





American Morris Newsletter

FROM THE EDITORS

As the cold winds blow here in Minnesota, your editors have proved once again that typing keeps the fingers from freezing. In the midst of cabin fever, we are still able to note that pots of crocus have appeared in the shops--spring (and Mayday) cannot be far behind. We must confess that we lied about the bulk mailing permit; it simply isn't feasible at this time. This issue, you'll notice, is slightly thinner than the last. We are trying to hold down mailing costs.

Apologies to anyone whose name we may have butchered in this issue or in the past. Team correspondents are requested to please print names to be included in AMN news or articles. Your editors are pretty handy with a dictionary, but we have no sourcebook for people's names.

A reminder--next issue is the 1984 directory. We will enclose an update note in newsletters for team correspondents. Please be sure and return the information promptly, so that your team can be included. Also, let us know now about any new teams you are aware of--let's try to keep the July corrections and additions to a minimum.

--Lynn Madow Dennis, co-editor

TEAM NEWS

Ann Arbor Morris and Sword (Ann Arbor, MI)

Ann Arbor Morris and Sword is still alive and well and going strong despite losing five teammates to the lure of the East (ah! the mysterious Orient!) Jeanne Hofstieger and Mary Bruchac moved to New Jersey and Massachusetts, respectively, and Bruce Sagan and Judy Barlas are spending an academic (not alcoholic) year in Wales prior to taking up new residence in Vermont. Not to be outdone, the redoubtable John Cavanaugh, for whom New England and even Wales were not enough east, has moved to St. Albans, slightly north of London. Marge has made a brief visit "home" to Ann Arbor to report that she has taken up with a gang of lunatics known as Wake Robin, and Rayna and David made a special trip across the ocean to check on Bruce, Judy, and John. We are happy to say that all three are flourishing - John has joined Hammersmith Morris and we joined Bruce and Judy at a weekly practice night for Aber Morris, a lovely bunch of people, composed, not surprisingly, of more English and American students than Welsh natives.

We have gained several very promising new members, including a sort of legacy from Kate Carey (once of Green Fiddle, now out in Canada's Wild West - thank you Kate, wherever you are!) Our weekly practices are normally at 5 pm Sunday but will be temporarily suspended during the upcoming holiday and travel season. Any morris dancers passing through are strongly urged to join us. Call 313-971-7267 for details. We are currently concentrating on Bucknell but will be maintaining some of our old favorites and undoubtedly dusting off Bampton, Adderbury, etc. in time for the Ale season.

Rayna Alsberg, 2345 Fernwood, Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Foggy Bottom Morris (Washington, D.C.)

The Voorhees-Kallina-Brown ticket was again swept into office in this year's November election. The foreman's chair is vacant, so we're sort of spreading those duties around as we work on mostly old stuff. We welcomed to the team Binghamton man Jon Ericson, formerly of the now defunct Tallahassee Morris, as well as Maggie Ericson and Julia Borland -excellent musicians both.

Big events of the year included our annual Walking Tour in which we were accompanied by the madcap Juggler Meadow men as well as the indefatigable Rasta Bob. (By the way, Rasta, the 1984 tour will be on the fourth, not the third, weekend in June.) Some of us went to the fine ale in Toronto and stayed with ex-foreman Roger Avery. The year ended with our participating in the Christmas Revels - and we thank you Shag Graetz for teaching us Abbots Bromley for that as well as for your general good advice.

Does anyone know who those morris men are who appear in the Men Without Hats video of the song "Safety Dance?" And what is that dance they are doing?!

Paul Kallina, 412 North Cleveland St., Arlington, VA 22201

K.C. Checkerboard Morris Team (Kansas City, MO)

I was pleased to have the listing of our morris team in your recent newsletter and am sending you herewith some additional information:

Our name is K.C. Checkerboard Morris Team. The team was founded in 1978, and as listed in the newsletter, I am the contact person. We are a women's team, and perform garland dances, Cotswold Morris, and clog. Our rehearsal days are Tuesday, Saturday, and Sunday.

We have just finished our seventh season at the Kansas City Renaissance Festival (in 1977 at the first festival, we were not organized as a morris team, but did perform English country dances).

We perform periodically throughout the Kansas City, western Missouri, and eastern Kansas area.

Betty Tillotson, 7617 Madison, Kansas City, MO 64114

Midnight Capers (Cabot, VT)

We are a mixed side of about 12 people, dancing together almost three years. We are doing mostly Headington, Bampton and Stanton-Harcourt.

Janet Van Fleet, R.F.D. Cabot, VT. 05647

Minnesota Traditional Morris (Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN)

El Sol dipped to its lowest influence in many decades over the northern midwest as MTM bravely brought its swords to bear in the battle of the seasons. Greatly renewed interest in sword dancing this year brought forth yet another offspring of the Minnesota Sword Dance Ceremony, this one motherless, having sacrificed old Beezum to shorten it up. The longsword group prepared Ampleforth again this year and a rapper team worked up the North Walbottle dance, the first time since the early years of MTM that flips have been used. All went well, except for one ill-fated attempt to demonstrate a facial landing, necessitating some emergency dental work. Squire Larry Klueh and mumming captain Rudd Rayfield managed most of the organizational work for the first annual Minnesota Sword Dance and Mumming Ale, described elsewhere in AMN.

The coming year's festivities will include a gala tour during the Minnesota Renaissance Festival (probably Labor Day weekend), during which the presence of any and all former MTM men is requested for hilarity, hijinks, and auld lang syne. The other major event planned this year is a tour of England between June 28th and July 17th. This was prompted by the emigration of former MTM dancer and squire John Cavanaugh (most recently of Ann Arbor Morris and Sword), who is rumored to be dancing with Hammersmith. Likely stops on the tour include visits with Windsor (Morris Federation), Fenstanton (Open Morris), Hammersmith and, we hope, Bampton.

For the grim and frigid present we take up bells and hankies again shortly to hasten the sun May-wards. Since we have no apprentice dancers this year, we have settled on the difficult task of studying up Longborough. Orders are in for ankle and knee braces and it should prove--at the very least--a good way to keep warm!

Steve Parker, 438 4th Street N.E., Minneapolis, MN

Pokingbrook Morris (Albany, NY)

Pokingbrook Morris started ten years ago in the Poughkeepsie, Kingston, and Millbrook area of New York. We drifted north over the years to become the one and only morris team of the New York Capitol District area. We dance as separate men's and women's sides, presenting the dances of Bledington and Fieldtown respectively, with occasional favorites from Adderbury, Bampton, Ducklington, and Hinton-in-the-hedges. In recent years we have been graced with the fine music of Selma Kaplan, and the renowned ales of Albany brewmaster and men's foreman Bill Newman.

This fall, we enjoyed several highly profitable gigs in the area, courtesy of the Albany city and county governments, making this year's Banquet a real celebration. We plan several workshops for this fall and winter, and a very full spring touring season. We hope to join forces with some local teams for some of these tours. Several new dancers have joined us this year, bringing fresh enthusiasm and talent to the group.

We practice on Wednesday nights, starting at 7:30 pm at the Howe Library in Albany. Afterwards we usually gather at a local establishment for beer, pizza and songs. If you are passing through, feel free to drop in. Tours of the historic Newman's Brewery and other high points of the Capitol District are easily arranged! And we always welcome opportunities to dance with other sides--our place or yours.

Bob Weissberg, Squire, 1509 Clifton Park Road, Schenectady, NY 12309

Spruce Hill Morris (Philadelphia, PA)

Philadelphians seem to have developed a penchant for Renaissance Fairs and, much to our satisfaction, labor under the misconception that morris is some kind of Renaissance dance form. But, since weather has been unusually warm and sunny here, even in November, we have gotten in a lot of late summer and autumn dancing. The weekend before Halloween, we went to New York at the invitation of RingO'Bells and enjoyed a tour of Greenwich Village on Saturday which wasn't quite as rigorous as the NYC Marathon we (wisely) observed in Central Park the next day. In addition, we were lavished with that team's gracious hospitality.

Internally, we experienced a wildly successful open practice season, with nine enthusiastic, fast-learning good dancers joining the team. Spirits are high as we all learn Ducklington. This will add to our repertoire of Field Town, Headington, and Bampton. Ann Dixon is still at the fore, going strong in her fourth year in that position. Our squire is now Phyllis Rubin and Marilou Raines-Kaubin is superb continuing in her bag duties.

We look forward to wintertime performances and warm weather ales and tours.

Phyllis Rubin, Squire, 1018 Farragut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19143

Westerly Morris (Westerly, Rhode Island)

Westerly Morris sent the editors of AMN the following notice from their team newsletter.

"Morris Men Are Replaced by a Flute and Harp - Mrs Glenn called to inform your bagman about the December 8th gig at the State House. She said the committee voted to have a harp and flute duo instead of the Morris Men.

"We can't win all the jobs."

George Utter, 54 Elm Street, Westerly, RI 02891



THE FIRST MINNESOTA

Sword Dance

&

Mumming Ale

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA JANUARY 6-8, 1984

A Celebration of Midwinter Traditions

The Minnesota Traditional Morris in conjunction with the Ritual Drama Team of Lowry Hill, Minneapolis, hosted this year the first MINNESOTA SWORD DANCE AND MUMMING ALE, the weekend of the Twelfth Night--January 6,7, and 8, 1984. Long a pet project of Ritual Drama Team founder and MTM member Rudd Rayfield, the idea for an Ale received widespread support in MTM after our performances of longsword and mumming in the 1982 winter season. In July 1983 the team gave the go-ahead to Squire Klueh and Rudd Rayfield to contact teams and prepare for an Ale in 1984.

Now it is history: the results surpassed all our expectations--it actually went pretty well! including the cooperative weather shift that weekend from sub-zero temperatures to a very nearly balmy mid-winter thaw! The Ale started on the 6th of January at Art Knowles' noted 12th Night Party, and the following morning those that could move convened to tour Minneapolis and St. Paul in two groups for a full afternoon of public performances. A dinner and contra dance capped the day, during which the plays and dances were performed for all participants. Sunday morning we all got together for a brunch to officially close the Ale and say goodbye.

Teams travelling from afar were the Marquette Street Mummers (of Oak Apple Morris) from Madison, Wisconsin, performing their own contemporary mummers play; and from Omaha, Nebraska, the Prairie Waves Morris and Sword, performing the Swalwell Rapper Dance. Members of the Windy City Women and the Fox Valley Morris of Chicago attended as observers. From Minneapolis, the Bells of the North Morris fielded the Flamborough Slats Dance; and the Ritual Drama Team, its Lowry Hill Mummers Play. MTM's Rapper team danced the North Walbottle Rapper; and its Longsword team presented the Minnesota Sword Dance Play and the Ampleforth Longsword Dance. Attendance at the Ale was not limited to teams of the English traditions, and this first Ale was treated to an inspired adaptation of the Mummers Play from Ballymenone, County Fermanagh, performed by the Mooncoin Ceili Dancers of Minneapolis.

We had such a good time that in answer to the obvious question we say--yes!-- it looks like we'll do it again next year. Which Minneapolis groups will host it in '85 is an open question, but all early inquiries may be directed to Squire, Minnesota Traditional Morris, P.O. Box 7151, Mpls., Mn. 55407.

Larry Klueh, Squire MTM, 1936 Roblyn, St. Paul, MN55104

OVERSEAS MAILBAG

The Morris Federation

At their most recent Annual General Meeting, the Women's Morris Federation voted to drop the word "Women's" from the organization's title. The member clubs will now use the title of "The Morris Federation."

Stevenage Sword (Stevenage, Herts, England)

Stevenage Sword are a dance side of about a dozen members, mainly rapper with some longsword, based 30 miles north of London. We are members of the Morris Ring of England and this year is our 10th anniversary.

One of our interests is collecting badges (buttons) of other sides. Over the years we have met many Americans who often show an interest in our dance, and some have suggested that we contact you as you may be able to send one or two American badges to us. One in particular, we understand, features the sword lock.

If you could send a few badges we would be very grateful. If there is any charge, please let us know. Also, if there is anything that we can do for you please let us know and we will try to help.

Mike Nye, Bagman, 37 Sish Lane, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 3LS, England

ANNOUNCEMENTS

'Ritual' Dance Days at Pinewoods, July 2-6, 1984

By popular demand, 'Ritual' Dance Days at Pinewoods (Plymouth, MA) has expanded! The 1984 program offers three days of classes in Cotswold and Border Morris, Rapper and Longsword, and Clog and four evening dances. Pinewoods Camp's unsurpassable setting between two ponds also provides opportunities for swimming and canoeing. This year, we will be sharing the camp with the Boston Branch of the Royal Scottish Dance Society. Although separate programs are being organized, cross registration and/or participation in classes from both programs is available--even encouraged! The total cost, including room and board, will be \$117.50 (approx.) For further information, contact:

Bob Paul
18 Glendale Avenue
Somerville, MA 02144
(617)623-8055



IN THE BAG

with Arthur Knowles

One of the most widely shared experiences of non-traditional morris sides is the joy, strife, contentious wrangling and occasional bruised knuckles (to say nothing of egos!) accompanying the process of choosing a dance tradition. Or two or three. A newly formed side seldom has any problem in this regard. The side will dance what the founder or foreman knows and can teach. For the first couple of years, as the team is getting its collective feet on the ground (or rather, off the ground), a single tradition or perhaps two traditions are all that the dancers can handle.

But soon things begin to change. The team will go to an Ale and be exposed to various new and exciting dances. Or perhaps a more experienced dancer will join the side, bringing with him/her varying knowledge and expertise. Individual dancers may travel and dance out with other teams, bringing back glorious accounts of their journeys and ideas for new dances we simply must do. Even the staid and steady foreman may spread heterodoxy as he/she remembers some particularly transcendental experience in another tradition.

Without a truly autocratic and tunnel-visioned leader, things take their natural course, and the proliferation of traditions has begun. Many folks have the impression that my own Minnesota Traditional Morris is the epitome of this tendency: "Ah yes, the Minnesota Miscellany Morris, seven traditions, no waiting." This canard can be easily refuted. MTM performs six traditions only: Headington, Adderbury, Bledington, Ilmington, Bampton, Fieldtown--with eccentrics from Litchfield, Sherbourne, Eynsham, Bucknell, and a variant form of Bampton. Also a little border morris from time to time.

This proliferation is generally frowned upon by "serious" dancers as being, 1) untraditional, 2) unprofessional, 3) sloppy, and 4) tending to an inappropriate uniformity of style. All of which is undoubtedly true. It is also, 1) challenging, 2) exciting, 3) fun, and 4) not boring. This last is very important to a side which dances out a lot. However, in a move to improve the general level of our dancing and to alleviate confusion, Minnesota has chosen to pare-down our performance repertoire to a mere four traditions. The team meeting which resulted in this decision was a close and viciously fought trial of wills. Everyone had their own favorite dances and traditions, and those that they positively loathed. More often than not, one person's loathed tradition was another's love. A final compromise was worked out in a closed room where a set of the ranking dancers faced off with long sticks: four came out alive, and each was given only one choice of tradition. Thus are momentous and earth-shaking matters decided. This compromise disgruntled all parties relatively equally, as good compromises generally do. I am sure that this decision will stand unmodified--until our next meeting.

As a sop to those who pride themselves on their knowledge and ability in the Morris, I have come up with an idea for Morris Badges. Like the Merit Badge of the Scouts, Morris Badges will serve to recognize a level of expertise in the various dance traditions. A dancer who has achieved performance competency in a given tradition will be entitled to wear the badge of that tradition on his/her baldric or vest. These badges should not be large like team rosettes, but small enough that 20 or 30 can be worn at once without totally covering a baldric. Such semi-heraldic devices could serve in various ways. At Ales, when one is looking to form a pick-up side, for instance. In any case, they will make nice conversation pieces and stir up a lot of controversy.

In line with the above proposal, I am now announcing a contest to design the first batch of Morris Badges. Each badge design should be no more than two inches in diameter. It should depict some specific and easily recognized aspect of the tradition it is meant to represent. It must be readily reproducible by machine embroidery and it cannot contravene any of the generally accepted laws covering obscenity or pornography. Please submit these designs by mail to the American Morris Newsletter within the next sixty days. Winners will be announced and displayed in the next issue. Anyone found wearing a badge to which he or she is not entitled will be flogged publicly with wet handkerchiefs and forced to buy their own beer at the next Ale.



FROM THE TITLE-PAGE OF "KEMP'S NINE DAIES WONDER,
PERFORMED IN A DAUNCE FROM LONDON TO NORWICH." (1600.)

The following article is reprinted from The Morris Dancer with the permission of the editors and the author, Ivor Alsop, former Squire and current Archivist of The Morris Ring.

NOTES FOR MUSICIANS

a. Playing for your own Club:

1. Master your instrument so that most of your attention can be on interpretation and on interaction with the dancers, and only a little effort is needed to keep the tune right.
2. Make the effort to learn the tunes properly. It is very easy to inadvertently change a tune in the course of time. Take especial care not to confuse similar tunes in different traditions; often it is the few altered notes that makes the tune fit the particular dance.

3. Get the speed right. Play 'once to yourself' at as near the expected speed as possible, or possibly rather slower, as it is easier to speed up than to slow down. Be ready to amend the speed if necessary and watch the dancers. Keep a steady speed, not slowing down for the awkward phrase or interval. Play to the dancers; it is the subtle phrasing timing and emphasis that gives lift and life.
4. Play with a light staccato touch - and especially light for the bass on accordian or melodeon, or on a drum. Music should have plenty of 'holes' in it.
5. Aim at having a solo musician for your dances. Traditional instruments (whittle and dub, pipe and tabor) provide a clear tune and rhythm, and had a surpassing penetration. Modern instruments (accordian, melodeon, concertina, fiddle) are difficult to play adequately for Morris. It is not a valid solution to use more of them.
6. Dress suitably. You may well have to dress with greater attention to warmth than the dancers who have at least some exercise. It is possible to do this without looking like a stray member of the audience. Extra clothing such as 'long johns,' a 'tee' shirt worn under your normal shirt or a suitably decorated jacket are all useful.
7. Be prepared to make good use of a microphone if the occasion warrants it.

b. Playing with other Clubs:

1. Never join musicians playing for another Club without an invitation, and remember that it is not possible to give this once a dance has been started.
2. Never play your instrument - however quietly - anywhere remotely within earshot of the dance unless you are part of the band, and are physically close to them. Dancers, musician(s) and public will hear both lots of music. This applies equally to mulling over the tune being played and rehearsing your next show.
3. Massed dances, and their attendant massed band, result generally in atrocious music. It is not an occasion to try out an unfamiliar tune, even less to learn one as you will have difficulty hearing your own instrument and your uncertainty will take the edge off the music.
4. Play even more staccato in a band than normal, and look at and listen to the leader (and make sure that you have got a leader).
5. Bands playing for dances in public are not 'jam' sessions. A good rule is: the fewer the musicians the better.
6. No two players of harmonic instruments use the same harmonies. At least go extra easy with harmonies. Better still, don't play them.

Some thoughts for Musicians from the Wilstone Musicians Instructional

1. A Cotswold Morris Dance is a seven man team - the musician is as integral part of the whole as any dancer.
2. If possible, be also a dancer to better understand the music's importance and contribution.
3. The melody is the starting point for providing dance music, not the end point.
4. When starting, playing with an experienced musician helps to give confidence, but aim to be playing solo as quickly as possible, even if only for one or two dances.

5. Practise assiduously to gain full command of your instrument and be able to use all those techniques and subtleties that help the dancers.
6. Be 'one' with your instrument - make sure it is firmly and comfortably adjusted.
7. Insist on playing solo in public. The musician's rapport with the dancers must be debased, to some extent at least, by having more than one player who then have to turn their attention to playing together.
8. Be sensitive and responsive to the dancers' mood and needs. You cannot concentrate too hard on watching their feet.
9. Learn to make the instrument 'speak out' the rhythm clearly and precisely - through the use drum, bellows or bowing.
10. Try to get the music to lift the dancer off the ground rather than drive him into it.
11. Crisp staccato playing is required rather than 'mushy' legato. Spend the minimum of time touching the keys. Particularly important during stick clashing. Applies also to left hand on accordians/melodeons, tonguing on blown instruments.
12. Phrase the music to the dance with appropriate 'lead in' to each movement. Do not be afraid to add extra 'lead in' notes to suit your instrument.
13. Movements, stick clashing sequences, slow capers, etc. each have the 'light and shade' pattern. Reflect this in the music. Hence need to anticipate the dancers' movements.
14. A steady speed is important but subtle adjustments can be appropriate, e.g. staying with dancers during slow capers, or introducing the slightest hesitation at the start of a movement to help a team to be all together.
15. At the end of a dance, finish neatly when the dancers do. A dragged out chord is not necessary.
16. Play for the dancers with no compromise for trying to be 'musical' for the audience. The dancers will not appreciate it and the audience watching the dancing will probably not either.
17. When playing jigs, leave the dancer free to express himself and follow whatever speed and phrasing he chooses.
18. For massed playing - if it has to be - have a lead musician and follow him, not the dancers. Do not join in if you do not know the dance well. Always play ultra staccato to stop the total effect sounding 'mushy.' Make sure the leader has agreed to a signal for a clean finish.

These notes are the result of a weekend spent talking, playing and doing. My thanks are due to Jim Melville, Mike Chandler, Jim Catterall, Allan Jarvis and Leslie Nichols, all of whom contributed to the notes.

The American Morris Newsletter is published four times per year, typically in April, July, October, and January. Individual subscriptions are available for \$4 per year (overseas subscribers should add \$4.00 for air mail postage). Team subscriptions are \$2.50 per copy for a minimum of six copies sent to the same address. Back issue are available for 70¢ each plus postage. Please make all checks or money orders payable to American Morris Newsletter. Copy deadlines for submission of articles, letters or team news are the fifteenth of the month preceding publication. After that date, contact us by telephone at 612/379-2286 (Steve Parker) or 612/721-8750 (James Brickwedde).

Members of the editorial staff include James C. Brickwedde, Lynn Madow Denis, and Stephen Parker.

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**a publication devoted solely to
English Morris & Sword Dancing**

Vol. VII no. 4