On Thanksgiving Day, the American Morris movement lost one of its early leaders and a great friend and supporter. Karl Rodgers was a founding member of the Pinewoods Morris Men, the first organized club in the United States. He also danced with the Village Morris Men, the first truly local club in America which was formed in 1969 by Eric Leber and which danced for New York City for about two years.

In 1971 he was elected Squire of the Pinewoods Morris Men and shortly thereafter founded the PMM Newsletter which still binds its members together. In 1973 he travelled to England with the first American morris team to cross the Atlantic, an assemblage of Pinewoods Men organized by Roger Cartwright which danced with many clubs in England including the Bampton Morris Men. The following year he helped organize the Greenwich Morris Men which is now one of the oldest of the existing local clubs. Karl also was a morris teacher for the Country Dance and Song Society in various workshops and classes and an ardent supporter of its activities.

In the next issue of the Newsletter, there will be a special tribute to Karl by several of the former Village Morris Men.

THE XYZ OF MORRIS (Part 2)
by Russell Wortley
(First published privately in February, 1978, by the author; reprinted by permission)

C. Why "Morris"?

There is little doubt that the word "morris" derives from "Moorish." In the 15th century we find not only the first appearance in this country of the expression "morris-dance" (1438) but also "morris-pike" (1487) which signifies a weapon supposed to be of Moorish origin. However, we need not conclude that the forms of dance which we know in our native tradition and which we call "morris" are also Moorish. Rather it appears from an examination of the references in the late 15th and early 16th centuries that a foreign dance-form called in French Morisques and in Spanish Moriscas was introduced to the Court of Henry VII about 1494. This was characterised by the use of elaborate exotic costumes or disguise, its name being anglicised to morsice, morisse, morish, or morris. This type of dance seems to have been brought in as a novel spectacle for Christmas and Shrovetide revels and was quickly taken up at the Scottish Court (from 1502) and within a few years became a feature of public processions such as the Midsummer Watch in London - the equivalent of our Lord Mayor's Show. Before long it spread, no doubt in modified forms, to parish entertainments and we find numerous references to "morris dancers" in churchwards' accounts in the 16th century, often in conjunction with Robin Hood pageants. It must have been at this parochial level that the exotic disguise
dances met with the native disguise dances and it seems that at this point the name "morris" came to be applied to both.

We have no record of the former names of our native ritual dances but we are convinced of the reality of their existence and the continuity of an ancient tradition at this period are the vividly uninhibited accounts by the Elizabethan puritans Fetherston, Northbrooke, and Philip Stubbes. In The Anatomy of Abuses (1583) the latter, without mentioning the word morris, wrote: "They strike up the Devil's Daunce withall: then march thys heathen company towards the church and church-yarde, their pypers pyping, their drummers thundering, their strumpes dauncing, their belles jyngling, their handkercheefs fluttering about their heades like madde men ..." Stray remarks by other writers of this time are also significant, such as that in the courtier Robert Landham's Letter to a friend, describing the entertainment provided for Elizabeth I during her stay at Kenilworth Castle in 1575, where he mentions that on the second Sunday afternoon of her visit, in the course of a representation of a Bride-ale (country wedding celebration) by local villagers, she was entertained by "a lively Morisdauns, according too the Auncient manner: six Dauncerz, Mawdmarion, and the Fool." This must surely imply the currency of a more modern manner, presumably the imported Moresk. It is to be expected in a seasonal ritual that the deeply rooted manner would survive, though perhaps not without absorbing something from the new style; how much or how little we can only speculate, but it seems to me quite possible that the leg bells came to our Cotswold ritual dances in this way, or at least were then elaborated from simpler "ruggles" such as survived into the 19th century with the morris dancers of the more remote Forest of Dean. There is much more we do not know: for instance, was the hobby-horse part of the Cotswold spring ritual or added in the 16th century when the ritual began to be used as entertainment?

It will be noted that these accounts relate to the type of morris which we know as the Cotswold tradition, belonging to spring and early summer. It is unlikely that mid-winter rituals would have been much affected by new fashions in processions and pageants which for obvious reasons were held in the summer months, nor by new ideas in Christmas revels carried on indoors in palaces and great houses.

D. Why Do We Do It?

Of course we all perform the morris because we enjoy it; more than that, under the right conditions in the right environment, we get a unique and powerful kick out of it unlike that experienced in any other activity. We find too that when well presented the morris communicates to the spectators something more than the simple enjoyment of watching a short play or a brief series of dances; a sense of mystery is conveyed which prompts questions such as those I have tried to give some kind of answer to in the foregoing text.

This sense of mystery is communicated, I suppose, very largely through the special costumes or disguises adopted by the performers, especially those of the chief and most primitive participants - Beelzebub, the Fool, the "Betty" (or may-marrion), the Lord and "Lady," and those in animal disguise, which Philip Stubbes lumped together as "their hobby-horses, their dragons and other antiques."" We are far from understanding completely the full significance of all these but, as I have written elsewhere, if some mysteries remain in the morris that is all to the good! We can say that the disguise is to conceal identity, for impersonation of a source of power wherewith to attempt to control the natural forces of the environment; we can say that the Fool or Beelzebub, the most disguised, is the chief dispenser of magic. But where does all this take us? To me, it is more important that some sense of mystery should remain.

In this connection, there may well be a danger at the present time arising from the multiplicity of morris dancing clubs. The morris dance was never a popular dance for the community at large and if it becomes over-familiar it will be in danger of losing its vital and distinctive ritual quality. It would indeed be regrettable
If Morris dancers came to be regarded as a bloody nuisance rather than as harbingers of spring or celebrators of the harvest. If we no longer really believe that the performance of our morrises can make the slightest difference to our unpredictable weather, we can still use them to celebrate the annual rebirth at the turn of the year, the annual renewal of spring, and the annual harvest of autumn. It is good, surely, not just to take our varying seasons for granted but to celebrate them with their appropriate traditional rituals.

FOOTNOTES:
1. This question is dealt with authoritatively by Dr. E.C. Cave in his new book Ritual Animal Disguise (Folklore Society, 1978).

2. Fetherston in his Dialogue against Light, Leue, and Llicrious Dancing (1582) wrote: "The abuses which are committed in your may-games are infinite. The first whereof is this, that you doe use to attyre in women apparel whom you doe most commonly call may-marrisons, whereby you infringe that straight comandement which is given in Deut. xxii. 5, that men must not put on women apparel for fear of enormities." [sic]

3. "Antiques" is here the alternative spelling for "antics," i.e., grotesques. It does not convey the modern meaning of something old.

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SPRING CALENDAR OF EVENTS

In last April's Newsletter, fourteen clubs were represented in the Spring Calendar. Not intended as an exhaustive listing of morris activity, it nevertheless provides an impressive survey of dancing on this continent. If your club has any tour dates planned by the middle of March, please note the date and place on a postcard and send it to the Newsletter (if tentative, please mark as such). If you prefer to telephone, the number is 802-387-5905. Deadline for this information is Friday, March 23, 1979.

MORRIS IN NORTH AMERICA

A special feature of the April issue of the Newsletter is a listing of clubs and groups using morris or sword dancing in their activities. If you know of any new clubs which have formed during the past year, please inform the Newsletter of their name and contact person. Also helpful would be a postcard from existing clubs showing how they wish to be listed. Deadline: Friday, March 23, 1979.

TEAM NEWS

A feature of the American Morris Newsletter dependent on your letters, postcards, and telephone calls. Names of correspondents appear at the end of each club's news.

Binghamton Morris Men: "Things are regular here: RPM carries on. Some "little men"
have appeared as usual in the fall. How many will stick is always interesting to speculate on. We are doing Sherborne as a new tradition and will probably drop something as a result. At the fall Ale, Peter Klosky was elected Squire and Jonathan Lorentz, the Bagman. I remain as foreman.

John Dexter, Box 732, Earlville, NY 13332.

Fiddler’s Reach Morris has taken up longswords and has been practicing with them for the past few months. The team has also been dancing Border Morris during this time. In January we will get back to concentrating on Bledington. Paul Krakauske was recently elected Squire.

Paul Krakauske, 50 Gray Street, Portland, Maine 04102.

Minnesota Traditional Morris: "Since our former correspondent, David Nichols, moved to Virginia there has been no news of the MTM. After breaking in a goodly number of green apprentices (half a dozen or so) in June, we brought our troupe to the Minnesota Renaissance Festival during four of its six weekends in August and September. An infusion of fresh enthusiasm and skills came to us in the form of Jim Brickwedde, formerly of Willow Wood Morris in Buffalo. From Jim we picked up Ilmington Maid of the Mill, which greatly enhanced our show at the Fair, and some bawdy singing which unfortunately caused more backs than heads to turn."

"In October we danced for the grand opening of the Saltari Folkdance Coffee House which is at least half under the illustrious guidance of Ed Stern. We then put away handkerchiefs, sticks, and bells, polished the rappers and long swords, and began gearing up for Christmas. At this writing, Betty is preparing her thinning hair and beard and the Doctor is distilling his ink-a-tink for the customary Mummers Play which will accompany the sword dances."

"During parts of September and October, our musician Gary Schulte managed a tour of the Owatowings, bringing back many interesting reflections from the Morris homeland. This has not deterred our peripatetic fiddler, however, from forcing us to dance sword to the first violin part from the William Tell Overture, all manner of Irish jigs and hornpipes, and excerpts from Joe Venuti!"

Stephen Parker, 434 N.E. 4th Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55413

Men of Houston: "Christmas is drawing nearer and it looks as if the MoH will be pretty busy for the season. With any luck we should have the Kirby Lonidade Mumming Play knocked into shape for Christmas. We took out the song since it’s really a Pace Egg Play and now it looks quite suitable."

"You also might be interested to know that the ladies have gotten tired of just being groupies and have just started a Morris side of their own. At present there are four of them at it and therefore need at least two more dancers to make up a side."

John Vivian, 3804 Villanova, West University Place, Houston, Texas 77005.

New Towne Morris Men: "Some highlights of the fall and winter were dancing at a wedding in Connecticut, the Pinewoods Morris Men’s Fall Tour, and dancing morris and mumming for the Irish Art exhibit in Boston. Plans for the coming year include a possible early spring tour with Marlboro Morris and Sword, and dancing at the wedding of Heather Menninger and Mark Wilke soon after May Day celebrations."

Mark Wilke, 90 College Avenue, Somerville, Massachusetts 02145.

Willow Wood Morris: "Morris continues in Buffalo although at times we have a struggle to get a set of active dancers. We have a core of eight fairly experienced dancers and several new beginners. Over the past year we have appeared at the Buffalo Folk Festival, several community events, and have had a few tours around the city. The weekend of October 1 we hosted fifteen members of Green Fiddle Morris from Toronto. In that tour we danced both in Buffalo and in Niagara Falls, Ontario. It must have
been one of the few tours to dance in two nations. We also travelled to London, Ont. to dance with Forest City and to Toronto for the Toronto Morris Ale. There seems to be growing interaction of teams in the Great Lakes area. Teams from Buffalo, Toronto, London, and Ann Arbor have danced together several times in different cities. We would welcome any other teams in the region to join in.

David Conant, 459 Auburn Avenue, Buffalo, New York 14213.

Marlboro Morris and Sword: "Our fall practices were organized as a "master class" exploring some new traditions in order to increase our abilities as individuals. We examined Chipping Campden, Bledington ("hooking to rule"), and Bucknell (with the hey as taught by Roy Dommett at last year's Ale). Beginning in January, we will haul out our Headington, Tisington (women), and Lichfield (men) from the moth-balls and begin preparing for spring. Plans for the 1975 Ale appear below."

Tony Barrand, Box 51, Marlboro, Vermont 05344.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ritual Dance Weekend: The Country Dance and Song Society of America will hold its second Ritual Dance Weekend at Hudson Guild Farm near Netcong, New Jersey, over the weekend of March 2-4, 1979. Program chairman for the weekend will be Tony Barrand and staff will include John Dexter, Fred Breuning, Jim Morrison, and Selma Kaplan. There will be sessions on Performing the Morris in the Streets, The Art of a Morris Jig, Buffoon Dances, Dancing as a Fool or Hobby Horse, English Longsword, and others. Social dances of ceremonial occasions will be featured on Saturday evening. Contact the headquarters of CDSSA for more information: Country Dance and Song Society, 55 Christopher Street, New York, N.Y. 10014. 212-255-8895.

Marlboro Morris Ale: Marlboro Morris and Sword is pleased to announce that the fourth Marlboro Morris Ale will be held over the weekend of May 25-28, 1979 at Marlboro College in Marlboro, Vermont. The program will be changed somewhat this year to allow for more touring in neighboring towns in Windham County on both Saturday and Sunday. On Monday there will be the customary alley dancing at Poncho's Wreck in Wilmington: the proprietor insists that it is traditional.

The facilities at the college force us again to limit the number of clubs attending this year. We have sent invitations to sixteen clubs, most of whom have been in existence for at least two years. We are also making a special effort to encourage teams from the Southern states to attend. Mass dances for the Ale will be different this year to introduce some fresh material into mass dancing situations (Headington 29th of May being the exception). The new dances will be: Bampton Maid of the Mill and Step and Fetch Her, Bucknell Room for the Cuckolds (stick) and Willow Tree, Bledington Morning Star and Young Collins, Adderbury Bluebells of Scotland and Shepherds Hey.

-- Tony Barrand, Squire, Marlboro M & S

NEWSLETTER SPECIFICS

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

As you reported in your last issue, we had the Binghamton invasion here last summer, where they made a good impression with their dancing, but had one or two nubs administered to them on certain occasions. You might care to note that "Ancient Ed" Szymanski completely omitted to mention one of the occasions the Binghamton men enjoyed most when over here: their day out with London Pride Morris Men (my team). They enjoyed fine weather, fine dancing situations, reasonable populace, reasonable company, and reasonable ale. Not surprising, though, that Ed failed to mention it since he was a notable absentee that day, having chosen to go off and visit the Hartley Morris Men. The other BMM spoke with real pleasure of their day out with us.

Michael Blansford 29 October 1978
St. Paul's Cray, Kent

We were surprised to see the name New Cambridge omitted from your list of "Morris in North America" in last April's issue. Perhaps it was overlooked because "everyone knows that team." However, while not being on the list hasn't hurt us any, some of our friends may have unnecessarily lamented our "passing." Many New Cambridge men, living further and further apart, have helped to sprout new teams where they live—most notably (and unflaggingly!), Roger Cartwright, NCMH's founder. But we still find the days to get together to dance. You may want to note then, at least as a hopeful sign for the longevity of morris (and friendships) that one of the oldest teams in this neck of the world is still plodding along, with some of the same problems that plague all teams: distances, personalities, scarcity of good pubs, etc; but also occasionally sharing the morris' strongest joys: dancing out with the sureness and quality of a group that has worked, and laughed, a long time together.

Mark Wilke 27 December 1978
Somerville, Mass.

[The editor regrets the omission and was working on the best available information at the time.]

LAST LAUGH: The Morris as a Household Word

The Boston Globe displayed its increased "Morris Consciousness" on two occasions last fall. Tom Kruskal clipped two different articles which mentioned morris dancing in passing:

"New England has a rich folk music tradition... There are folk festivals, fiddle festivals, and banjo festivals; Morris dancers, contra dancers, and square dancers... But precious little folk music on the radio."
(from "A Place for Folk at WGBH," The Globe Calendar, October 12, 1978.)

"The next thing we know they'll be teaching Morris dancing and disco on the T [Boston's mass transit system]."
(from an article describing the Transportation Authority's latest idea to increase interest in mass transit by putting locally written poetry on buses and subways, The Boston Globe, October 17, 1978.)

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