Cover and logo design by Barbara Prentice O'Morcke, formerly of Rose and Thorn Morris, now living in Oxfordshire, England.
Notes from the Editors

The cold north winds and first snows are settling in up here in the Upper Midwest forcing the retreat of the morris indoors for the duration. To keep the memories fresh, we review in this issue the ales of the past season, two tours of England, along with the usual team news we have received. We also introduce another new regular feature section. It's called "Other Than Cotswold Morris" - an attempt to broaden the general knowledge base of what else exists in England which goes by the name of morris. Roy Donnelt has supplied much of the material for us. He will be joined by others from time to time.

Cheer!

Team News

This regular feature of AMN is totally dependent on YOU. Please keep us regularly informed of all your activities - both the good and the bad.

MORRIS DANCERS AVOID ARREST

Seventeen morris dancers almost got arrested on September 2 at the ale held at the Minnesota Renaissance Festival while trying to get clean.

The incident occurred when the dancers, who had been dancing for two days with no access to showers, decided to go skinny dipping (and bathing!) in a lake five miles from the festival grounds. Unfortunately, the lake was also right off a highway, and the sight proved too much for Scott County residents. Someone called the cops, and one arrived just as most of the dancers finished dressing.

He had managed to glimpse some skin on three of the people, however, and the sight proved to be too much. He singled these three out to ask for names and identification (which only one person had). All the dancers accompanied the three to the top of the hill, where the squad car was parked, to hear a lecture on the perils of corrupting children who might happen to be bicycling down the highway. (No mention was made of the potential for accidents, however, by drivers rubbernecking on their way home from work.)

4
All of the morris tunes at the Ale who had more than one person attending were represented at the near bust, with the exception of the Winchester mock, who were performing at the time. (latter which, rumor has it, they went off to the same lake to take their baths...)  

Spruce Hill Morris, Philadelphia, PA

Spruce Hill Morris is still going strong, though we've temporarily lost several members for the fall. One of our dancers/susicians is off picking apples in New Hampshire, while another dancer is traveling around Europe and still another is off to Russia for a spell. Some of us who are firmly rooted in Philadelphia are dancing fieldtown, Dockington, and Kempton, with a sprinkling of Hewshoptown. We've got several promising rookie morris dancers who make up in enthusiasm what they, as yet, lack in skill. We've a new Squire this year in Lisa Hosskey and Ann Disman is still, ever patiently, our Dreamer. As always, we welcome any passers-through to join us at our practices at 7:00 P.M. on Mondays. Call me at (215)886-6980 between 9am and 5pm.

Marjorie Baines Haddad, Rapan, 431 Covered Bridge Rd., Cherry Hill, New Jersey 08034

Thornden Morris, Syracuse, N.Y.

We are a women's team that's been together for four years. We currently have eleven active holdholders in the area and three prospective dancers coming to practice.

It has been quite an exciting summer for all of us! We started off with a beautiful, sunny May Day celebration on our难忘, Thornden Park Hill. The day included a summer's play, our first publically danced sword dance, grace saying how many of you know what that is?) and a country sing and breakfast at a local pub.

At the end of May, much to our delight, Kate Woolle gave birth to a beautiful, bouncing baby girl, Alexandra, who has been giving her lumps & good workout at many of our practices since. In addition, the number of single women on our team dropped by four since our last dance out season. Kate Woolle, Leah Smith, Robert Markert and myself all checked our bachelorette lives for wedding bells!

The cost of the summer's tours included a June 33rd outing with the Kingston Men, Downtown Deph, Liverpool Act in the Park, the Renaissance Fair in Sterling, N.Y. with the Hearts of Oak, a dance at Sarah and Cal's reception, and a Fall Equinox tour in Jamestown on September 20th.
This Fall and Winter will include a vigorous review of our Fieldtown dances, with perhaps a bit of Bampton and Border Morris.

Much heat, warm fires and pots of ale for all morris teams this winter season.

Jennifer M.S. Byrne, 122 Redfield Pl, Syracuse, N.Y. 13210

Westerly Morris Men, Westerly, R.I.

(These observations have been excerpted by the editors from the monthly issues of the Westerly Morris Newsletter.)

Westerly reports two surprise parties, one for Wally Penn (who is retiring) and one for Everett Munro. Plans seem to be underway for another tour of England as letters are beginning to reach potential host sites. They had no rehearsals in August. They danced the 4th Annual Harbor Day in Newflich, were confused as to whether or not they were to be invited to the Annual Cambridge Tour with Pinewoods Morris Men; spent a weekend with Juggler Meadow in Western Massachusetts; and, finally, preparations are underway for a Twelfth Night performance in Westerly on January 5.

George H. Utter, Bagman, 54 Elm Street, Westerly, R.I. 02891

Midwest Morris Ale

Out in the "Great American Desert" beyond the pale of Pennsylvania, west of West Virginia, there is a peripatetic morris event that grows more rich and various with each passing year. In 1984, Indiana's Bloomington Quarry morris hosted the event in the first sultry breezes of Summer in a beautiful state park in Southern Indiana. In attendance were Bloomington, Maroon Bells Morris (Boulder, CO), Castlemoor Morris Women (Lexington, KY), Lexington Morris Men, Souwood Morris (Knoxville, TN), Cornstalk Morris (Champaign-Urbana, IL), a few Fox Valley Men (Chicago), Ann Arbor Morris & Sword (Michigan); Greenwood Morris (East Lansing, MI), the Apple Sharadous (FL), Spin-and-Snakes and Minnesota Traditional Morris (Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN) and Capering Roisters (St. Louis, MO). The teams toured the Bloomington area and showed those aspiring musicians at Indiana University a thing or two about mashing out tunes on melodeons, harmonizing on hurdy-gurdies and the like. The odd bit of guerilla theatre and a long informal session on Monday morning of Memorial Day weekend adorned the proceedings. In 1985 the fifth annual Midwest Ale will occur in Minnesota's Twin Cities to be sponsored by Minnesota's Bells-of-the-North and MTM. In 1986 the event will again enjoy relatively Southern hospitality at the hands of the Capering Roisters of St. Louis.

1984 Morris Ales

Midwest Morris Ale

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Midwest Morris Ale

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The Killer Ale

The 1984 Northwest "Killer Ale" was held over the Labor Day weekend. Teams from Vancouver, B.C., Seattle, and Portland braved the sunny, sea-breezy weather in some of the most beautiful coastal settings imaginable to astonish residents of Indianapolis, Kingston, Squamish, Lynnwood and Window with fabulous forays, great galleys, high hankies, and real round rounds. After the tours, a procession and mass dance in Kingston attracted an especially large and responsive crowd. Dance traditions included Bledington, Bidford, Ducklington, Fieldtown, Banpton, Upton-on-Severn, and Adderbury.

Hosted by Seattle's Mossyback Morris Men and organized by Bob Greco and John Mack, the ale included Misty City Morris and Red Cap Morris also of Seattle, the Vancouver Morris Men, and Rainy Capers Morris from Portland. The tours around the island were followed by one of the great gustatory events of our time: a FEAST at which delectables such as stuffed mushrooms, melon with gravlax, became, barbecue salmon, wine-sauteed carrots, fruit, trifle, and other treats too marvelous to mention completed with Redhook Ale. Blackhook Ale, Ballard Bitter, and the infamous pan galactic gargleblasters (served in laboratory test tubes) for the palates of sideseters. The Northwest's first ale concluded on Sunday with dancing by all teams on the ferryboat ride back to Seattle.

Morris Madness

The Minnesota Renaissance Festival joined in celebrating the festival's tenth anniversary this Fall by designating the Labor Day Weekend a festival of "Morris Madness" and sponsoring a major tour by ten teams and several individuals. Among the highlights of the weekend were getting to know many fine morris folk from Colorado, a contribution of home brewed draft stout by Jim Linton, and assumption of the cloak Renaissance license by all. Celebrities included both Minnesota sides, Oak Apple Smalls, Village Green Morris Men (Colorado), Village Green Morris Men (Kneep, Manitoba, Canada), Windy City Morris and Finn Valley (Chicago, Ill, and Capering Holdsters Dk. Louis, MO). Visitors from afar included Rayna Alsberg and Peggy Gemer from Ann Arbor, Nancy Wingen of New Hampshire's Morris Men, several members of a country dance troupe in norwe, Ontario called the Lucki Dancers, and Lynn Noel, late of Ha'Penny Morris and subsequently an Oak Apple dancer. The Festival felt the event was successful enough that they may continue their co-sponsorship.

Second Annual Mixed Morris Ale, Woods Hole, MA

Memorial Day Weekend, 1984, was a fine weekend in fact. Rather than dampen the spirits of parts of seven morris teams which had descended upon Woods Hole the previous evening, it evoked the quality of dancing necessary to stave off the rain. We danced all day in the swirling fog. Although the fiddles and concertinas weren't too happy, no one else seemed too perturbed. The Second Annual Mixed Morris Ale organized by the Woods Hole Morris had begun.

4
The event was a three day orgy of Fieldtown, Hampton, Black-ington, Adderbury and Sheenstone downtown. No two teams had the same repertoire and mass dancing was largely a learning experience with hardly half of any one set from the same place. Most of the visitors were housed at the local county fairgrounds and much sharing of songs and dances occurred at strange hours of the night along with much drinking of beer in the grove of tall trees loosing in the fog above the tents.

Sunday was spent touring around the "Upper Cape," generally the area between the Canal and Ryancia. The weather held off and the sun was even to be seen. A contra-country Dance with callers from among the morris teams and musicians from bare necessities in Boston finished off the official program Sunday night.

Monday rained sheets of water, but we dopedly went down to Ryancia to lead the Memorial Day parade and dance for those brave enough to watch. Curiously, as soon as we set up to dance, out from under our ponchos, umbrellas and raincoats, the rain stopped. Call it what you will but that is what happened. It poured all through the Memorial Day wily by the Commanders of the local Air Force base; then we case out and it stopped.

Woods Hole expects to do this at least one more year. But the team is small and generally not of one mind on anything. So organization is never what one might call "tight." Sometimes it seems downright haphazard no matter how good it looks on paper. In exchange for using the fairgrounds, we went in July to dance each day at the county fair--financial boondoggle as soon as we got the bus going round. The Memorial Day parade, which we led this year for the second time, looks like a sure bet. But many teams can't stay through Monday because they have too far to drive home and we are generally exhausted before we even begin, having partied and boshed ourselves out by Monday evening.

Next year we hope to solidify some real paying gigs--of course the pay gets divided among all present, and we are beginning to locate real sources of money for a show. Ten Morris teams are coming from all over Massachusetts and the Cape is a tourist attraction beginning Memorial Day weekend...

So we parted in the rain anticipating another year, hoping to see even more teams represented, looking toward better stands, better weather, and more exchange of dances and songs any of which dance mixed either on principle or due to circumstances are welcomed to contact us at P.O. Box 453, Woods Hole, MA 02543.
Correction:

"I thank you for including my piece and for the handsome appearance of the paragraphs. Unfortunately, however, you omitted one line of my manuscript, which garbles the content of Exercise 6. The correct sentence is, "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 are not pointed down ballet style nor pointed up clog style, and that you never land with a plop but rather with a rebound."

"Best wishes on all your morris activities."

L.D. Jennings, 80 Clifton St., Belmont, MA 02178

"I would appreciate it if you could publish a correction to the instructions for a dance I sent you which was printed in the January 1983 issue. The dance was 50 Second Fish Jig the Bare, and the instructions were to start the double steps of the figures on the inside foot. I should have said the outside foot."

Mary Johnson, 77 Norwood Ave., Kensington, CA 94707

Upcoming Ales
10th Annual Marlboro Morris Ale

Held: Memorial Day Weekend
1985 - 10th Annual

Base of operations: Marlboro College, Marlboro, Vermont

Tours throughout Windham County with major shows at Brattleboro and Newfane

# of teams: 11 (or 12) men's teams
6 women's teams
(1) garland team

limited to 250 dancers and guests due to the capacity of the college facilities.

Arrive Friday night.
Saturday - show dances, walking tours of Brattleboro with pub stops, Saturday night feast.
Sunday - tours of Windham County

Tours are composed of two men's and one women's teams.

Contact person: Juliana Stevens, Barnegat House, East Alstead, NH 03602 (603) 655-2304

Correction:

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Mary Johnson, 77 Norwood Ave., Kensington, CA 94707
The Folkshop at Cecil Sharp House begs the indulgence of you foreign words dancing types, and craves on bended etc., that you cast a spinthrough over our prices before you go wasting your hard earned at lesser euphoria. These prices include airfreight and you can pay anywhere except American Express (not true - we take cash, cheques. Visa and Mastercharge, no glass bended) Rohner melodeons — D/G or specify: Erico £210 / Peterwash £290 / 5 row 4 stop C,D,G, £130 / Bastien CIG 20 key — concertina in case £39 / 6 longwhale or reppas £115 / Bella (a £50) 20 (smallest) £65 / 221 £75 / 222 £85 / 223 £97 / 224 (N-200-Iu large, Indian type) £60 / 3 hole pipe and tahor £5 / Internal accordion/melodeon pick- up by C-Das £126 / for quieter etc. £60 or fiddle, mandolin, range, etc £75. Catalogue: £2.00

We try to answer all queries and sometimes sell. Come and visit when in England. Phone 01-467-2206.
Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

As you are probably aware, Mr. Ivor Allsop has, for a long time, been entirely responsible for the upkeep of the Morris Ring Archive, the sole body delegated by the Ring for the keeping of records. About two years ago, the Worshipful Master Fool of the Ring, Mr. Morris Sunderland decided to form a Fools Union in order to prevent what he saw as the erosion of the rights of the fools in the Ring. But what began as something of a joke among the fools is now beginning to realize a real significance in the Morris. With the running of instructional meetings, etc., there is plenty yet to be done by the fools. During one of these meetings, the matter of the history of fools was raised, and I subsequently pursued the matter further.

It appears that the Ring Archive has very little on the history of fooling at all, so it was suggested that the fools organize their own archive. As I had already obtained a majority of major sources, I was chosen to start work. I have no objections to a separate archive because he has too much work already, and Morris Sunderland is looking to get finance from the Ring.

It was suggested to me, at Thaxted yesterday that I might try the American teams as you have seen so much more in the historical side of the Morris, If you could pass on information to me about American fooling, any obscure references you may have found, or details of any American publications, I and the fools would be most grateful.

In addition, I am aware of the difficulties encountered by novice fools, who are unable to find other fools to learn from, and if any of your fools are interested, please pass on my address to them, because I disagree strongly with the view that fooling cannot be taught.

Yours faithfully,

C. Clarke

Fools Union Archivist, and Fool for St. Mary's M.M.

Minnesota Traditional Morris' Tour of England

In celebration of its 10th anniversary, MTM treated itself to a 1 1/2 week tour of England. Instead of listing all the observations from our vantage point, we felt the following illustrations, created by Fenstanton Richard Gregson best represents England's view of us. A quick list of the gigs on the tour include: Windsor Morris (June 29-30), the Embassy Royal Regatta and Demolition with the Royal Combined Morris (July 1), the Cambridge Royal Regatta with the Royal Alfred Men (July 2), a visit with West London Morris (July 2), a formal visit with the Reading Morriston (July 3-5), a visit with Arnold Wicdley's Hampton Morris (July 7-8), Wheatley and Bucknell (July 10) and lastly with hameston Morris (July 13-15). 21 MTM dancers were present on the tour. A journal with entries by many of the tour members was kept and is stored in the side's archives.
Pinewoods Morris Men's Trip to England

We finally really did it in 1984. A team trip to England was first discussed at Pinewoods Camp in the summer of 1972, when Karl Rodgers and Peter Leibert spoke to Nibs Mathews about the prospects. A scratch team (that is, an unofficial one) of PMM dancers organized by Roger Cartwright went over in the Spring of 1973. Among other things, they went to Bampton on Whitmnday and attended the Morris Ring meeting in Thaxted. This was the first American Morris team to visit England, but of course there have been many since. Besides Roger that year, there were Fred Breunig, John Dexter, Ed Mason, Sam Rubin, and Dick Van Kleeck, with Andy Wolfe as an extra musician, and they were later joined by Karl Rodgers and Howie Seidel.

There was a short-lived attempt to organize an England trip for the spring or summer of 1979, and then a more serious one for 1980, a delayed celebration of PMM's 15th anniversary year. Unfortunately, this also fell through, but 1984 turned out to be great - after all, it was the 20th year of existence for PMM, the oldest Morris Team in the Western Hemisphere. Dancers and musicians were Dave Arnold, Jon Bosworth, Rich Conant, George Pogg, Michael Havey, Tom Kruskal, John Krzywicki, Ed Mason, Brad Sayler, Terry Tobias, and Chris Walker, a total of 11.

The tour lasted from May 18 to June 3 for most of us. After arriving at Gatwick on May 19, we rented minibuses and headed for Felixstowe on the East Anglia coast, where a folk festival was in progress and where the East Suffolk MM would be our hosts. Next morning we toured in Felixstowe with East Suffolk and with the Seven Champions, a team of Molly Dancers. It rained some, but we danced anyway. That afternoon we danced (indoors) at the folk festival.

The next day we went to Waldringfield, not far away, to dance for Honorary PMM Douglas Kennedy at his home. He is now in his 91st year. We did some dances for the schoolchildren at a nearby hall, where the women accompanying the tour, also performed their Uncle Remus puppet show, a very elaborate affair that they had worked up for the tour, including a portable puppet theater. After our visit with Douglas and Liz Kennedy, we went touring that evening with the East Suffolk MM - again in the rain but we danced anyway - rain or no rain - with umbrellas protecting the instruments and musicians. So ended our touring in East Suffolk.

Leaving East Suffolk on May 22, we traveled to Bedford, the home of Morris and Barbara Sunderland. He ushered us to a local school where we danced and did a few playparty games for the children. It was back to the Sunderland's home for tea. Some tea! Every available table was covered with food and assorted goodies. We are afraid that Barbara may still be looking for some of her kitchen equipment, as a few of the men cleaned up and put it away.

Then around the corner, as it were, to the Three Cranes Pub, to meet our hosts for the evening, the Bedford MM. Good dancing
outside, and good drinking inside. They put us up for the night, and next day we were off for London. Our big event there was dancing at Westminster, on a regular Wednesday event, and Morris teams sign up in advance to dance there. We put up for the night at Woodside HM, and with Whitethorn, a women's northwest Morris side. Afterwards we all adjourned to a boat on the Thames that has been made over into a pub, for more dancing. Nibs and Jean Matthews joined us there.

We took a couple of days off in London before heading west to Exeter in Devon, where Great Western HM were our hosts. We did the city of Exeter on May 26, and on May 27 went on a Morris tour of the Dartmoor area, arranged by Great Western. On both days we were joined by other teams being hosted by Great Western. There were glory of the West, a women's Morris team from Exeter, Iron Men from Shropshire, a Border Morris team, and a women's team (Joy Morris) made up of their wives and girl friends, named Severn Goblins. This team danced with a very vigorous style of dancing. Great Western is also a vigorous side (Cotswold), especially notable for the great elevation they get. Original dances invented by Great Western are Nine Men's Morris, for nine men of course, and Flasher's Morris, which we did not get to see (good thing, too). We did our Rapper at the dance party on one of the nights in Exeter, which was well received (no mistakes).

On to Headington Quarry, to tour with the Headington Quarry HM and the Westminster HM. Big dance party that night (May 28), including a raffle to raise money for Headington Quarry HM. Dick Conant won a bottle of scotch. He said it was the first contest he's ever won in his life. We did the Rapper again. Both Headington Quarry and Westminster are noted for their smooth style of dancing. Headington Quarry now has a boy's team, coached by the Squire, Bob Grant.

We also visited Bampton & Whitnondlay to see the Bampton sides (there are now three), but did not stay to dance in the evening because of the Headington Quarry tour. Although Bampton is full of Morris dancers from all over on Whitnonday, it is traditional that they stay in civilian clothes and do not dance until evening, leaving the day's dancing to the Bampton men.

Our next hosts were Swindon HM, with whom we spent an evening dancing at The Bell, a pub at a small village outside of Swindon. The set dances in Christian College were done by three of their side and three of their guests. After each chorus, the set routes the life of the revolution had 41 men, who climb one post, and the winner is the one who does it fastest. The prize is another pint (pint), and much jockeying to avoid the honor. Bosworth, Sayler, and Mason were pressed into service. The winner was, in general astonishments, one of the PMM, but the winner (Mason) generously donated his prize to the musician (Tobias).

We made the beautiful Cotswold town of Stow-on-the-Wold our headquarters for the last few days before the Ring Meeting at Thaxted. While there we toured with Sherborne HM, led by the
redundant Toby Keyhole, and the Museum of the Mole, another
northwest cork side, along the stops was Siddington, which has a
beautiful pub, but alas no longer a resident morris side.

The grand finale was the morris Ring Meeting in Thame. It
was the 50th anniversary of the Morris Ring in 1984. We did the
day twice with Stanton Ug and Dolton. We, the Stanton Egal has a
bad leg and doesn't dance, but he compensates by drinking a
remarkable quantity of beer. After the final grand assembly in
the evening in Thame, we took off for London to spend the night
before catching the plane out of Gatwick the next morning.

Our main stayby dances were Oddington Woodland May and the
Upton-on-Severn Stile Dance, but we did pretty well also by
Dorset Dicky, Lichfield ring O'Neill, Oddington Gid Dig Dance,
and Suchell Queen's Delight.

SORRE MORRIS

by Roy Denmark

The term was coined by Dr. Cave in an article for the
Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society to cover the
seasonal performance in the Welsh Border counties of Shropshire
and Herefordshire, in England and not Wales, but extended to
cover the sub-Marches, sub-Cotswold county of Worcestershire and
even the dance from Shropshire in Buckinghamshire. The
tradition should include the dances mentioned elsewhere in the
West Midlands, indeed the Lichfield dances can be considered a
collection of pairs of dances like the Border tradition rather
than a condition set as in a Cotswold village. The available
dance material is very limited and there is no consistency in
style or movement. The term seems to be thought of as existing
for the particular occasion with an absolute minimum of practice,
formality, costume, and compensation for these deficiencies in
the highly skilled dancing and skill of the musicians with
the performance of a collection of tunes and music that are
popular, the use of percussion instruments and in many dances as
can be noted, it is a classic example of a custom that is only as elaborated as
it is needed to be acceptable to its community.

Dances exist for from 3 to 12 dancers. The Dance depends on
the numbers available as at Brinfield. The dances collected from
a particular place sometimes differ quite markedly between
informants as at Pershore, reflecting the flexibility from year
to year. Sometimes a song would only have one dance, sometimes
two, or as at Malvern an indeterminate set of figures. The
common features are the rather short sticks and sometimes a stick and handkerchief version of the same dance, also usually a high single step akin to the local country dance step. Such details as straining foot rules and phrase endings are notable for their absence.

The Silurian MH have interpreted the material and this is available in print. They have sought to preserve the traditional style and features as far as they can be deduced. An alternative image has been produced by the Historic Texts with the Shropshire Bellows and Making a Morris Tuppenny Dish where the material has been consolidated and systematized, extended and new ideas developed using all the local italic. Through this there is an image of the Border Morris - bewildering, more than usually exhibitionist, noisy dancers, yap covered jackets all of which seems to me more the spirit of the past box but not the substance.

The limited dance material collected has led to much invention and to teams that are in the 'style' but having entirely composed repertoires made up of which are by no means successful as dances. However it would be wrong to count such as "Border." Alternative descriptions are "street dances," as used by Mary Rose and the team from Moldstone, or "Dance Troupes" where they are more refined and artistic. Both extremes tap different elements in the English culture. Groups know personally are South Downs, Paradise Islanders, EICA, Boppe Morris and Lord Zajets and Harley Morris from Penn, showing that the idiosyncrasy translates to men, women and sized teams. Many teams have a few Border or Border-like dances to broaden their repertoire and exploit the contrast with the Cotswold jumps and opera.

The following is reproduced from a brochure produced by the Silurian Morris Men of Hereford

Some of the oldest records of the Morris dance come from the Welsh Border Counties of Hereford and Worcestershire. In 1658 a side of twelve dancers performed at Hereford races accompanied by four whistlers (crowd controllers) and two musicians. Their average age was said to be 103 years. In 1659 a team from Domesley in Shropshire caused a disturbance at an Ale House at Morley. In 1614 the inhabitants of Longdon (about 9 miles east of Ledbury) entertained themselves with May games and dancing upon the Sabbath Day. The Morris dance was expected in Shrewsbury especially at Christmas and a Morris dance was presented at the ale houses.

It would seem from this and other evidence that the morris dance was fairly widely performed in the area in the seventeenth century at Christmas but perhaps more so in the summer.

The Form of the Dance

In the late nineteenth century and early nineteen hundreds the morris dance, or molly mawk as it is known to some living informants, was widespread throughout the old English areas of
the three counties. It is from these sources we get the form and figures of the dance as it is performed at Christmas, and there is no doubt that these traditions continued to be performed, in those days, for the performance at the festival season.

The dance seems to have originated as a longways set (two rows of men), although several collected performances, like those at Brimfield in North Herefordshire, and Brornsberrow Heath near Ledbury, were in their latter days performed in a single line.

The number of performers has not seemed to be of great importance. Unlike most Cotswold Morris dances with sets of six men, most Border dances were performed in longways sets with multiples of four men often totalling twelve men in all. Most of the dances are performed vigorously with short sticks, the exceptions being the handkerchief dances from Upton, Pershore and Evesham and the stepping dance from Brornsberrow Heath.

The Dress

Apart from the Hereford Side of 1609, that seemed to have had a beneficent sponsor, the normal pattern of dress has been to cover white shirts or old clothes with brightly coloured or gaudy rags. In some cases it gave the effect of an old fashioned rag sat, as at Cradly, in others the ribbons were more sparsely scattered, as at Upton-upon-Severn. Sometimes rosettes and sashes were added. Headwear seems to have varied from none at all to soft hats covered with rags to top hats or bowlers.

At the turn of the century some of the sides had discarded the traditional costume and wore fancy clothes. An interesting history of the Much Wenlock side tells us that the dancers wore tags of cloth on their ordinary clothes, later the cloth was exchanged for paper which was set alight by young mischievous lads. Finally tags were abandoned for fancy dress reminiscent of circus clowns and some dressed as women. A recent informant who danced with another side at Much Wenlock reconstructed the costume on the old pattern and was unaware of any changes to fancy dress.

Blackened Faces

Many of the side wore bells and a common feature was the blackface. A possible theory for this was that the Moorish, or Moorish dancing, was brought over by the Moors and hence the dancers imitated their dark complexion. This theory is unlikely; if indeed the word is derived from Moorish at all, it was used as a descriptive term, with reference to the black faces. So the black face is likely to be a much older feature and if compared to other forms of men's ritual dance throughout the world, it fits in with the general theme of anonymity. In view of the trouble of blacking the face, and the hands in some cases, it seems remarkable that such a feature should still survive in some parts of the world.

In view of the general theme of anonymity, in view of the trouble taken to black the face, and the hands in some cases, it seems remarkable that such a feature should still survive in some parts of the world.

14
The Music

Older accounts usually refer to one or two musicians, pipe and tabor being the oldest forms of accompaniment. In the nineteenth century however the musicians seem to have increased and in the area there are many references to percussion instruments of various types. All of the following instruments have been featured: fiddle, accordion, melodica, concertina, tambourines, triangles, drums, bones, tin whistles, flutes, pipe and tabor.

The tunes used were usually claimed to be of no great importance, but several villages used similar tunes. "Not for Joe" in several different versions commonly features in the dances of North Herefordshire and South Shropshire. Also singing often accompanied the dance in these areas.

Where the Dances Came From

Nineteenth and Twentieth Century sides have been noted before 1936 in the towns and villages shown on the map.

REPORTED SIGHTINGS OF MORRIS SIDES BETWEEN 1900 AND 1940
Silurian Border Morris - About the Side

Silurian Border Morrismen of Ledbury were formed in 1969 and at first performed dances mainly from the Cotswold traditions, together with a few local dances. Later they concentrated their efforts on the traditional ritual dances of their own area of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire, and are now regarded as the leading exponents of these traditions, sometimes referred to as Welsh Border Morris.

In October 1979 their dances were filmed for the Archives of the Morris Ring, and their services have been utilized for Morris instructionals, including shows for the Morris Section of the West Midlands Folk Federation and the Morris Ring. The Morris Ring has also published material on Border Morris largely based on work produced by the side.

The side has been fully involved in the organization of the Bronyard Polk Festival, the largest weekend folk festival of its kind in the country, and as individuals have also been responsible for the organization of numerous folk activities in the area including not only ceilidhs, dances and bands, but also other groups such as Doglogerum. Just as AMN was finally about to emerge from the word processor, the next round of designs from Barbara Prentiss-O’Rourke arrived. The work included the mailing panel and two mastheads. Barbara, formerly of Rose Thorn, now lives in England. Beautiful work, Barbara!
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 subscriptions 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. Back issues are 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) 379-2286 (Steve Parker) or (612) 721-6750 (Jim Brickwedde).

Members of the editorial staff include James C. Brickwedde, Lynn Medow Dennis, and Stephen Parker.

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