot. Remain there till the end of the second double. Return to your original position with the singles. The step and jump is then in place and the rebound, while stiff high, carries you almost to the spot again. Your objective is to accelerate and decelerate as rapidly as possible by leading with your body rather than by stepping out with your feet.

- You must be able to TURN EXTREMELY QUICKLY.

Exercise 8: Same as Exercise 7, except choose a spot about 3 feet to your right. Start by making a 3/4 turn to the left, in a fraction of a count. After you have done a few of these, aim for a spot to your left, starting with a turn to the right. Then do both variations some more, but start with the other foot; (one case "starts with the leading foot"; the other "starts with the trailing feet").

Test yourself. Is your dancing characterized by "grace with vigor", by "loose-limbed yet controlled movements", and by "going all out"? Can you match Williams Fijhter who was characterized "above all, by the quickness of his steps" or Charles Tanner "of whom it was said that a woman could place her finger under his feet when he was dancing without fear of injury"?
Anyone looking for Victoria on the map will notice that our city — the capital of British Columbia, but with a population only a fifth of Vancouver's — is eccentric and insular. This geography is reflected in our morris activities.

Victoria is a cosmopolitan city with numerous active ethnic clubs, many of which have dance teams. English traditions were not represented, however, and partly with the aim of filling this gap, my wife, Christine, and I decided to expand our involvement in international folkdancing and tackle dances of our native land. On a return visit to England in 1973, we obtained some literature and recordings from Cecil Sharp House. Using this sparse material, plus books in the public library, I reconstructed two Headington dances (inaccurately, as I later discovered).

From our folkdance club we recruited enough men for one side. Christine organized the wires in costume-making (the Forest of Dean multi-coloured patch vest, as worn also by the Beaux of London City); the other gear includes straw hat, long-sleeved white shirt, and white trousers; individuals choose their colours for ribbons on hats, arms, and bell-pads, and souvenirs on their hats according to their own fancy. We founded ready-made jumbo-sized handkerchiefs in a local store, but in blue/white and red/white patterns, which hence became part of our standard kit. Frequent stick breakage caused interesting random effects at performances until my employer's chief forester arranged a supply of superior specimens for us.

Our first appearance was in 1974, a stage performance in a program of folk dances. Lacking a musician, we depended on recordings. For a couple of years we continued with occasional practices and performances. We did not exclude women, but few were interested in participating except as stand-ins; when they would wear the men's costume.

In 1975 we were joined by David Taylor, an accomplished folkdance teacher who had just returned from contract employment in Kenya; while there, he had belonged to a morris side started by another expatriate from England. With this experience David was able to straighten out some of our problems of interpretation and styling, to add some more Headington material, and to introduce the Adderbury tradition. We also took up longsword. Our resources did not include complete instructions on any one dance, but I did manage to stick together sections from several dances to fit our recording of the Flamborough tunes.
In 1976 we were galvanized into more energetic activity by being selected for the B.C. contingent to the Arts and Culture Program of the Montreal Olympics, on the recommendation of the Victoria ICA (Inter-Cultural Association), an umbrella organization for the ethnic groups. We took with us an accordionist whose background was old-time dance music, and considering the change in style needed I think she managed well. Other groups in the B.C. contingent included a traditional Chinese orchestra, some Punjabi dancers, a Doukhobor choir, and a Tahitian dance group; I mention these because our morris activities are seen here to constitute one element in the so-called intercultural mosaic that is officially encouraged by Canada's Multiculturalism policy.

After Montreal, we relapsed into occasional practices and performances, until 1978 when we were invited (again through our ICA connections) to represent B.C. at a folklore festival on the Gaspe, the circumstances being similar to those in Montreal but on a much smaller scale.

Our return to Victoria was swiftly followed by the arrival of the Pornfret side from Pontefract, Yorkshire, a team specializing in Bucknell. Their visit was noted in AMN 11.3 (Oct. '78); and was described more fully in The Morris Dancer, issues 4 and 5 (Aug. and Nov. '79); I will just add that since then, there have been individual visits in both directions. During Pornfret's stay we met Pat Thompson, recently arrived from Toronto where she danced with Green Tide. Pat later organized a women's side, including several of the morris wives, and also found us a permanent musician, Andy Jensen (who plays several kinds of squeeze-box), from among the folk music community.

Also in 1978 I made contact with the Morris Ring, Mike Garland (the Bagman) was very helpful in providing leads, whereby I was able to augment our library and build up a collection of Letchworth's tapes.

In 1980, the Victoria Morris Men and women's side formally joined forces to become the Hollytree Morris Dancers, a name chosen for two reasons: the species' ancient symbolism, and Victoria's holly-wowing industry. The women's costume, green corduroy knee-breeches and white blouse, was augmented by a vest with small floral patterns on the front and back, a holly tree design and the words Hollytree Morris in white letters. The men's costumes were also improved, making us eligible to apply for financial assistance from the B.C. Cultural Fund, which in turn enabled us to rent school premises for regular practices. At the same time we began a log of performances, to support future grant applications.

During 1980 we began adding Bampton dances to our repertoire, following attendance at the Mendicino country dance camp. A schism occurred in 1981, and a few members broke away for...
form a separate group because of policy differences; our affiliation to the IC4 involved us in various organized performances, whereas the objectors preferred to stick to spontaneous dance-outs and dances in the street. We, a practice which most of our members would not agree to.

For a year or so, the breakaway weakened us considerably and caused anxiety about our survival. As it happened, however, we pulled through, and the other group folded out after a couple of years only now in 1984 to be revived again.

In 1984 we were again represented at Mendocino, after which we started learning some of the Bledington dances.

1982 was the year we acquired our hobby horse, donated to us by a senior citizens' group in Vancouver who had been performing morris for about a decade and wanted to try something different.

Most of our members have families and a corresponding shortage of time to attend to correspondence and administration, one effect being that we have made few attempts to contact other groups in the Pacific Northwest. In 1983, however, we hosted Gasworks Morris from Seattle and for the IC4's Folkfest in 1983 we put on joint performances with visitors from the Vancouver Morris Men and Bledington. We also hosted the Nottingham Morris Men for the Bledington Morris Men (over here for a summer teaching assignment at the University of Victoria).

Our log for 1983 shows 15 performances, 8 indoors (TV, music festival, church social, senior citizens' centre, hospital, retirement home, department store, private club), and 7 outdoors (Harbour Festival, Folkfest, and five informal dance-outs in various open spaces). We dance mixed; if we had more members we probably wouldn't, if only because of the difference in costumes. Shortage of members has also meant that we cannot spare any above-average dancer to become a Fool.

Current traditions are Headington, Alderbury, Bampton, and Bledington. I am aware that to some extent our style is peculiar to ourselves, partly through accidents of interpretation and also more recently from creative experiments with new variations. In keeping with our general level of ability, we avoid some dances that seem too difficult. Our cumulative repertoire, including what we have forgotten, averages just over two dances added each year.

We practice on Monday evenings at Doncaster School (formerly at Uplands school): during the summer holidays we practise less regularly on someone's lawn. On an exceptional night we may do dances almost on all membership, none of whom have been with us for most or all of our existence. Most of our people are in their 40's and 50's, and cracks about advancing years are becoming more common; after one performance at a hospital, we had a roll-call to check that no one had been lost in the geriatric ward.
The American Morris Newsletter is published four times per year, typically in April, July, October, and January. Individual subscriptions are available for $4.00 per year (overseas subscribers should add $4.00 for air mail postage). Team subscriptions are $2.50 per copy for a minimum of six copies sent to the same address. Each issue is available for $1.75 each plus postage. Please make sure all checks or money orders are made payable to American Morris Newsletter. Copy deadlines for submission of articles, letters, or team news are the fifteenth of the month preceding publication. After that date, contact us by telephone at (612)379-2285 (Steve Parker) or (612)721-8750 (Jim Brickwoode). Members of the editorial staff include James C. Brickwoode, Lynn Madow Dennis, and Stephen Parker.

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