



American Morris Newsletter



*A publication
devoted solely to
English Morris and Sword Dancing.*

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

In April 1977 in this space, there appeared my first "Letter from the Editor" announcing the birth of the American Morris Newsletter. After three and a half years I find the need to pass the pen on to others. I have been encouraged along the way by many different people, always enough to keep me working on that next issue. I sincerely hope that you, as readers and subscribers, will continue to support and encourage the new editors: Steve Parker and Jim Brickwedde of Minnesota Traditional Morris and Laurie Levin of Bells of the North. In passing along the newsletter, I will urge them to use their imagination to improve the publication. There is always room for improvement, so I hope you readers will give the new editors your ideas for changes. A postcard takes but a few minutes to write. Let them know what you like and don't like, and offer some news of your club's activity, a new dance, song, or whatever. Use the Newsletter...it's yours! --FMB

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.

Bells of the North: "We had several performances in May and June including May Day dancing at Powderhorn Park and Saltari Folkdance Coffeehouse. We joined the Minnesota Traditional Morris for their annual dance down Minneapolis' Nicollet Mall on May Day. Most recently we danced at the St. Paul Arts Festival in Rice Park in front of the historic Landmark Center building. Upcoming performances include the Leprechaun Days in Rosemount, Minnesota, this July.

"Last fall for our first performance several of the dancers came up with these new words for Bonny Green Garters which we feel are particularly appropriately sung by a women's team:

Oh here's to the laddies, we love them so well,
Though some they are rather slow starters;
Off with their baldrics, and off with their bells,
But leave those bonnie green garters.

Denise Kania, 4000 20th Ave. So., Minneapolis, Minn. 55407

Bloomington Morris: "We're back to dancing mixed here in Bloomington. Working on Fieldtown new...previously we danced only Adderbury. We also have a rapper team (again mixed) and while the sword team has danced out a couple of times, Morris won't until May 1st.

"This will be our second May Day. Last year we started with the sun on the courthouse square, which is now immortalized in the film "Breaking Away," and then moved on to a local breakfast joint and then to the University's Dunn Meadow for the rest of the day. We'll probably do about the same this year,"

Frank Hall, P.O. Box 9, Bloomington, Indiana 47402

Forest City Morris: "After a moderately busy spring the club is getting ready for an even busier summer. Major events of the spring included: an exhausting workshop with Tony Barrand of Marlboro which helped not only our repertoire but also our organization; a performance at the University, "An Evening in an English Pub" with much beer, music, dancing, and mummung; an appearance at the Aylmer Spring Garden Show: back by "popular demand:" a trip to Vermont for the Marlboro Ale; and a performance at the annual Eldon House Garden Party, an historic site in London. The latter provided a chance to rub drinking elbows with the social elite (they champagne, we beer)...a nice contrasting picture.

"Still to come are several folk festivals and our "mini-Ale" with teams from the Great Lakes Region."

Tom Seiss, 37 McKenzie Ave., London, Ont. N62 1V1

Ha'Penny Morris: "Ha'Penny Morris had a terrific time at the Marlboro Ale and is continuing the high spirits with two weekend tours in July -- a New York winery tour with Hearts of Oak and the Canterbury Fair (NH). After a few weeks off in August (while various members vacation in Africa and the west coast, etc.,) we will resume in September -- hopefully with a Cape Cod tour!"

Jackie Chew, 19 Central Road #1, Somerville, Mass. 02134

Lexington Morris Men: "Lexington Morris Men regret the departure of their founding Squire, Don Campbell, but are happy to announce that they are continuing to meet twice a month under the leadership of their new squire, Gene Combs. On the Fourth of July, Lexington is planning a full day of activities starting downtown about 9 AM with a parade at 1 PM. The Lexington Morris Men will dance for the amazement of crowds gathering downtown before the parade."

Peter Rogers, 1538 Bluebird Lane, Lexington, Ky. 40503

Marlboro Morris and Sword: "The team was busy for most of the spring with regular practices, our annual schedule of tours (Cotswold morris), and organizational preparations for the Ale. Special activities in June were a tour of southern Vermont ending with an overnight stay at the elegant Barrows House in Dorset, VT, where we danced for Barbara and Charlie Ketchum (of "Country Journal"); and an appearance at the Clearwater Revival Festival in Croton-on-Hudson, New York. For June practices, we donned our iron-shod clogs in preparation for our third annual appearance with processional clog dancing in the July 4th parade in Brattleboro, VT. For the latter, our marching band has grown to double digits including trumpets, baritones, trombone, French Horn, clarinets, saxophone, piccolo, side drums, bass drum, and cymbals!" [Ed. Note: Article on Marlboro Ale published May 1980, "Country Journal"]

Dinah Breunig, RFD #1, Box 9A, Putney, VT 05346

Men of Houston writing in early April were "just starting to come out of our winter hibernation. We should be dancing out six times this month, mainly for a new pub opening. Last month we spent a couple of days at "The Houston Festival" dancing both officially, on stage, and unofficially, outside every beer tent."

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

Minnesota Traditional Morris: "Maytime was merry indeed! We had a chance to kick it around with the Green Grass Cloggers at the Minneapolis Folk Festival, celebrated Mayday with the Bells of the North along Nicollet Mall, had several fine evenings at Palmer's Bar, and topped the season with a trip to the Marlboro Ale. Highlights for us included camping, touring, and vocalizing with the Westerly Men (our thanks to Peter Leibert for the treetop chandelier), exceptional tours with Ring o' Bells, Marlboro, and Spruce Hill, and just having a chance to dance ourselves ragged between morris and contras. Happily our fool, Nicholas Lethert, withstood the withering glares of shock and surprise as he plaited himself around and through the middle of Marlboro's set for a particularly memorable

rendition of the Vandals of Hammerwich, after which he was soundly, though jovially, thrashed by them for his hilarious impertinence. This initiated a give and take of fooling between us that really brought us together and made the trip.

"Upon our return we held our annual team ale to discuss directions for the year and elect officers. Larry Paulson, five years a dancer with MTM, finally failed to evade elective office as he was elevated (?) to the office of Bagman. To the great relief of all, the former bagman, Steve Parker, was kicked upstairs into the Squire's hat formerly worn by Arthur Knowles ("the Ayotullah").

"We look forward to a fine summer full of local festivities -- the St. Paul's Arts Festival, the Old Saint Anthony Riverfront Festival among them -- as well as trips to the Thunder Bay Ontario Summer Solstice Festival and the North Country Folk Festival in Ironwood, Mich. Later in the year we'll probably do the six weekends at the Renaissance Fair."

Steve Parker, 434 N.E. 4th St., Minneapolis, Minn. 55413

Mountain Morris Men "had a great day of dancing in Lexington, Ky. The brilliant sun, intense green at Cooperstown, and colorful kits with jingling bells had us all intoxicated with the springtime ritual of morris. No need for crowds, we were dancing for ourselves!

"Thanks to Don Campbell and the Lexington Morris Men for organizing the tour and adding rousing song to the event at Joe Bolognas. The Brasstown contingent made their contribution and also the Berea ladies during their brief appearance performing North Country Morris.

"Another highlight of the spring was dancing at the Guild Fair at Indian Fort Theater in Berea on Saturday, May 17th."

John Ramsay, CPO 287, Berea, Ky. 40404

Newtowne Morris Men: "After a grand weekend in Marlboro we gladly await the July wedding of Janis Murtaugh (Ring o' Bells) and our own intrepid musician, John Ramshaw. We lose them then to Australia for a few years but we've set aside a quantity of port to celebrate -- and entice! -- their eventual return. We wish them all the best!

"Also, to squelch rumors to the contrary, we did win the Monday morning Marlboro Ale bagel-baseball game: final score was Newtowne-5, Binghamton-3. Our advice to Binghamton: keep practicing!

[Ed. Note: The Newtowne Men were featured last winter in an issue of the Boston Phoenix; a copy of the article was included with the team's news. It is always fascinating to see how the media deal with morris dancing. This was quite well done. Thanks for the article! --FMB]

Mark Wilke, 22 Prescott St., Arlington, Mass. 02174

Sunset Morris Men "have been very active in the 1980 touring season. The pinnacle of our spring was on June 14 when we danced at a celebration of Queen Elizabeth's official birthday. An elegant party arranged by various Anglophiles and British expatriates was held at Long Angeles' 'posh-est' hotel, the Beverly Wilshire. It was a white tie affair with the presence of such notables as the Consul General. Not wanting to appear crass, the Sunset Men arranged for a Cadillac limosine (luckily our Fool works for a limo service) and arrived at the mail Ballroom entrance ready to dance. As the butlers reached for the door handles, we burst out and broke into "Blue Eyed Stranger." It was definitely the best entrance of the night!

"We 'turned professional' this year upon the signing of a contract to perform at the Renaissance Faire for six weekends. It was a huge affair where we danced for 4,000 people a day. Other engagements will include dancing at a garden party at the home of the Consul General (in spite of our appearance at the Queen's birthday) as well as normal touring.

[Ed. Note: I'm intrigued by Sunset's "uniquely Californian kit" about which Squire Murrow refused to elaborate!]

Gene Murrow, 5919 Manton Ave., Woodland Hills, Ca. 91364

Three Rivers Morris "is in great shape. We now have five musicians among us: Chris Hodgkin, Allison Thompson, Nancy Prentice, Abigail Thompson, and Andreas Hayden. That's about half of us. We are practicing mostly Headington, Bampton, and Adderbury. There will be plenty of dancing out this spring. With the rest of the Pittsburgh Country Dance Society we performed for the opening of the Century III Mall -- an enormous new shopping area in Pittsburgh's South Hills. We have been engaged to dance out at Carnegie-Mellon University's Spring Carnival; will do Lichfield Ring o' Bells and Flamborough sword as part of the English Country dance show in the Pittsburgh Folk Festival; expect to tour the Three Rivers Arts Festival; to be engaged for morris alone at Century III again, and are looking for other amusement and gainful employment. We practice Saturdays. Visiting morris dancers are invited to work out with us."

Albert Blank, 107 Buckingham Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15215

Victoria Morris Men: "We have been meeting weekly for practices in recent months, and we have performed for several special events: at the local folk-music club where we also taught the audience some easy English country dances, to music provided by their own musicians at the Victoria Music Festival, where other entrants included a Phillippine group performing a dance with lit candles; at a folk dance party following a local workshop in Hungarian dances; and at a May Day outing in the park, organized by the Society for Creative Anachronism, whose members wore medieval costume and presented a short play involving Robin Hood and Friar Tuck. We are also due to perform during Victoria's Folkfest celebrations at the end of June.

"A women's team, that includes several of the "Morris wives," is now well established, under the tuition of Pat Whittier, formerly of Toronto. Being expert at the needle, they already have a full set of costumes. They performed at several of the events mentioned above, without duplicating the men's dances as they are building up their own repertoire. They have progressed remarkably well in a short time."

David Winn, 2124 Pentland Road, Victoria, B.C. V8s 2W4

Rumor Department: Is Jon Ericson, formerly of Binghamton, really in Tallahassee, Florida, trying to start a morris team?

FIFTH MARLBORO ALE

This year sixteen clubs from eight states and provinces gathered at Marlboro College for a weekend of dancing and merrymaking. Except for a little heat on Saturday, the weather was ideal for touring. After the traditional Saturday morning dancing around the maypole for each other, teams broke off to tour in Brattleboro for the afternoon. After a massed show on Brattleboro common all returned to feast and dance at Marlboro. Sunday's tours throughout the county have also become tradition: townspeople remember the visits each year by morris dancers from exotic places such as Virginia, Minnesota, and Ontario!

Special memories of the 1980 Ale (other than those already pointed out in the team news!) include the debut of Court Square Dancing Society whose lyrical performances of ribbon and stave dances charmed every audience. This is the first team formed on this side of the Atlantic whose sole effort is the performance of these special dances, and their efforts certainly proved to be a highlight of the weekend. Another notable event for the dancer's memory book was the imaginative and well-done version of Bampton Furze Field performed by the Newtowne Men: two sets danced together with the head of the sets rotating with each chorus so that each set of heys went a different direction after the hands round. This dance was one of many American creations displayed throughout the Ale; several teams brought and performed dances of their own making that had been developed within the framework of the particular team's principal tradition. The ultimate American dance, Mr. Softy, which appeared last year, was welcomed back like an old friend!

The Marlboro Club thanks all who came for helping to make the fifth Ale such a success: Albemarle, Binghamton, Court Square, Foggy Bottom, Forest City, Greenwich, Ha' Penny,

Kingsessing, Minnesota Traditional Morris, Muddy River, Newtowne, Pinewoods, Ring o' Bells, Spruce Hill, and Westerly.

HERE & THERE

A high school age group of dancers from Ilfracombe in North Devon will be touring the United States this summer. Arriving on July 6th they will be performing Cotswold morris (boys) and Cheshire morris (girls), as well as Country Dances and a Mummers Play. Their leader, Fred Ward, is a member of the Barnstaple Morris side. The group, numbering twenty, has some unscheduled time in early July and early August; anyone interested in providing hospitality and in seeing their show should contact John Ramsay, CPO 287, Berea, Ky 40404.

The Westerly Morris Men wing it to England on August 12 for two weeks of dancing with English clubs. Their itinerary shows appearances in the Cotswolds, perhaps Wales, Oldham, the Lake District, York, and Saddleworth for a Rush Cart weekend. The Newsletter wishes both of these groups a happy and safe trip!

EDITORIAL

An American "Morris Ring"?

In May 1977 a meeting of individuals representing fourteen or more existing clubs decided in a true independent-Yankee fashion that there was no place for an American "Morris Ring." Two years later, John Vivian of the Men of Houston wrote to the Newsletter hoping to re-open the question. The resounding silence which followed implies that most people still do not want a supra-organization.

This is probably for the best. Communication among sides will take place on a local level and, as long as someone is willing to keep this Newsletter going, there will be contact on a larger scale as well. Quality of dancing which John Vivian raised will take care of itself, too. Few people in my experience enjoy hacking around at something for more than a short time. After the novelty wears off, either they want to learn more and get better, or they lose interest and drop out.

I remain a Yankee in favor of independent local clubs. -- FMB

MORRIS IN NORTH AMERICA

(Additions and Corrections)

Kentucky: Lexington MM: Gene Combs, 236 Irvine Rd., Lexington, Ky. 40502

Minnesota: Bells of the North: Laurie Levin, 12816 Melody Lane, Minnetonka, Mn. 55343

Regional: New Cambridge MM: Bob Doucet, 67 Easton Rd. #3, Allston Mass. 02134

REMINISCENCES

Looking back to Vol. I, no. 1 of the Newsletter and seeing the date (April 1977), my first reaction was, "that's not very long ago!" A lot has happened since then, however, even though several American "traditions" had already begun (the Marlboro Ale and the American Travelling Morrice).

The number of North American clubs has more than doubled. In that first issue, there were twenty two clubs listed (13 men's, 4 women's, 2 with men's and women's sides, and 3 dancing mixed). In Vol. IV, no. 1, three years later, fifty clubs were listed which did not include unconfirmed rumors of several others. The fifty 1980 clubs include 24 men's clubs, 12 women's clubs, 6 clubs with men's and women's sides, and 8 clubs dancing mixed.

Does this mean that in 1983 there will be well over one hundred clubs in North America? (It should be noted that there is a slight mortality rate: only 17 of the 22 clubs from 1977 are still dancing in 1980.)

Other notable happenings in the last three years have included trips across the ocean in both directions by individuals and groups (e.g., Roy Dommett, Morris Sunderland, Tubby Reynolds, Peter Brown this way; and Binghamton Morris Men, Berea Dancers, Ring o' Bells, and soon Westerly that way), establishment of new gatherings (Toronto Ale, Binghamton Sudze, London, Ont., Mini-Ale), and the creation of a truly American buffoon dance (Mr. Softy). Finally, the Newsletter witnessed with great sadness the passing of too any friends and supporters: May Gadd, Karl Rodgers, Louise Chapin, and Russell Wortley.

I wish the new editors success in taking the Newsletter to new heights, and I implore you readers to support them as much (even more) than you have me! Thank you for your support these last three formative years.

Fred Breunig

BITS AND PIECES

Bob Collier, new Squire of the Autraliasian Morris Ring, has offered to write an article describing the "morris scene" in Australia. It will appear in a future issue of the Newsletter...keep watching for it.

A final word of sincere thanks to the Smith family of Putney for their collating, folding, and stuffing work on the Newsletter over the past several issues. This time-consuming job has always been a pleasure with the help of John, Maggie, Karin, Monica, Russell, Sam, and Benjamin! Thank you!

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NEWSLETTER SPECIFICS

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