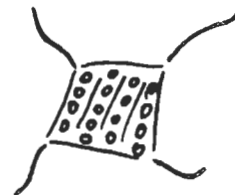




# American Morris Newsletter



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

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## EDITORIAL

### Can We Avoid "Overdancing?"

Several recent publications from England have addressed the problem of "overdancing." A Ring circular (January, 1979) states, "This problem is not a simple one and is getting increasingly complicated. Let me begin by stating quite clearly the size of the problem: we are in danger of having ALL Morris taken off the streets in many areas and in some this has happened already. By 'overdancing' of course, we mean that a site has more dancing than the local population or Town Council will tolerate and this may be two visits a year or a hundred." Apparently, there were some incidents where a visiting club neglected to obtain proper permission and failed to contact local sides about dancing in their community. The problem is indeed serious and is one result of having vast numbers of morris clubs (over 300) in an area the size of New England.

We, of course, do not have a problem of overdancing in North America; but the roots of the issue are something worth thinking about. As I perceive the situation, another large part of the problem is not only needing places for over 300 teams to dance, but also needing to find places for those clubs to dance every week from April through September or October! Indeed, many English clubs have a touring schedule which literally lasts for months. To me, that is overdancing.

I have come to feel strongly about the seasonal nature of these favorite rituals of ours. Cotswold morris really feels right danced in the springtime (May, principally). In my club, longsword has adopted Halloween for its annual outing. Certainly the earth is dying by late October and needs to be encouraged to come back by our death-and-resurrection play (Winter Solstice and Plough Monday are not sensible times to dance out in Vermont).

But more important than it feeling right for the performer, a seasonal calendar makes more sense to the spectators, one's neighbors, the people for whom you are dancing. They can understand a celebration of spring which happens in spring or a plea to a dying earth as leaves fall from the trees. They are willing to prepare cakes and ale or offer "coin of the realm" if the visitation is special to them. Gradually, they begin to look forward to the "day the morris dancers come" and then you have a tradition in the making. If they miss your dancing, they have to wait till next year when you return to the same place on the same day or weekend.

Then, in the end, the cycle comes round to where you started: the whole thing becomes special for the performer. Certain months take on a new significance and require extra involvement. In between, there is time for other aspects of one's life. Participation in the Morris takes on a longer range perspective; one thinks in terms of years and even decades and becomes more relaxed about the dancing because "there is always next year."

The Ring circular says, "... the reason for dancing morris [is that] it is a

ritual, and many clubs hold that our prime objective must be to perform this ritual on our home territory, irrespective of the site's audience potential. If we only dance in areas where we can be sure of a good 'bag,' we are debasing the Morris to the status of a sideshow." Its advice: stay at home and develop your own "traditions." Surely, this is the way to avoid "overdancing."

#### FOURTH MARLBORO MORRIS ALE

By all accounts, it was another success. Some clubs wrote back, "best ale yet;" "had a great time;" "thank you for the inspiration to keep dancing." The editor viewed it all from a horizontal position through second-hand reports due to a bad case of pneumonia.

Each Ale has ended with a particular characterization. This year's was "The Year that Rained." But just as memorable were Albemarle Morris Men's new hats, the first viewing of other morris teams by Minnesota Traditional Morris (a men's team which has existed since 1976), and certainly the introduction of the new American buffoon dance (see page 3). There were sixteen clubs in all representing the South, Northeast, Mid-West, and Canada (Albemarle, Binghamton, Black Jokers, Bluemont, Foggy Bottom, Green Fiddle, Greenwich, Kinsessing, Hearts of Oak, Marlboro, Minnesota, Muddy River, NewTowne, Pinewoods, Ring o' Bells, and Sourwood).

The format was changed slightly this year to provide for more local touring. Saturday's show dancing at the College occupied the late morning hours so that teams could divide up into five groups for a "walking tour" of Brattleboro, Vermont, in the afternoon. After a massed spectacle on the Brattleboro Common, everyone shared in a feast at the College. More morris, and later on some impromptu country dancing, filled out the evening. Sunday's schedule remained the same: touring of local towns ending in Newfane, Vermont, for the weekend's second public massed spectacle. Some Pinewoods men suggested a change in tour routes next year to avoid the local nuclear power plant in Vernon, Vermont (actually those folks may need the morris luck most of all!).

Monday's workshop of new American morris dances featured some which have already crossed the Atlantic (Ring o' Bells' Brackley-style "Oh Susanna" taken to England by Roy Dommett and themselves!) as well as "Mr. Softy" which had been formulated only that weekend by Philadelphia's Kingsessing Morris Men. The latter had been performed at Newfane the day before by its creators and then pleased crowds later on Monday as a massed dance before the traditional long pub stand at Poncho's Wreck in Wilmington, Vermont.

The Marlboro club, panicked by the prospect of a rain-ruined weekend, appreciated everyone's good-natured acceptance of the weather and flexibility over the Ale weekend.

#### A HOT ITEM!

According to the latest English Morris Ring circular, Lionel Bacon's aide-memoire A Handbook of Morris Dances was sold out as of April. Morris Sunderland, who handles the distribution, hoped to have a new run "by June." Write to him for more details: 13 Park Lane, Henlow, Beds. SG16 6AT, ENGLAND.

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Special thanks to the Smith family of Putney for their collating, folding, and stuffing work on the last several issues: John, Maggie, Karin, Monica, Russell, Sam, and Benjamin (who does a great job of supervising from his crib!).

MR. SOFTY

A Philadelphia Buffoon Dance in the Bledington Tradition

The dance was first created and performed at the 1979 Marlboro Morris Ale by the Kingsessing Morris Men who have asked that it be published in Bacon Handbook style.

1/2 A · (AB)<sup>4</sup> · A



Sequence - OY; FU; DF; HG; DF; WG; DF; HR; DF; WH.

DF - Buffoon and half-hey; rep.

1st time: Soupy Sales Side Step (SSSS)\*

2nd time: Fists (F) strike Hats (H): offer fist at waist level; after fist is struck swing in large circle out and up

| EF - OF - | OF - EF - | EF - OF - | OF - EF - |

3rd time: Curley Shuffle (cf. Three Stooges)\*

4th time: Pass Hats: close circle, leaning in, take hat from right neighbor and place on own head. Repeat twice (total three passes); on repeat of DF and 3 more hat passes, own hat is retrieved.

On WH (last A music) sing, "The creamiest, dreamiest soft ice cream, its name is Mr. Softy." (Repeat)

Dance ends with SSSS (facing up) during last 2 bars.

\* For details write to Kingsessing Morris Men, c/o Tom Senior, 118 Montrose Avenue, Rosemont, PA 19010, or ask the nearest 30+ year-old TV addict.

Editor's Note: The dance was created in the Bledington tradition because that is Kingsessing's principal tradition. Your club could alter it to fit your tradition.

REPORTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Anchorage, Alaska: Before travelling to the north country, Jane Levenson wrote to the Newsletter to check on a rumor she had heard about possible morris activity in Alaska. She reports, "After quite a search, I have discovered that there is no morris dancing team in Alaska. There was one last year apparently: a group got together and learned something out of a book to do for the Renaissance Fair. Oh well. There aren't any jobs either so I'm moving to Boston sometime in July."

Australia: On a recent trip to Australia, Roy Dommett acquired copies of two issues of the "D.E.F.S.A. News" (Dance English Folk Style Australasia) which he forwarded to the Newsletter. Shortly thereafter, a letter arrived from the editor and publisher, J.S. Haddon, asking for copies of "your Ring's Constitution and Newsletter." We plan

to set up an exchange of publications, and I explained the "morris scene" on this continent. Excerpts from Dommett's and Haddon's letters appear below:

Australasian morris' problems must be more akin to the USA than the UK. Very few of the Aussie sides are all male; one is for women; the rest are mixed. Last year they took a bus from Sydney to Perth (2500 miles) picking up sides on the way just to dance the hind legs off those in Perth! RD

I am opposed to mixed morris as there are no traditional grounds for it, but not to single sex teams of Morris ... I am also opposed to the secularisation of morris as I think each team should set aside one day a year for the spiritual side of the Morris dance and have a break from engagements for six weeks prior to it. I hold to Cecil Sharp's knowledge as to Morris being Pan-European, as the Calusari of Rumania bear witness." JSH

The more recent issue of D.E.F.S.A. (December, 1978) lists nine groups under the heading "General Dancing Directory" six of which specify involvement in morris, sword, or rapper (in addition to country, Playford, Scottish, etc.). The Australasian Morris Ring then lists nine member clubs and five more under "Other and proposed clubs" and notes that clubs in a number of other towns and cities have been or are being formed.

#### TRIBUTE TO KARL RODGERS

Karl used to swing around the corner and pick me up and we'd amble over to City and Country School on a balmy Spring evening and chat in the lobby. There'd be a rap on the glass and Eric Leber's smile, Howie Seidel, and John Dexter (rushing in from West Point) would appear.

Boy, we really worked on those dances, especially the Bledington. What a graceful hook leg Karl had, and that slight smile, so radiant really. Were we conscientious; serious, you know; and Karl's and Eric's strength of purpose in wanting to bring out the dance well. Karl knew music and had that feeling for grace and form of a line and dance movement. We'd chatter all the way home, dreaming up waterfront tours, redesigning our kit, savoring the good tiredness and comradship.

Those were great days and years in the New York CDS: the Festivals, but most especially the regular weekly dances, Karl's fluent and graceful dancing, and playing gave much courage, spirit and goal to newer and younger dancers.

Years do slip by ... Bennington winters in the Carriage Barn and the old ramshackle inn, PMM Harvard tours, Pinewoods, the first English caper (Thaxted, dancing for the children in Great Hornead village) ... Karl's qualities of sensitivity to others, his fidelity to dance and music, his feeling for group spirit and caring ... these were important sources of energy and warm delight for me and, I believe, for so many others.

That is the finest kind of legacy. I miss his good spirit, his music, and I miss the lift of dancing opposite in William and Nancy.

-- Roger Cartwright

There hasn't been any team since that was in any way like it. Most teams have "six fools and one dancer;" the Village Morris Men had four foremen and two fools. Without any other local side existing in the country, though, we knew snugly that for the moment we were the best.

From those days of the Village Men in New York City (1969-70), I remember Karl especially for his gentleness and patience. These combined with his abilities as a dancer and teacher made him a true leader and friend. Every good team has its egos and its arbitrators. For the VMM, Karl was definitely one of the latter. In the

years that followed, he taught the morris with a respect and ease that made him responsible for starting many new dancers. He had a way of sharing his love of the dance and the music which was truly inspiring.

I want to share the words of Horace Colpits, the minister at Karl's memorial service, "The spirit of Karl Rodgers will live on in the lives made different by his influence ... The best remembrance is that which continues of the life and spirit, or that which he gave to others which lives on with them." -- David Lindsay

#### 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.

Berea Morris Men: "The Berea dancers are going on tour to England, leaving the 29th of May. We will be visiting Coventry Morris Men, Ladies of Green Willow, Newcastle, and the Royal Show. We have prepared our own morris dance for show on tour: Mountain Morris Men's "Dixie." In other news, we had 13 students enrolled in a January mini-term course entitled "English Ritual Dance." Jim Morrison taught two Adderbury dances to six sides of rank beginners at the 44th annual Mountain Folk Festival on April 5-8."

John Ramsay, CPO 287, Bera, Kentucky 40404.

Fiddler's Reach Morris: "Fiddler's Reach dances on ..."

Robb Spivey, 9 Wilson Street, Topsham, Maine 04086.

Lord Hill Morris Men have "wound up their first season with a tour June 12 in Readfield Corner and Mt. Vernon, Maine. We feel it was a great season, and we are very excited to be dancing men's morris. We really started last fall after the demise of the Strong team when we got together our second Winter Solstice Mummer's Play and party, the play being performed black-faced with appropriate costumes and followed by a Border Morris stick dance. In February, we reconvened on Lord Hill and formed a new team which danced out for the first time at Gilbertsville, N.Y., where the Binghamton boys showed us a good time! We are all content that among the pleasures of Springtime will be dancing as the Lord Hill Morris Men."

Greg Boardman, RFD, Fayette, Maine 04349.

Madison Morris: "Morris is finally off the ground in this town. And it feels good!" writes Louise Neu. Madeline Uranek of Folklore Village Farm (west of Madison) wrote that the team performed at FLV's annual May Fest "calling themselves 'Motley Morris' ... a mixed men-women team with Chris Levy as squire and Dave Titus as instructor. They danced a really fine, enjoyable selection of Headington dances." Madeline also said that the team hopes to eventually have men's and women's sides.

Louise Neu, 420 Russell Walk, Madison, Wisconsin 53703.  
(after Sept.) 637 Pickford Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53711.

Marlboro Morris and Sword: After a normally hectic touring season in May, the club settled down to polish up its Lancashire clog morris procession for the second annual appearance in the Brattleboro 4th of July parade. Iron-shod clogs with bells attached make all the difference in the sound of the dancing (compared to last year). Our eight-piece marching band led by Peter Amidon will not have to compete with the Shriners Band this year. We hope to improve on our "Honorable Mention" award received in 1978. Meanwhile Squire Tony Barrand is criss-crossing the English countryside filming all the good morris and sword dancing he can find. He almost decided to zip back for our July 4 spectacle, but finally decided that "there's always next year."

Fred Breunig, RD #1 Box 9A, Putney, Vermont 05346.

Men of Houston: Teams that attended the Marlboro Ale "should have seen Gary Coover and his MoH film show. Gary called me just before he set off for the U.K. to say, 'there is definitely a Houston Tradition' which, I suppose, is what we expected. Anyway, whatever we dance, the Men of Houston are having a good time down here. We are dancing out about once a month and are getting enough financial response to cover our gas and beer costs. We've got one gig in Austin this month plus a store opening in Houston, and two performances for the Houston Parks and Recreations Dept. in July."

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

Minnesota Traditional Morris: "The month of June closes a year of exhilarating growth and change for MTM. Last year we lost all but four of a team of ten that had danced together for at least two (some for five) years. The present lads now seem to have a good start towards the old ensemble again. A group of women have also shown considerable interest in the past two months, and we have been helping them put a performing side together.

"Out trip to Marlboro topped our sky-high expectations despite logistics problems and several doses of rain and fog. The team returned in such a state of salivation over learning a range of new dances that it has been a bit difficult pinning down precisely what to do before the Renaissance Fair opens in August. At our annual team ale and dinner, Art Knowles was re-elected (Art says, 're-hornswaggled') squire by acclamation and Steve Parker became bagman. This summer we plan to add a few new dances (among them, 'Mr. Softy') and continue plans for a modest gathering of mid-American teams in Madison, Wisconsin, in conjunction with the new team there (end of September). We might also have the opportunity to host a half-hour weekly radio show on Morris and associated music. We were told the FCC sleeps on Sunday so the pilot program, which ran for 90 minutes on June 17, included a few of the more interesting tunes (e.g., Cuckoo's Nest)."

Stephen Parker, 434 N.E. 4th Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55413.

New Haven Morris and Sword's "second year saw a doubling of the team's size from eight to sixteen members despite the loss of two of last year's crew. Under David Lindsay's direction, we have nearly all of the Fieldtown tradition down and a couple from other villages. Our season consisted of eight or nine tours in the Hartford-Middletown-New Haven area and a joint tour with the Westerly Morris Men. Brandishing sticks of fearful size, we were 'featured' behind the weather forecast of a local TV station. The climax of our Spring, however, was a joint tour of Hartford with Westerly, Pine-woods, and Muddy River. By all accounts, this tour, part of the re-dedication ceremonies of the old Hartford Statehouse, was one of the finest ever staged in Connecticut, and certainly one of the most enjoyable. During the summer we will concentrate mostly on rapper as we are losing many of our members (some for good, alas!). It is unclear whether or not David will be in New Haven next year, but the team will continue under my leadership if he does not return."

Mark Gatza, Yale Divinity School, 409 Prospect Street, New Haven, Connecticut 06510.

Ring o' Bells: A postcard from England brought the following news: "The trip has been working out really well. The 12 of us are travelling in a minibus, sightseeing during the day and dancing in the evening. We've already danced with six different women's sides and one men's side (the Leicester MM). It was the first time the LMM had ever danced with a women's side and although they started out with a lot of doubts (they were afraid our dancing would be too 'pretty'), they ended up liking us very much! People have been really wonderful to us, putting us up, and feeding us. A couple of days ago we stayed in Nuneaton with the Ladies of Green Willow. Next week they are hosting the Berea Country Dancers!"

Lee Ellen Friedland, in transit, England.

Three Rivers Morris: "We are beginning to venture out. Have shown at the Spring

carnival of Carnegie-Mellon University and festivals at Chatham College and St. Edmunds Academy. We hope to get a great deal of exposure at the Three Rivers Arts Festival where we have been invited to tour ad lib (this is a big affair occupying acres of the Golden Triangle in downtown Pittsburgh). Our music has developed admirably; four of our dancers are playing: fiddle, 3-hole pipe, pennywhistle, and fife. Looks like we're going to get a concertina player, too, but he hasn't danced." Albert Blank, 107 Buckingham Road, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15215.

Victoria Morris Men: "We are continuing to meet for practices, but are low in numbers through attrition, illness, and so on. When some new members have progressed more, we expect to resume performances."

David Winn, 2142 Pentland Road, Victoria, British Columbia V8S 2W4, Canada.

Woods Hole Morris Men: "Not much has been happening with the WHMM for the last year. Most everyone seems to have moved away, and Tom Aldrich has a bad knee; so we just wait. We may somehow creep out of the woodwork on the Woods Hole May Festival, though. You never know!"

Bob Guillard, RFD#1, 111 County Road, Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts 02532.

Yellow Rose Morris "is thriving. We now have seven women and are separate but associated with the Men of Houston. We're now learning a second dance which is very exciting, especially since Gary Coover visited the Marlboro Ale and decided that the Houston tradition is morris after all. So we're not quite in a vacuum, though we want to be different from the men so as not to bore audiences should we dance at the same festival."

Dorcas Hand, 3258 West Main #1, Houston, Texas 77098.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A couple of years ago, the concept of an "American Morris Ring" was discussed and discarded. I would like to reopen the subject.

The Morris Ring in the U.K. does more than presenting a vehicle for getting group insurance rates, it also acts as a quality control body, admitting to the Ring sides which conform to its standards and rejecting or expelling those sides which fall short of its expectations. Morris is expanding in the States, as it is in England, and just as the Ring tries to stop the debasement of English Morris, so I believe an American Ring is needed to do the same over here.

Just as there is no stigma involved in being a Ring or non-Ring side in the U.K., so there need be no worries that the creating of an American Ring would cause a decrease in the number of sides. What it would cause is a gradual improvement in overall style and competence. A fledgling side would be able to watch a "Ring" side and know that if it copied them it would be learning "good" morris. Conversely, if it copied a non-Ring side, it would know that what it was learning was possibly not in the best of traditional practice.

Obviously, there are some significant logistics problems to be overcome before a Ring could be started, but now is as good a time as any to start thinking about them.

John Vivian, Men of Houston

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