LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The American Morris Newsletter is born. I am hoping to make it a viable communication link for all organizations and individuals interested in English Morris and Sword dancing. It is a completely independent publication and will exist only if people and groups subscribe to it and contribute ideas, suggestions, information, complaints, articles, letters, and so on. Is there something you would like to see in these pages? Let me know! Is there something you want others to know? Send it to me for publication. (I have received several suggestions already, and I thank the contributors.) Most of all, please spread the word that this Newsletter exists. It can become a useful forum if everyone interested in Morris and Sword shares these pages. —FB

MUSIC AND THE MORRIS (Part 1)

by Russell Wortley

(Reprinted by permission of the author and of Folk Review, Austin House, Hospital Street, Nantwich, Cheshire, England. Annual Subscription, $8.50.)

Anybody playing fiddle, pipe-and-tabor, concertina or whatever for a morris side for the first time might easily think to himself: Well, I think I can play "Constant Billy", "Maid of the Mill" and a few more tunes—all I've got to do is play the tune and, so long as they know the dance, everything will be fine. But unless he is an extremely insensitive musician, he will find out sooner rather than later how wrong he was.

From which remark you will rightly deduce that this article is concerned less with morris tunes as such and more with the manner of playing them—with thoughts which I hope may be helpful to both present and prospective morris musicians. For instance, the novice player would do well to take an early opportunity of listening carefully to recordings of traditional morris musicians. If it's Cotswold-morris (and we are here concerned exclusively with this variety), the incredible drive in the fiddle-playing of Jinny Wells of Hampton will be a revelation, so many worlds apart from the smooth virtuosity of the Irish fiddlers (this is not a matter of better or worse—but difference in kind); then there is the crisp neat anglo-concertina of Merry Umber of Headington Quarry, just to show how different two Oxfordshire morris musicians can sound. Whoever you take as your model or however you try to combine elements from each, beware of being led astray by superficial idiosyncrasies of style and thereby losing the essential elemental pulse which must be maintained from beginning to end of the dance; in fact it is vital that all stylistic frills, all the decoration and twiddly bits, should be made to subserve and not hinder the basic rhythm. At the same time, it is equally important that this elemental pulse shall not be wooden and unyielding but responsive to the dancers, strong but subtly pliable. And this brings us to a second major consideration—the close rapport between musician and dancers.

It should not in fact be long before the novice player discovers that a morris side is not simply a matter of six dancers plus a musician plus a Fool; rather, the operative unit is the team or side consisting of six dancers, musician and Fool. The musician (likewise the Fool) must feel himself an integral part of the side and totally
involved in it, and to achieve this unity he has while playing to be continually watching every movement of the dancers, just as the dancers should be continually listening to (not just typing) every note of the music. Remarks of traditional morris dancers reveal the reality of this utter integration of music and steps. "If a man don't know the tune he can't dance" (Benjamin Moss of Ascot—under-Sycwood to Cecil Sharp); "We used to learn the steps as an animal reflex was no trouble, for the steps are just the words are" (Joseph Druce of Ducklington); "Anybody that has a good ear can see by the tune what the steps are" (Richard Bond of Idbury). It helps a lot if the musician knows the dances: at Northedge I was told that their gipsy fiddler was a good player but "he didn't understand the dancing like (his predecessor) Faddy Morgan." Jinky Wells knew the dances so well that even when he was blind he could tell by the sound of the bells if one of the dancers was out of step.

Choice and control of tempo present another kind of problem to the morris musician. It is surprising how sensitive a set of dancers can be to quite minute differences in tempo and, in this matter particularly, different teams vary in their tastes so you have to get to know your own side's preferences, remembering at the same time that the optimum dance tempo is often affected by circumstances such as hardness of surface, the weather, lateness of the hour and alcohol consumption. So it's no use expecting to avoid complaints altogether on this matter of tempo. You can only hope to reduce them to a minimum by being constantly alert and responsive to the mood of the dancers. A useful tip, perhaps, is to be on guard against playing the introductory "Once to yourself" too fast: it's easier to increase the tempo slightly as the dance goes on than to slow it down.

With all this to think about, it goes without saying that you have to know your tunes so well that they come out with the minimum of brainwork. In the case of an experienced morris musician, I have no doubt that at least 95% of his mental activity while playing is concerned with rapport with the dancers and quality of the performance, leaving only 5% for keeping the time right. It was probably something to do with the tune being part of his inner consciousness, not just his fingers, that caused Jinky Wells to have the habit of humming the tune as he played it—to the consternation of one BBC recordist whose protest was met with, "That, young man, is part of my music."

It is obvious that the kind of rapport between musician and dancers that I have tried to describe would be harder than ever to achieve with more than one musician and it was certainly the normal practice among Cotswold morris sides to perform with one musician only. He stands still at the head of the set—"Show up to the music" is meaningless if the musician is strolling around or standing on the other side of the road: in fact, he forms a stationary point of reference which should enable the set to avoid drifting down the hill or across the road during the dance. Details of this kind are important, too, from the point of view of effective presentation. The formal quality of the Cotswold morris can easily be lost through a casual attitude to the music.

Just as more than one musician at a time almost inevitably weakens the cohesion of a dance, so constantly changing the musician during a show militates against the formal unity of the whole performance. Above all, the musician should not look like a dancer temporarily escaped from the set. Among revival sides how often this is the case! When a club is lucky enough to have several competent musicians it should not be impossible for them to take turns playing for successive groups and, when they are also dancers, at least to remove their bells before playing. Again, it should not be necessary to remind would-be musicians that a public performance is not the occasion for practicing or learning an unfamiliar tune, any more than it is the occasion for a dancer to learn an unfamiliar dance.

If more attention were paid to matters of this kind by morris clubs in general, we might hear fewer justified complaints about the poor dancing and rotten presentation which do unquestionably occur and which debases the reputation of present-day morris.

The whistle-and-dub or tabor-and-pipe was the regular music for morris in the Cotswold area. It is remarkable the the medieval form of the instrument with a small drum suspended from wrist or thumb survived here as a folk instrument through to the end of the 19th century, even though a number of well-known representations and descriptions from the 16th and early 17th centuries indicate the use of the large tabor slung at waist level. This may well have been an importation from the continent which failed to become established in our folk tradition. Sharp reported that many old morris dancers told him
they gave up dancing when the whistle-and-dub was superseded by the fiddle "because they found it impossible to dance to the latter instrument" (Morris Book, Pt. I, p. 34). No doubt they missed the insistent beat of the dub, basically in the rhythm — — — — etc., but constantly varied to suit the steps of the dance. By the use of a short double-headed stick, a roll was produced which is said to have created a "quite astounding noise", giving "a peculiar fire and character to the tune." Why don't more present-day players experiment with this technique? Here is a lost art which can surely be recaptured; and nobody would deny that much of the true music heard today could do with a bit more fire and character. It is worth noting too that older descriptions almost invariably speak of tabor-and-pipe, not pipe-and-tabor; and the performer was nearly always a taborer, not a piper. This alone suggests the importance of the taboring.

Morris dancers and musicians alike still have much to learn about the tradition which has been passed on to us and which we are responsible for passing on to the next generation. Probably the greatest fascination of the morris lies in the scope it gives for apparently limitless discovery of new ways of performing steps and figures or of playing tunes--small variations which sometimes affect to a surprising degree the feel or look of a dance. Every morris practice is in this sense an adventure—at least, that is how it seems to me even after more than 40 years.

(Russell Wortley has played tabor-and-pipe for the Cambridge Morris Men and the Travelling Morris for many years and was Bagman of the Morris Ring of England from 1950-59. His words of wisdom about the Morris may also be found in the English Folk Dance and Song Society's English Dance and Song.

In the middle of the original article, Dr. Wortley expounded on several cogent points regarding a respect for traditional practice. These will appear in the July issue of the Newsletter as Part 2 of the article.)

RITUAL DANCE WEEKEND A SUCCESS

The Country Dance and Song Society's Ritual Dance Weekend in February provided a different approach to classes in Morris and Sword dancing. The emphasis was on style and team dancing rather than repertoire in both the morning classes and the afternoon sessions (which used video-tape). Another feature was the showing of a number of films of traditional and revival morris and sword teams (Handsworth, Grenoside, Monkseaton, Headington Quarry, Hampton). Sizeable contingents of four morris clubs attended (Black Jokers, Greenwich, Pokingbrook and King of Bells) as well as representatives of several others. A suggestion was made that a similar "package" be offered to other parts of the country.

FUTURE TEAM! DEPARTMENT

Dancers in Bloomington, Ind., have been working on several dances which the more experienced ones have learned at Pinewoods and Berea Christmas School. Frank Hall has arranged for Fred Braunig to teach a workshop in April to "show us where we're on the track and where off."

Activity in Hanover, N.H., continues. The group there is fighting one of the problems that other areas have: a shortage of available teachers.

New Haven may have a resident morris team in the near future. Potential musician Gary Dolinsky wrote that David Lindsay "will most likely be coordinating our side."

Steve Lane of Seattle reported a budding rapper team on the West Coast. They are working on increasing their numbers for eventual men's and women's teams.

**ARE THERE MORRIS OR SWORD DANCERS ACTIVE IN YOUR AREA? DROP THE EDITOR A POSTCARD!**
The following list is undoubtedly incomplete. Please inform the editor of any omissions.

**TEAMS OR CLUBS** (arranged alphabetically by town)

Berea (KY) Country Dancers; John Ramsey, CFO 287, Berea, KY 40404

Binghamton, NY: New Cambridge MM; Roger Cartwright, 7 Francis Ave., Cambridge, MA 02138

Binghamton, NY: Binghamton MMI; Ed Szymanski, 2820 Smith Dr., Endwell, NY 13760

Birmingham, AL: Northern Lights; Michael H. Matthews, 306 N 12th St., Birmingham, AL 35203

Boston Area: Precious Jewel; Carol Oakes, 120 Everett St., Woburn, MA 01801

Burlington, VT: The Mad River Morris; D. McCord, 1112 South Main St., Burlington, VT 05401

Burlington, VT: The Mad River Morris; Susan Miller, 2118 Highland Ave., Knoxville, TN 37916

Concord, NH: Phenix Morris; Alice LaPierre, Terminal Motel, Penacook, NH 03301

Delmar, NY: The Golden Ring; Patricia Grogan, 22 Cottage Ln., Delmar, NY 12054

Denver, CO: Western States Morris; Marilyn McComas, 1234 16th St., Denver, CO 80202

Eau Claire, WI: The River City Morris; Dan Powers, 401 S. 7th St., Eau Claire, WI 54702

Erie, PA: Erie County Traditional Morris; John R. Putnam, 218 10th St., Erie, PA 16502

Emeryville, CA: The Estrella Morris; Steve Lane, 1721 So. Snoqualmie, Seattle, WA 98108

Fairfax, VA: The Fairfax Morris; Paul C. Martin, 11419 Eastview Dr., Fairfax, VA 22030

Farmington, CT: The Farmington Morris; Daniel M. Symons, 222 Town Line Rd., Farmington, CT 06032

Ft. Wayne, IN: The Fort Wayne Morris; A. Paul Horr, 1022 W. Haynie St., Ft. Wayne, IN 46802

Greenville, SC: Greenville Morris; J. W. Harrell, 1000 Spring St., Greenville, SC 29601

Hartford, CT: The Hartford Morris; Paul C. Martin, 11419 Eastview Dr., Farmington, CT 06032

Holland, MI: The Holland Morris; John L. Biddle, 2004 W. 14th St., Holland, MI 49423

Indianapolis, IN: The Indianapolis Morris; William A. Penno, 412 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46222

Ithaca, NY: Ithaca Morris; Robert H. Hays, 124 S. State St., Ithaca, NY 14850

Jamestown, NY: The Jamestown Morris; John C. Burrows, P.O. Box 250, Jamestown, NY 14702

Kansas City, MO: The Kansas City Morris; John L. Biddle, 2004 W. 14th St., Holland, MI 49423

Knoxville, TN: The Knoxville Morris; Susan Miller, 2218 Highland Ave., Knoxville, TN 37916

Lake Placid, NY: The Lake Placid Morris; Elinor S. McGuire, 151 Lake Placid Ave., Lake Placid, NY 12946

Lakeville, MN: The Lakeville Morris; William H. Biedenbender, 1363 S. 3rd St., Lakeville, MN 55044

Lancaster, PA: The Lancaster Morris; William C. Martin, 501 W. King St., Lancaster, PA 17603

Lexington, KY: The Lexington Morris; John L. Biddle, 2004 W. 14th St., Holland, MI 49423

Los Angeles, CA: The Playa Del Rey Morris; John L. Biddle, 2004 W. 14th St., Holland, MI 49423

Madison, WI: The Madison Morris; William H. Biedenbender, 1363 S. 3rd St., Lakeville, MN 55044

Marlboro, VT: Marlboro Morris and Sword; Tony Barrand, Box 51, Marlboro, VT 05344

Matsue, W.A.: Pinewoods MM; Chris Walker, 22 Baskin Rd., Lexington, MA 02173

Minneapolis, MN: The Minneapolis Morris; Mrs. Mason Myers, 215 Sheridan St., Minneapolis, MN 55405

Morristown, NJ: The Morris Morris; William H. Biedenbender, 1363 S. 3rd St., Lakeville, MN 55044

Muncie, IN: The Muncie Morris; William C. Martin, 501 W. King St., Lancaster, PA 17603

Murfreesboro, TN: The Murfreesboro Morris; Steve Cates, 1417 Poplar Ave., Murfreesboro, TN 37130

New York City: Greenwich MM; Ed Durham, 790 Riverside Dr., New York, NY 10032

North Hampton (MA) Morris; Rob Brown, Box 84, Northampton, MA 01366


Poughkeepsie, NY: The Poughkeepsie Morris; C. Hodgson, Oakwood Sch., F'k's, NY 12601

Portsmouth, NH: The Portsmouth Morris; John W. Harrell, 1000 Spring St., Portsmouth, NH 03801

Pittsburgh, PA: The Pittsburgh Morris; Mrs. Russell Holt, 542 Torwood Lane, Pittsburgh, PA 15236

Quinnipiac University, Hamden, CT: The Quinnipiac Morris; Stephen J. Cappiello, 500 Church St., Hamden, CT 06517

Richmond, VA: The Richmond Morris; William C. Martin, 501 W. King St., Lancaster, PA 17603

Rockville, MD: The Rockville Morris; James F. Johnson, 1721 7th St., Rockville, MD 20850

San Diego, CA: The San Diego Morris; Charles E. Stiles, 1721 So. Snoqualmie, Seattle, WA 98108

San Francisco, CA: The San Francisco Morris; 742 Union St., San Francisco, CA 94109

Seattle, WA: The Seattle Morris; Steve Lane, 1721 So. Snoqualmie, Seattle, WA 98108

Syracuse, NY: The Syracuse Morris; William H. Biedenbender, 1363 S. 3rd St., Lakeville, MN 55044

Toledo, OH: The Toledo Morris; William C. Martin, 501 W. King St., Lancaster, PA 17603

TOOWARDS (classes, performances)

Ann Arbor, MI: Department of Music, Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48104 (perform)

Brynn Mawr College, George Zimmerman, Brynn Mawr College, Brynn Mawr, PA 19010 (classes)

Burlington, VT: Peter Burrage, B.F.D. #1, Essex Jct., VT 05452 (classes)

Hermonton, VA: Barbara Hardigg, Box 236, Herndon, VA 20270 (elementary school group)

S.F. Area groups; David Garlan, 1105 A Mission Ave., San Rafael, CA 94901 (teacher)

Somerset, KY: Irene Bryoles, Rt. 2 Box 416A, Somerset, KY 42501 (school)

Toronto, Ont., Ms. Chris VanWinkle, 153 St. George St., #406, Toronto M5R 2E (classes)

Woods Hole, Mass.; Bob Guillard, RD#1, 311 Country Rd., Buzzards Bay, MA 02532 (perform)

Bloomington, Ind., Frank Hall, 110 East 6th St., #3, Bloomington, IN 47401 (classes)

Hanover, N.H., Wayne Cripps, Box 677, Hanover, NH 03755 (classes)

* * * SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL MORRIS TEAM * * * SUBSCRIBE TO THE AMERICAN MORRIS NEWSLETTER * * *
TEAMS DANCING' OUT

APRIL 1

WBIM, Norwich, CT

WBIM, Mountain Folk Festival, Berea, KY

1/2

NJ, Festival of Irish, Scottish, English Music & Dance, Knoxville, TN

2

BMM, Bexton, MA

9

RoB, Prospect Park, Brooklyn, NY

10

GMM, Wave Hill Environmental Center, Bronx, NY

16

HIT, Spring Festival, Cambridge, MA

16/17

HMM

HMM (tent.)

HMM (tour of Otage County, NY based in

GILBERTSVILLE, NY

23 RoB, CDSS Spring Festival, New York, NY

WBIM, Lexington, KY

WBIM, Parents’ Weekend, Comm. College, CT

(Morris and Mumming)

GMM

MAY

23 or 24 BJ, New Eng. Folk Festival, Natick, MA

(tour and workshop)

24 RoB

HMM (tent.)

New York, NY*

EN, Dogwood Arts Fest., Knoxville, TN

28 MMS, Putney, VT

30 PFM, Cambridge, MA (tent.)

ABBREVIATIONS

MMS = Binghamton Morris Men

RoB = Black Jokers

GMM = Greenwich Morris Men

NM = Hearts of Oak Morris

PHM = Knoxville Morris (not club’s official name)

MOS = Marlboro Morris 4 Sword

MRR = Muddy River Morris

CM = New Cambridge Morris Men

PHM = Fennex Morris

(MM = Morris Minors)

PMM = Pine Woods Morris Men

RoB = Ring o’ Bells

WMM = Woodford Morris Men

#MM = Wasterly Morris Men

(see listing of morris teams

on page 4 for name and address of

corresponding person)

MAY

1 HMM, Binghamton, NY & area

NCMM

BJ

MMS

NJ, Cambridge, MA (early morning)

GMM, Blue Hills Reservation, MA (p.m.)

MMS, Audubon Spring Rites, Barre, MA

PHM, Durham, NH

GMM, Princeton, NJ**

PHM, Benniker, NH

MRR, Rissley Fair, Cornell, Ithaca, NY

8 MMS, Marlboro, VT

12 MMS, Asheret, MA (tent.)

14 BJ, North Shore, MA

PHM, Concord, NH

MMS, So. VT. & So. N.H.

15 MMS, Williamstown, MA/Brannifton, VT

21 PHM, Main St., Seaport, NH (noon)

** other teams invited: please contact host team

College Green & pubs, Hanover, NH

** other men’s teams invited: contact host team

JUNE

4 RoB, South St. Seaport, New York, NY (tent.)

12 RoB, Music Festival, Prick Estate, Roslyn, NY (tent.)

11/12 BMM

Endicott, NY

JULY 9 PHM (MM), Market Day, Sanbornton, NH

30 PHM, Canterbury (N.H.) Fair*

AUGUST 4 PHM (OM), Fox Hollow Festival, Petersberg, NY

SEPT. 3/4 Mountain Morris Men Annual Labor Day Workshop/Ale/Tour (probably in Kentucky)
Black Jokers: During the month of March, the Black Jokers took part in a number of youth concerts with the Boston Symphony and various other folk dance groups. The Jokers performed both morris and rapper.

Hearts of Oak Morris: Binghamton's women's team performed for the first time in early March in several indoor shows and then danced out at the Maple Sugar Festival in Marathon, N.Y., with the Binghamton Men. There was also a tour of local towns.

Woodford Morris Men: Under the direction of faculty sponsor Jane Britton and Squire David Macennon, the Woodford MM are thriving in Versailles, Ky. They are part of a larger group which also includes a Country Dance demonstration team. Dancing is well-established at Woodford County High School where it is actually part of the curriculum. The group will field two morris sides and two rapper teams at the Mountain Folk Festival in Berea, Ky.

Marlboro Morris & Sword: Local newspapers held Marlboro's men's team responsible for a spell of balmy weather in February after a side damed -the of Fairfield, Vt., elementary school. The whole team danced out at Town Meeting in Marlboro on March 2 (not so balmy). Plans for the Second Marlboro Morris Ale are progressing, and the women's sword team practices regularly hoping for a springtime debut.

Northampton Morris enlisted the services of John Van Soestin of New Cambridge MM as teacher and musician and have pulled things together. They have already danced out this spring with both men's and women's sides.

Ring o' Bells began its spring season by dancing for patients in the neurological institute of Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital. The team also held a "seminar" (lecture-demonstration) at the Gutter Workshop in Roslyn, N.Y., followed by a tour of Roslyn Park and free beer at a local Italian restaurant.

TRAVELLING ENGLISH MORRIS

Is Monkseaton Coming? It is not yet clear whether or not the Monkseaton Morris & Folk Dance Club will be able to come en masse to the U.S. in August. They have a few engagements lined up but will need more before they can commit themselves to the trip. Their program, entitled "Folk from Northumbria", covers a wide range of dance and song including rapper, country dancing and solo clog. If anyone can help find performances for them (paying about $600), please contact Alan Brown, 81 Gravenuor Drive, Whitley Bay, Tyne & Wear, England. Even if the whole group cannot make the trip, Peter Brown, the group's Northumbrian Clog Champion, will be teaching at the Country Dance & Song Society's Finwoods Dance Weeks in August.

Announcements: The Ilmington Morris Men hope to make a visit to the U.S. in the late summer of 1978. PAYAL Paul Bryan wrote to inquire about the possibility of arranging a tour for them. I have sent a copy of this issue of the American Morris Newsletter to him, so teams listed may expect to be contacted in the future. Mr. Bryan also informed me that the Ilmington MM have "recently been filmed as part of a British Airways 'propaganda' film to attract tourists to Great Britain" which was designed for the U.S. market. Has anyone seen the film?

If any teams wish to help arrange an Ilmington tour, write directly to: Paul Bryan, Berry View, Ilmington, Shipston-on-Stour, Warwick CV36 4LL, England.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & ADVERTISEMENTS

Finwoods Morris Men Squire Chris Walker announces the availability of a scholarship for a present or future FMM member to a Finwoods Dance Week for 1977. Unfortunately, due to the state of the FMM treasury, the scholarship will only be for half the cost.
of one dance week. Men who might not otherwise be able to attend Pinewoods Camp this year should apply to Chris Walker, 22 Baskin Road, Lexington, MA 02173. Applicants must apply on their own to the Country Dance & Song Society for acceptance to the Camp itself (55 Christopher St., New York, NY 10014).

Marlboro Morris & Sword has acquired 1000 morris bells from the Morris Ring of England. They are 7/8" in diameter and made of steel. The club will not be using them all and is willing to sell them at cost (5c each) plus postage while the supply lasts. Contact Bagman Dinah Breunig, 40 High St., Brattleboro, VT 05301, or Squire Tony Barrand, Box 51, Marlboro, VT 05344.

Russell Wortley's "Bibliography of the Sword Dance" which complements his "Bibliography of the Morris Dance" (1975) is available (or will be very soon) from the Librarian at Cecil Sharp House, 2 Regents Park Road, London NW1 7AY England. Copies are 10p each plus postage. Both lists are extremely valuable as background material.

A new subscriber to the American Morris Newsletter suggested that there be a section for the advertisement of "Morris merchandise". This space will be available for such a purpose (for instruments, costumes, equipment, etc.) as well as for announcements.

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A PARTING THOUGHT

"These old songs and dances have a certain antiquarian interest and there is no harm in collecting information about them, nor in reproducing some of them as curiosities or as physical exercises for the young. But when we get a 'revival' of them, when we have pale-faced intellectuals warbling and capering under the delusion that they are restoring the simple gaities of Old England, the thing becomes ludicrous. Morris dancing has undoubtedly its value as a healthy recreation for school children. But it would be very much better left to the children."


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NEWSLETTER SPECIFICS

The American Morris Newsletter is published four times per year (April, July, October and January). Subscriptions are available to anyone at $1.50 per year (Morris or Sword clubs may subscribe at a lower group rate: write to the editor for details). Copy deadline is usually the last day of the month prior to publication. Next deadline will be one week early: June 23, 1977.

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I would like to subscribe to the American Morris Newsletter. Enclosed is my check or money order for $1.50 to cover my first year's subscription. (Please make checks payable to the "American Morris Newsletter" and send to: Fred Breunig, 40 High Street, Brattleboro, Vermont 05301.)

Name

Address (include zipcode)