Labour Day weekend in Toronto was the occasion of the first Toronto Morris Ale: a great success all round, and the forerunner, we hope of many such Ales to come.

The decision to hold the Ale was not made until well into the summer, and everyone at Green Fiddle Morris had been a little apprehensive that this late planning might make it difficult for many teams to make arrangements to come. In fact, four morris teams, comprising some seventy-five dancers and musicians, made it to the Ale. Green Fiddle were joined by Ann Arbor, Forest City, and Willow Wood Morris, for a most satisfying (if exhausting) weekend’s dancing. Several other teams who had made plans to come were unable to make the trip due to last-minute complications of one kind or another. In the event, however, numbers proved just about right for our fledgling Ale organization, and the process of putting this first Ale together has given us the experience to plan for a greater number of teams, and larger numbers of dancers, next year.

The majority of the dancers arrived on Friday night at our headquarters for the weekend: a good-sized and well-located hall set in a small park close to Fiddler’s Green Folk Club. Most members of the visiting teams were accommodated in the homes of Green Fiddle dancers (one of the advantages of having a morris team with a large membership!) and by the early hours of Saturday morning everyone had finally located beds. After meeting and breakfasting together in the hall, all four teams made their way to a large green area at the heart of the University of Toronto campus. Here, part of the morning, and most of the afternoon, were spent dancing for ourselves, and for those passers-by who were interested in staying and watching the proceedings. The weather was glorious, and indeed it remained so for the whole weekend. On Saturday evening, everyone participated in a splendid ceilidh-cum-country-dance, at which we enjoyed the playing of the Toronto Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, who generously offered their services to benefit the Ale. Much good carousing, much good music, and much good dancing (including some fine Irish stepping) until the wee small hours.

On Sunday, the dancers split into two groups for touring. Each group had a part of the Green Fiddle team with it, and the groups, after dancing throughout the day before appreciative audiences in such diverse places as the Metro Zoo and Black Creek Pioneer Village, met in the late afternoon for a grand tour finale in front of Toronto City Hall. Here, a crowd of about four hundred people watched a spectacular processional, and some fine dancing for about an hour, as the four teams took turns in displaying dances from a goodly number of different traditions. Sunday night saw a return to the hall for supper and some excellent singing, playing, and dancing (not to mention drinking!) in an informal "Talent Night."

Finally, on Monday morning, those who were still on their feet were treated to a very fine workshop on dances from the Bledington tradition, led by our special
The Binghamton Morris Men arrived in England fifteen strong including our lady musician, Selma Kaplan. Our arrival at Thaxted Ring Meeting raised a few complications since we had been "uninvited" to participate because of our mixed status. However, due to the efforts of Morris Sunderland and members of the Thaxted team, we were allowed to follow a tour on Saturday and dance in towns away from Thaxted. We got out of kit for the evening festivities, but we did participate in the alley dancing and proved that the B.M.M. can keep up with the English dancers in the partaking of the ale, etc.

Other highlights of the trip included a special performance for Douglas Kennedy at his house, an old converted boat set upon a wooded lot; numerous tours with other teams (special thanks to our hosts P. Munson, Irvine Reid, Philip Smithers, and Peter Lund); and joining the Headington Quarry men at practice where we received some tips on the Headington style.

Last but not least, we joined the Bampton men in some dancing one day at a "Fete" outside Oxford and another day at the "Eagle" in Bampton, where we danced, played "Aunt Sally," and drank "Morrell." Selma's trip was made when she played for a jig danced by Frances Sharpold, squire of the Bampton team. Shortly after, the Bampton men presented the B.M.M. with a plaque made by a local artist. It was of a Bampton man dancing a jig. In all, the trip was "quite an experience."

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: Aside from the trip to England (see above) and regular touring, the club co-sponsored the third American Travelling Morrice in August. Dancing with the New Cambridge Morris Men, they toured the Finger Lakes Region of New York State with great success and great merriment.

Ed Szymanski, 2820 Smith Drive, Endwell, N.Y. 13760.

Bluemont Morris in Bluemont, Virginia, has been "practicing since last February and have had three workshops with Jim Morrison. So far we dance the Ilmington tradition only. We have had mixed sides when we've danced out, but we are planning to work toward separate men's and women's sides. We've danced out several times in local towns, and are now practicing hard for performances in local fall fairs, especially the Bluemont Fair, September 16-17. Up to now we've been Bluemont Morris, but we may change to Snicker's Gap Morris in the future."

Warren Hofstra, c/o Skyfields Farm, Rt. 1, Box 139, Bluemont, Va. 22012

General Knox's Morris Men: "Our young team has chosen General Henry Knox as its namesake and patron not so much for his position as Revolutionary military leader, but rather for his rôle as a landed baronial patron of our district in Maine, a supporter of jovial events and surroundings, and a giver of lavish banquets who died
of a chicken bone which lodged in his throat at one of his own feasts. How magnificent a death. Our first dance-out was on July 2 at a private party on the farm of one of our members in Camden. Aside from low-key comfortable touring throughout the summer, we danced at the July 4th celebrations in Thomaston, Maine; the Rockland, Maine, Seafood Festival, August 5th; the Rockport, Maine, Folk Festival the evening of July 8th; Common Ground Fair, Litchfield, Maine, September 23rd."

John Van Sorosin, Old School House, Martinsville, Tenants Harbor, Me. 04860

Green Fiddle Morris has had "a really busy summer's dancing, quite apart from the Ale [see page 1]." Mariposa gave us a splendid boost and helped us sort out a good many things in our dancing. Having worked our way through the Bucklington tradition, we've made a start this summer on Bledington and were delighted when Michael Blanford agreed to do the Alle workshop on this tradition and taught us two more dances - Morning Star and Trunkles. Shortly our dancing-out will taper off, and we'll be back at some hard winter practice. Bledington is, I think, going to be our major field of endeavour this winter - it's a super tradition, but a tough one, I think we're all aware."

David Parry, 402 Palmerston Blvd., Toronto M6G 2N8 Ontario

Marlboro Morris and Sword: Following a triumphant July 4th parade entry (Northwest clog morris), the club relaxed into its customary summer of rest. In September, we dusted off bells and vests to travel to New York City to dance with Ring o' Bells and Greenwich Morris Men. Just prior to this writing, the women's sword team took its sword dance and mummers play to the streets for the first time (their performances over the past two years have been under more informal and formal circumstances). Plans are to have this two-day tour of southern Vermont and New Hampshire towns (at the peak of the fall foliage season) become the yearly outing for the women's sword team.

Tony Barrand, Box 51, Marlboro, Vt. 05344

Mountain Morris Men are also dancing as this Newsletter goes to press. Their Annual Ale is being held at Berea College in Kentucky where they are learning from Roy Bonnett in an extended weekend workshop and dancing out at the Fall Fair of the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen.

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

Pinewoods Morris Men at this writing are dancing on their thirteenth annual fall tour of Harvard and Cambridge. "This year we're branching out: the morning stops are at Harvard, the afternoon stops in Boston." The club held its annual Ale and general meeting at Pinewoods Camp in August and re-elected Shag Graetz as Squire and George Fogg as Bagman. It was followed by the traditional Pinewoods Camp tour.

J.M. (Shag) Graetz, 50 Moulton Rd., Arlington, Mass. 02174

The Victoria Morris Men crossed Canada to take part in the third annual "Festival de Folklore de St. Octave de l'Avenir", held June 29-July 2. St. Octave is an abandoned village (now reduced to three buildings) in the hills of the Gaspé peninsula overlooking the St. Lawrence estuary. The festival, efficiently run by a local organization with help from the Canadian Folk Arts Council, attracts thousands of visitors. Other performances included Quebecois, Acadian, Philippine, Italian, Polish and Egyptian dances by groups from Quebec itself and from Manitoba and Prince Edward Island. Later in July, Victoria had a surprise but very welcome visit by the Pomfret Morris Men, of Pontefract, Yorkshire. They had been asked to perform at the Calgary Stampede, but found on arriving there that through a misunderstanding they had been left out of the program. They moved on to Victoria where at short notice they lined up a week of performances, received enthusiastically by large audiences of locals and tourists. The Pomfret group specialize in Bucknell dances which they perform with great verve. They wear the traditional Bucknell costume and include in their number a Fool and a Hobby-Horse.
A. What is Morris?

The participants in various seasonal customs in many parts of England are in their own localities called "morris dancers".

According to the time of appearance, they celebrate either the turn of the year (at Christmas, New Year's Day or Plough Monday), the coming of spring or summer (at Easter or Whit Sunday) or the harvest of autumn. In any case they are looked upon as bringers of luck; thus they serve the community at large and in return collect contributions of money and/or refreshment.

Although called "morris dancers" they may act a play (Mummers' Play) or they may dance morris dances which vary in character and sometimes in name in different parts of the country. The teams or gangs are usually limited to quite small numbers; they are exclusively male and invariably wear some kind of disguise or special costume. Thus "morris" is the traditional name, not just for a kind of dance, but for a seasonal observance taking the form of a ritual perambulation of a locality by a small group of disguised male performers who give their display not for fun, nor primarily as an entertainment, but with the unspoken purpose of promoting the cycle of the seasons.

Where the tradition is unbroken the local people feel that the year is incomplete without the annual appearance of the "morris dancers".

While these features belong without exception to all performances traditionally called "morris" it should be remembered that the converse does not necessarily apply: certain seasonal customs such as the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance and the Hooden Horse of East Kent exhibit all these characteristic features, yet have never been called "morris".

(1) Mummers' Plays

These usually belong to Christmas, Plough Monday, or Easter and folklorists have identified four or five types of play which differ in content, season of performance, and geographical distribution. Thus the Hero/Combat type ("King George and the Turkish Knight") belongs to Christmas and is widely distributed over the country, the Wooing Plays (Plough Plays) are performed on Plough Monday and belong to the East Midlands, the Pace-egg Plays, and the Soulers' Plays belong to the north-west and are performed at Easter and All Souls respectively while the Top-Plays of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire again belong to Christmas. It should be added that the performers of mummers' plays are not everywhere known as morris dancers: they may be called mummers, plough jags, pace-eggers, soulers, guisers, tipteers, or morris dancers, according to locality.

(2) Morris Dances

With the mummers' plays, several varieties of morris dance can be distinguished. Six main types, geographically separated, each have their characteristic season of performance. The best-known (at least in the southern half of England) and the kind most commonly seen in the current folk dance revival is the Whitson morris of the Cotswolds. Characterized by predominantly white clothing, the waving of handkerchiefs and the sound of bells tied round the shins, the Cotswold morris includes some of the most elaborate traditional dances in step and figure and seems to have reached a higher degree of artistic and aesthetic development than any of the others. This being the case, it is not surprising that it was these dances that appealed so strongly to the dance collectors and to sophisticated revivalists; and by the same token the expression "morris dance" is wrongly taken to belong exclusively to this type.

In the Tyneside area "morris dancers" perform at Christmas time with double-
handled flexible strips of metal known as rappers and are now commonly referred to as sword dancers though these implements bear little resemblance to swords. In Yorkshire the implements used by the sword dancers are rather more sword-like being single-handled, but blunt and again held at both ends by the dancers. Here again the performers are known locally as "morris dancers" and perform around Christmas or on Plough Monday.

Lancashire and Cheshire are the home of yet another type of morris dance, the clog morris with its spectacular costume and headgear and vigorous stepping using wooden-soled clogs. Closely associated during the 19th century with the harvesting and carting of rushes (formerly used to strew the floors of churches), these dances are usually performed in August. Simpler forms of dance are used by the morris dancers (generally called molly dancers) of Cambridgeshire who perform either on Plough Monday or Boxing Day and by the Christmas morris dancers of Worcestershire, Herefordshire, and Shropshire (for convenience called the Border Morris). The former dance the more old-fashioned of the social dances currently in the district (principally country dances), while the latter's dancing is based mainly on reels which of course are also social dances.

So we arrive at a conclusion which may appear anomalous to revival folk dancers: that a morris dance can be a country dance. In this case what makes it "morris" is simply the fact of its being performed by "morris dancers" as defined above. From here it may be argued that no dance should rightly be termed "morris" unless it is so performed. Not only should the performers be male and wear some kind of costume or disguise, but they should also perform regularly at the appropriate season of the year. (To be continued)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I recently received a letter from Roy Dommett who was in America not so long ago to investigate the "morris scene" there. He suggested that you might like to have an address list of the women's morris sides known to the Womens Morris Federation of which I am the current Secretary. I have therefore enclosed a copy and will send you any amendments or updated versions as and when they occur.

I shall be quite happy to receive any letters and enquiries from anyone if they think we can be of help to them in any way. We can in particular, perhaps, be a good contact for any female dancers since, as you might know, the Morrie Ring is very anti-female morris and our Federation was formed because they did not cater for us!

Val Parker
71, Goldings House
Goldings Crescent
Hatfield, HERTS. AL10 8UA

Ed. Note: The American Morris Newsletter would be happy to send a copy of the list to any interested person. Please send 75¢ to cover reproducing and postage. -PB

HELP WANTED: Small newsletter with circulation on both sides of the Atlantic desires volunteer help with production. Regional correspondents, columnists, feature writers; also assistance in printing and circulation department. Write AMN, R.D. 1 Box 9A, Putney, Vermont 05346.

The American Morris Newsletter is published four times per year (April, July, October, January). Subscriptions are available to anyone at $2.00 per year: please make checks payable to the "American Morris Newsletter" and send to the address on page 1. Copy deadline for next issue (team news, letters, articles, etc.) is DECEMBER 31, 1978.