THIRD MARLBORO ALE

The third Marlboro Morris Ale was held over a blistering hot Memorial Day weekend with sixteen visiting clubs in residence and representatives of another eight or nine clubs attending as guests of other teams. Close to 270 dancers and musicians processed onto the Maypole field for the Saturday demonstrations and mass dancing where twenty-one teams performed (including the local elementary school's girls' side, Northampton Morris, and Troy Morris who were there for the day). Prize for greatest distance travelled went to Berkeley Morris which drove from California in an open pick-up truck. Other clubs attending were: Binghamton, Black Jokers, Fiddler's Reach, Forest City, Greenwich, Hearts of Oak, Marlboro, Moose Mountain, Muddy River, Pokingbrook, Newtowane, Pinewoods, Ring o' Bells, Sourwood, Strong, and Westerly.

Activities for the weekend followed the pattern of the two previous years: morris dancing during the day with country dancing and carousing at night. Sunday's tours covered virtually every town in the county and all converged on Newfane, Vt., for a grand spectacle of dancing for that community. Several tour routes passed popular swimming holes which made the heat a little more bearable.

During the evening hours there were special displays of other forms of morris dancing. The Black Jokers treated the Saturday dinner line and the Sunday Newfane stand to a Calusari dance from Yugoslavia. Often cited as a cousin of English Morris dancing, the Calusari dancing involves high stepping (with solo parts), waving of sticks, and ringing of bells: all very exciting. More familiar were a rapper dance by Muddy River, a longsword dance and play by the Marlboro Women's team and another by the Green Mountain Hommers, a Garland dance by Muddy River, a raucous Brimfield dance by the Marlboro Men, and a tongue-in-cheek "clog morris" (Southern Appalachian style) by Sourwood. Ring o' Bells presented a hilarious "Mummy's" play which featured Mother Nature, a fight between Jeanne d'Arc and the Turkish Delight, followed by an unsuccessful attempt at raising the dead by the Registered Nurse.

Special guest of this year's Ale was Roy Dommett, well-known morris man and scholar from England. He showed his films of traditional sides in England (some dating from the 1930's), made extensive notes about American morris, and taught a workshop on Monday morning to all who were still standing on Day 3. His impressions of the Ale follow as a separate article. Before and after the Ale weekend, Roy met with clubs in New York, Boston, and Marlboro for various kinds of workshops. He was probably glad to get back to his job at home for a little rest!

The final event of the Ale was the popular afternoon of dancing in the alley by Poncho's Wreck, a pub in Wilmington, Vt. Dancing by more than two sides was difficult in the alley, so there was much carousing during the set dances and jigs of the afternoon. It was a loose, relaxing finish to an exhausting weekend.
I asked Roy Dommett to write to the Newsletter regarding the 1978 Marlboro Morris Ale. His response:

My impressions of Marlboro Ale - Green mountains, 40°F, black fly, baked pigs and porter and the "Culture Shock" of skin bathing and peanut butter and jello sandwiches. In the trip I met May Gadd, Arthur Cornelius & Jim Morrison & now appreciate the pedigree of morris teaching in the USA. It preserves some of what has been changed in the UK & helps account for the current high standard of basic technique. However, there do not seem to be enough dancers with this sort of Pinewoods/CDSS background in basics to continue to support a phenomenal expansion & there is the risk, as in the UK, of a dilution & a drop of standards through lack of experience, knowledge, and example. A self help system is needed - using film? videotape? The morris appears inventive and interpretive, but a detailed knowledge of the extent of the dance tradition is still needed to avoid excesses and to retain the magic of the non-Cotswold morrises.

Marlboro is fun, but it encourages what exists. It is uncritical and inspirational rather than helpful. Marlboro should not change but other opportunities to meet should be created. Does anyone relax just trying other morris? The morris seems wedded to Country Dancing - is this not restrictive? Is it not forcing towards mixed morris?

Can an attempt be made to distinguish between morris for performance and morris for fun? Not all dances learnt have to be done in public. Standards and style mean concentration and clear aims and selectivity, and often a curtailment of repertoire; ye morris is a means of self expression and personal enjoyment, so variety and novelty has a place. Of course, each club sets its own patterns and is its own ultimate judge. Before arguments on one sex or mixed events, please remember that gatherings, tours, and feasts are experiences of real value if the sexes are separated as well as if they are together. There is room for both. Different approaches, like different morris traditions, should be a part of everyone's experiences.

My general comment for everyone is the need for hard soles on shoes, larger handkerchiefs, and attention to bells particularly in practice. A really good side can be told just by listening. There is a general lack of knowing what to do with the morris fool - at least in this the UK might help.

American dancers who have already appeared in the UK have impressed by their standards of dancing. Sides will be welcomed to the UK if present standards are maintained or improved. Beware of the danger of picking up passing fads.

Roy Dommett

OTHER COMMUNICATIONS FROM ENGLAND

Windsor Morris, generally accepted as one of the best women's morris teams in England, edits a magazine for the Women's Morris Federation entitled Morris Matters. After his recent trip to the States, Roy Dommett put them in touch with this Newsletter and we set up an exchange of our publications. In future issues, the Newsletter hopes to reprint some articles from Morris Matters.
Jenny Joyce, writing for the magazine, added, "We hope to broaden the scope of the magazine beyond 'women's morris' as such, as we don't like defining Morris by sex!"

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.

Fiddler's Reach Morris: Summer activities have included dancing with other Maine teams on June 17-18 and at the Bowdoinham Country Fair on July 4th. On the weekend of September 22-24, the club will dance at the Common Ground Country Fair. "This is a wonderful old fashioned fair. Fiddler's Reach would like to invite any team to come and dance with us that weekend." If you are interested contact:

Maggie Baum, 5 Potter Street, Brunswick, Maine 04011

Marlboro Morris and Sword: After a hectic month of May, June offered some but not a lot of relief. In addition to a workshop with Roy Dommett on Eynsham, a team dinner, a day of dancing, and a festival, the club had practice and preparations for the Brattleboro, VT., July 4th Parade. Parade officials had no category in which to judge our Northwest Processional Morris complete with sixteen dancers and brass and drum band, so they gave us an "Honorable Mention" in the marching band section at the awards ceremony.

Tony Barrand, Box 51, Marlboro, Vermont 05344

The Men of Houston publish a monthly newsletter to accompany the journal of the Houston Folklore Society, The Cottonpatch Rag. In the June issue, Squire Dave Rowan expounded on the future of the club after its first year of existence. As with many clubs, "the main problem at the moment is that of recruiting." Editor John Vivian also warned his club to not "forget the ceremonial side of morris dancing. We are in the middle of creating the 'Houston Morris Tradition,' and when one considers the differences in climate between Houston and the English Cotswolds, this is probably a good thing. Let's just make sure that any changes we make are made with the last 800 or so years of tradition in mind."

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

Minnesota Traditional Morris caught the Newsletter up on quite a bit of news:

"Shortly after Christmas we picked up a fine new fiddler, Gary Schulte. Gary does advertising for radio and TV and has recently come up with a tape of a bizarre version of Shepherd's Hey. So if you hear an ad from General Mills or Pillsbury (both Minneapolis based) to the tune of Shepherd's Hey, you'll know where they got it!"

The club toured quite a bit this spring as far away as Mankato, Minn., and Ames, Iowa, and now are sponsored by Saltair, a folk dance coffee house started by MTM founder and foreman, Ed Stern.

"On May 1 we had our annual tour in downtown Minneapolis with somewhat disastrous results. Somewhere in the middle of our first dance, a cab driver, busy watching us, veered out of his lane and was hit by another car generally making a mess of the cab just 15 meters from where we stood. No one was hurt, but we were expecting one of the drivers to have words with us; so we put together a quick processional and were off up the mall."

Gary Johnson, bagman. The club plans to dance with Ed Stern's folk dance performing group this summer and then at the Minnesota Renaissance Fair in August or September.

David Nichols, 1057 25th Ave. S.E., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55414
Mountain Morris Men "will have a workshop in Berea on October 6-8. Roy Dommett will be our coach and we will alternate workshopping and performing at the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen's Fair (attendance at the Fair this spring was 20,000). The workshop will be for experienced dancers only. Applications will be available through Brent Combs.

"Wayne Allen is dancing a lot of Morris in England. He will be teaching morris at Christmas School this year."

John Ramsey, CPO 287, Berea, Kentucky 40404

Northampton Morris: "After an exciting spring of touring, highlighted by our 'Cherry Blossom Tour' of Washington, D.C., with the accomplished Foggy Bottom team, we will be on vacation for the month of August. The bag has now changed hands and is with Jill Weinstein, Box 114, Shutesbury, Mass. 01072. Our latest additions to the team are two lachenal concertinas purchased by our musicians, Carol and Dan!"

Susy Williams, Box 84, Petersham, Massachusetts 01366

Three Rivers Morris is still working its way back to a viable club, although (as of April) were "not ready to tour yet." They did perform some dances at a program of historical dance given by the Country Dance Society of Pittsburgh on April 28 in Monroeville, Pa. "We are being outfitted to a great extent by and through the Pittsburgh center. Paul Bossart has given the center a fine set of rapper swords which we plan to put to good use. The center is also buying material for bells and baldric which are being assembled by Mavis Bridgewater. Unlike many teams we are not and have no intention of becoming an independent club."

John Ramsay, CPO 287, Berea, Kentucky 40404

San Diego, California, does not yet have an organized morris or sword club, but Elaine Regelson has been leading classes and hopes that eventually something will develop. She writes, "A fair number of the dancers in the Morris class, including some of the most dedicated ones, are in their 50's and 60's. I also have an 11-year-old when he can come."

Elaine Regelson, 1351 Reed Avenue #1, San Diego, California 92109

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Last year I had several rounds of correspondence with Russell Wortley during the period in which I was reprinting his article, 'Music and the Morris.' At that time, he consented to have the Newsletter publish sections of his letters. -FB]

Just pause to consider the question What is Morris? What makes it different from other kinds of dances? If you take morris in its correct wide sense, it is certainly not a particular kind of dance, for morris can mean the Cotswold type of Morris dance, the clog morris dance, sword dance, reel-type morris dance, country-dance type morris (molly dancing), even a mummers' play. The performers of all these are traditionally called "morris dancers" and the significant factors they have in common are (1) they are all male; (2) they adopt some form of disguise or special costume; (3) they normally perform at a particular season of the year.

Look a little more deeply into the 'occasional occurrence of women's teams in the tradition' (your words). Sharp knew of only two instances in the Cotswold area (Spelsbury and Blackwell) and he writes "in each case, be it noted, the experiment was short-lived and regarded as a joke." (EFDS Journal, May 1914, p.8). In the north-west early this century, as the genuine clog morris declined (owing to the lapse of the rush-bearings), the basic form of the dance was taken up in dancing schools for young girls who gave displays & I believe this continues in a few places: the result, however pretty and well-drilled, can only be a travesty of
Russell Wortley has since expanded his ideas into an article entitled "The XYZ of Morris" ("not intended to suggest that what follows is the last word on the subject, but merely to indicate that the subject is by no means as simple as ABC.")

Just received my newsletter and wanted to let you know how pleasing it is to be able to keep track of what's going on in the States.

I have been in England now for eight months and am having the time of my life in morris. I dance with the Bedford Morris Men and am extremely fortunate to have David Welti [squire of the English Morris Ring for the past two years. -FB] as my instructor on a weekly basis. The Bedford men are a fine group, both as dancers and as people, and have made this "Yank" feel right at home.

Wayne Allen 12 April 1978
Bedford, England

Thank you for your letter of April 6 inquiring about the Claymont School and its involvement with the Morris. The school program is based on many years of research into the techniques of human development by the Institute for the Comparative Study of History, Philosophy, and the Sciences, Ltd., established in 1946 by the eminent British philosopher and scientist, the late John G. Bennett.

The Institute's first major educational project involving approximately 100 students each year for a ten-month program was the International Academy for Continuous Education at Sherborne House in Gloucestershire, England. With the acknowledged success of the Academy, and taking into account the great number of American applicants to attend, Bennett initiated the Claymont School and society before his death in late 1974.

During the spring of each year, the Academy at Sherborne and now the Claymont School in Charles Town, W. Va., teaches Morris Dance as part of the program of studies. Only about a dozen of the Sherborne dances are recorded and those only to the researches of Cecil Sharp, who had traced one of the old last remaining dancers to a hamlet in Berkshire. The Sherborne Morris Men were among the foremost of the Cotswold dancers. They were renowned for their Galley or Gallery, as they called it, and they used other technical variations on the traditional steps, some of great complexity.

The Sherborne custom, shared by one or two other villages, of carrying a cake, impaled on a sword to be eaten for luck, was considered by Sharp and other to be a vestige of a sacrificial or festive ritual too ancient to be recorded. The traditional Sherborne dress, apart from the customary white breeches and pleated white shirts, consisted of blue stockings and black billy-cock hats, trimmed all over with
ribbons, with a red sash worn diagonally across the chest. The right hand handkerchief was red and the left white. Sherborne Pete was always held, with dancing, on Whit Tuesday. The Fieldtown men were regarded as their great rivals.

The Claymont Morris team carries the Sherborne traditions. The team is a different group of people each year, dancing at our two fairs which are open to the local community and at some of the nearby spring festivities. So you see, we don't even fit the category of being a dance society.

Thanks again for the newsletter. We do enjoy seeing that there is so much Morris activity in the States.

Barbara June Koppel
Charles Town, W.Va.
May 4, 1978

ANNOUNCEMENTS

* Copies of Lionel Bacon’s Handbook of Morris Dances are still available. Write for details: Morris Sunderland 13 Park Lane Henlow, Beds SG16 6AT ENGLAND (Telephone: Hitchin 814186)

* Cassette tapes of morris music are also available. They were put together "not as 'musician substitutes' but as a stimulus to good morris music." Ask for details from Morris Sunderland (address above). "If there are particular U.S. needs, tell us, as the production of tapes seems haphazard," says Roy Dommett.

* Charles River Books, Inc., 59 Commercial Wharf, Boston, Mass. 02110, is now distributing Cecil Sharp’s The Morris Book (2 volumes). Parts 1, 2, & 3 are included in Volume 1; parts 4 & 5, in Volume 2. Price is $17.50 apiece. The news release states, "We are offering a 20% discount to members of the Morris Society who order directly through us."

* The Country Dance and Song Society, with national headquarters in New York City and centers and associated groups all over the country, offers a wide range of morris and sword books, records, and materials at reasonable prices. Write for a catalogue.

Summer address: c/o Pinewoods Camp, RFD 6 Box 451, Plymouth, Mass. 02360
After Sept. 1: 55 Christopher Street, New York, N.Y. 10014

NEWSLETTER SPECIFICS

The American Morris Newsletter is published four times per year (April, July, October, and January). Subscriptions are available to anyone at $2.00 per year; please make checks payable to the "American Morris Newsletter" and send to:

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

Morris or sword clubs may subscribe at a lower group rate ($1.50 per person per year for a minimum of six copies of the Newsletter sent to one address).

Copy deadline is usually the last day of the month preceding publication. Next deadline is SEPTEMBER 30, 1978. Please send team news, articles, letters to the editor, subscriptions, renewals to the above address by that date.

**SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL MORRIS TEAM******SUBSCRIBE TO THE AMERICAN MORRIS NEWSLETTER**