WOMEN'S MORRIS GOES TO ENGLAND

The special feature promised in the last issue was partially mailed: Morris Sunderland's article had not arrived two weeks after the copy deadline. The Newsletter presents one half of the feature here: an account by members of a women's team's trip to England during the summer of 1979. --FMB

Twelve members of Ring o' Bells spent 2½ weeks in June touring England. We danced with twenty-two teams, four of which had separate men's and women's sides, and saw another twenty at a meeting of the Morris Ring. Hereewith are a few observations of morris on its native soil, particularly women's morris, which began six years ago and is now booming. (Those interested in a full account of the adventure should contact our official log-keeper.)

Among the women's teams we saw, we were struck by the great variety, both in types of dances and in approaches to dancing. In addition to the Cotswold morris familiar to Americans (it is not true, as some had tried to convince us, that no women's teams dance Cotswold), there are less well-known traditions (such as Wheatley and Stanton Harcourt) and lots of North-West and Border morris. British sides are also less hesitant than us to invent dances and even whole traditions: Derby Crown has created a Derby tradition which is wholly original and one of the most exciting things we saw. The approaches to dancing range from that of Ladies of Green Willow (Bunraston), who have chosen to dress extremely prettily (long gingham dresses with lacy smocks and embroidered handkerchiefs) and dance in a "feminine" style, to that of Phoenix, who wear trousers and make a show of being "masculine" -- breaking sticks intentionally and pouring beer over their heads. The teams that impressed us most were those that had stopped trying to impress people and had gone on with the business of developing their own style, be it the precision and exuberence of Derby Crown or the vigor and expansiveness of Windsor.

We found less knowledge of the morris than we had expected. Many dancers knew little about the history or the "standard" repertoire; many had never heard of the Sharp and Bacon books. They learn primarily from other teams and from occasional workshops at festivals. Because of the lack of Country Dance and Song Society-type classes and the inaccessibility of Ring instructional material, many women's sides must learn second-hand through their husbands (in fact, a good many sides are made up of wives of the local men's side).

Of the men's morris we saw, in general the Cotswold morris was less impressive than other forms. We saw first-rate North-West morris and rather "definitive" Lichfield of Green Man and Handsworth's long sword were high points of the trip.

As a women's side, we encountered some hostility from individual men. Curiously enough, some of those most opposed to women's morris had never seen a women's team dance! We found that a lot of this hostility evaporated once we started to dance and were seen to be moderately competent. Men were absolutely amazed, however, that we had neither a male musician (many, but not all, English women's sides do) nor a male
driver ("But who drives the van?"). British sides tend to do considerably more drinking and less dancing than American ones, a situation that sometimes left us feeling we had not had enough dancing, even though we were doing it every day! We were, however, very impressed by British hospitality. We were treated practically like royalty, and were greeted with everything from homebaked goodies (decorated with American flags and sword locks) to boat trips, civic ceremonies with Mayors, and castles to dance in. Everyone was interested and surprised to learn about American morris; few had any idea of what is going on here. Several teams expressed interest in coming to the States. Windsor Morris is thinking about 1981. If they do come, don't miss them!

SPRING CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Every year in the April issue of the Newsletter appears an impressive survey of clubs' touring dates on this continent. Although not intended as an exhaustive listing of American morris activity, it does give one an idea of the extent to which others are involved in dancing. 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 dates are tentative, please mark as such). If you prefer to telephone, the number is 802-387-5985. Deadline for this information is FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 1980. Please do drop a note; it only costs a dime!

MORRIS IN NORTH AMERICA

Another annual feature 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. Keep us in mind by sending postcard requests to existing clubs showing how they wish to be listed. Please observe the same deadline: FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 1980. Thank you!

TEAM NEWS

A regular 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. A special thank you to all of the club's which sent news for the current issue. --FM

Belles of the North: "Minnesota now has another Morris team! A women's club pulled together informally last May and now has dubbed itself the Belles of the North. There are currently about twelve members. Jim Brickwedde of the men's team has been functioning as foreman and Lauri Levin has been the squire. As there is no organized bag yet, a 'bagperson' has not emerged. We decided to do a different major tradition than the men and have begun with Bampton and a sprinkling of Ilmington and Headington dances. Our debut performance was given in November at a fundraiser for the Saltair Folkdance Coffeehouse and was received enthusiastically. We took great pleasure in prickling the pride of the men by laying claim to being the only legitimate team in Minnesota (Parliament has dictated only that women may not legally be prevented from dancing Morris)."

Lauri Levin, 12016 Melody Lane, Minnetonka, Minnesota 55343

Binghamton Morris Men: "Our new officers are Bob DeLuca, squire, and Nate Lord, bagman. The year was again an active one starting with our Gilbertsville weekend and ending with our Harvest Feast. The feast held an added highlight: during the presentation of a mummers play outside a Chestnut Street abode, three police squad cars converged on the scene with lights flashing just as the villain bit the dust. It has
Greenwich Morris Men: "Just had a fantastic tour with Pinewoods, et al, in Boston [in October]. Now we are preparing for the Christmas Revels in New York City -- long sword, Abbots Bromley Horn Dance, morris, etc. We will be continuing morris and sword throughout the winter."

Dan Stenzler, 19 Pheasant Lane, East Setauket, New York 11733

Lexington Morris Men (F): "Currently in Lexington, Kentucky, a club is about to start. Practices will begin in January with a good-sized group of eager folks new and old to the morris, so we expect to have some dances ready for the spring. We have no name as yet [November --FRM], but probably will be the Lexington Morris Men (or maybe Mama Mia's Morris Men -- from a favorite haunt)."

Don Campbell, 332 Duke Road #2, Lexington, Kentucky 40502

Marlboro Morris and Sword "Thinking that spring might be on its way (we have no snow), is brushing the cobwebs off of its springtime Cotswold repertoire. Planning is underway for the fifth Marlboro Morris Ale (see Announcements --FRM). A new crop of women dancers has been working since the fall and are fitting nicely into the women's side. Rumors are afoot about a men's rapper set forming."

Fred Breuing, R.D. #1 Box 9A, Putney, Vermont 05346

Men of Houston: "It seems as if we have been dancing out about every second weekend, which has been somewhat frustrating as we have not been able to learn many new dances. Is should quieten off for a few months now [October letter --FRM]. Lots of internal
John Vivian, 3804 Villanova, West University Place, Houston, Texas 77005

Minnesota Traditional Morris: "While we cannot take total credit for the wave of May-like weather that blankets our region, the MTM will not exclude the possibility of some influence with the seasons. Perhaps the Morris workshop we shared with the Belles of the North so sharpened our dancing that the climate had no choice! Tony Barrand's and John Roberts' work with us was certainly a high point in the history of the club; we hope to have them back."

"In November the rappers came out of the bag and we developed a snappier team than we have had in some time. The other half of the club worked up the Ampleforth long Sword dance and their characters for the traditional Christmas mummers play. The Minnesota Sword Ceremony visited the Courage Center for the Handicapped (our bagman: 'I thought you brought the swords!'), and gave performances at the Landmark Center in St. Paul and at our fifth annual series at Butler Square in Minneapolis. A very interesting show took place at the Public Library where our two mid-winter fools, Ray Field and Nick Lethert, joined forces, in a nut around the neck of a devil fool."

"The year 1980 will begin with our dancing at the squire's annual Twelfth Night celebration. We are planning to open our annual Folk Festival and a chance of a visit from some of the Carlisle Morris. The seasonal events will be celebrated as usual. Here's higher capsers to all in the new year!"

Stephen Parker, 424 N.E. 4th Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55413

Pinevoods Morris Men: The club had a busy fall starting with the 14th annual fall tour of Cambridge and Boston, Mass., and ending with participation in the Christmas Revels, also becoming an annual tradition. Our squire Rick Conant took a Pinevoods balirc to England to confer an honorary membership on Douglas Kennedy in December. The club is hoping to return en masse in the spring for a two- or three-week tour and is practicing regularly throughout the winter to prepare for that.

J.H. "Shag" Graetz, 50 Moulton Road, Arlington, Massachusetts 02174

Sunset Morris Men: After several unfruitful attempts over a number of years, the Los Angeles area now has a morris team! A telephone call in late October from its guiding force, Gene Morrow, informed the Newsletter that "thirteen guys and three musicians have been practicing for two months now" on selected Headington and Adderbury dances. The big question is: will their choice of a local name enable them to appear in closing scenes of future films?" Gene Morrow, 3919 Maxton Avenue, Woodland Hills, California 91364

Westerly Morris Men "performed at the four sold-out performances of the Twelfth Night Celebration of the Community Chorus of Westerly." Apparently they were coming in buses to see the Westerly men perform their 'Westmoreland' mummers play. "In January we will meet to work out our plans to go to England as a team. We have been invited to take part in the annual rush cart festival with the Morris Men of Saddleworth near Oldham. The Manchester Evening News reported, 'The Americans will be yanking the two-ton cart in a fertility-religious ceremony. During the ten-mile haul, they will call at more than fifteen public houses in Uppermill, Greenfield, Dobcross, and Delph; then there will be a country dance. The next day they will attend a church service — the rushes used to be laid on the floor — followed by wrestling, dancing, and a face-pulling gaming contest.' Squire of the 'Saddleworth Morris' men, Peter Auborich, said, 'Apparently the Americans hold their own Morris dances in the States, following traditions brought over by the first settlers. But they don't have rush carts. One of the group saw ours last year and wrote asking if he and his friends could join in
George Utter, c/o The Westerly Sun, 56 Main Street, Westerly, Rhode Island 02891

Rumors of new clubs: New York City, that home of millions, may finally be getting another men’s morris team. John Dexter, recently moved into the “Big Apple,” reports that he is “thinking of another club here ... perhaps the Rigor Morris?”

John Dexter, 250 Elizabeth Street, New York, New York 10012

OTHER GROUPS

The Newsletter follows all leads it receives about possible morris activity in North America. As a result of inquiries, two groups responded describing their involvement:

A.B. Combs Med-o-larks: Seventy-one seventh and eighth graders belong to this folk-dancing club in eastern Kentucky which performs “all types of folk dances from many foreign countries as well as some morris dances.” They perform at other elementary schools, hoping to spur interest in folk-dancing, and also at “nursing homes in our area, and every year they are the first to ask us back.”

Marvin Meadows, c/o A.B. Combs Elementary School, Combs, Kentucky 41729

Folk Ensemble of the James Madison University Dance Theatre: Another group with an international repertoire with an emphasis on American folk dance (“we get more requests for clogging than anything else”), this group gives concerts of dance from several foreign countries (Israel and Mexico, as well as an English suite with rapper, Cotswold morris, and country dances). They have learned their English material from Jim Morrison of Charlottesville. “The performing Ensemble is only part of the Dance Program at JMU. We also offer classes in international folk, American folk and ballroom forms of dance, in addition to modern and ballet ... Our program also includes a dance major and minor and a graduate program leading to a Master’s Degree.”

Ed Howard, Instructor of Dance, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va. 22807

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Re the author of “Bells Have Turned Green” (published last issue as “author unknown” —FM8), I was told by the English singer Johnny Collins that the song was written by a group which took the name “ROBOT NIMB,” an anagram of BOB, RON, and TIM. They are three members of Herga Morris who also sang at the Herga Folk Club from which, I understand, the morris team developed.

John Roberts
Wilmington, Vermont

I am interested in maintaining contact with yourself and the Morris scene generally in the States. After all we colonials should stick together! If you know of any morris men (or ladies) who are planning on visiting this country, you can put them in touch with me and I will see to it that they are looked after wherever there is a Morris side over here.

John Miles, Squire
Australian Morris Ring
3/2 Durham Close
North Ryde
NSW 2113
Tel: 888 2275 (W)

Australasian
299 5470 (W)
Ritual Dance Weekend: The Country Dance and Song Society of America announces a weekend at Hudson Guild Farm in Netcong, New Jersey on Friday, February 29 to March 2, 1980. There will be classes in Cotswold and border morris, rapper, long sword, and ribbon and stave dances. The staff will include Andy Barrand, Tony Barrand, John Forrest, Lee Ellen Friedland, Paul Friedman, Curt Hayashi, John Rowlands, and Program Chairman Jody Evans. Special features: English-style ceilidh (Friday), contra dance with ritual dance demonstrations by participating teams (Saturday), new films of the beat ritual dance teams in England, and a lecture on the development of the sword dance by scholar and rapper expert John Forrest from England. More detailed information may be obtained from CDSSA, 505 8th Avenue, New York, NY 10018.

"Clog Dancing English Style," a weekend course sponsored by the School for Traditional Dance and Song, will be held in Brattleboro, Vermont on the weekend of April 11–13, 1980. Intensive classes in solo English clog (including waltz and reel steps, as well as the hornpipe step) and the Northern counties' three-hand reels, ranta, and polkas will be taught by School instructors Tony Barrand and Fred Breunig. Films taken last summer of dancers in England will be featured during the weekend and Saturday night's dance will include traditional North Country dances with stepping. For more information, please write to the School for Traditional Dance and Song, P.O. Box 51, Marlboro, Vermont 05344.

Marlboro Morris Ale: Marlboro Morris and Sword club is pleased to announce that the fifth Marlboro Morris Ale will be held on the weekend of May 23–26, 1980 at Marlboro College in Vermont. The program will be similar to last year's Ale with touring of local towns on both Saturday and Sunday, and the traditional alley dancing on Monday. The facilities at the college again limit us to inviting sixteen clubs, all of which have been in existence for at least two seasons. We are inviting a number of clubs which have never been to an Ale, including several from great distances. Mass dances will be the same as last year with the following exception: Fieldtown Step Back and the familiar Balance the Straw will replace the Jigwell dances. The other dances are: Headington 29th of May, Hampden Maid of the Mill and Step and Fetch Her, Bledington Morning Star and Young Collins, and Aiderbury Bluebells of Scotland and Shepherds Hey.

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