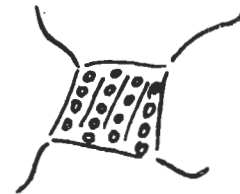


# American Morris Newsletter



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

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## "The Qualities of a Morris Dancer"

An excerpt from "The English Folk Dance Tradition: An Essay"

by Rolf Gardiner

(Published in London, 1923, Rolf Gardiner figured prominently in the early days of the revival as a teacher, dancer, and writer.)

But, never the less, the effect of the dance (Abbots Bromley) upon the beholder, the slow lilting, hypnotizing rhythm of the dance is like one of pure magic: something uncannily primitive by which the deepest physical psyche is aroused from its slumbering.

And so is the morris a great experience, like going through a cleansing fire: when the whole six of you, each striving for supreme individual excellence, swayed by the pulsing rhythm of the dance, the whole body and soul of you, singing to the ineffable loveliness of the melody, a loveliness, in which a yearning sadness and exultant joy blend inextricably, like the colors of the rainbow transfused in a drop of rain, feel one surging electric fluid in the great spasm of physical effort; yet at the same time each individual dancer is himself, distinct, apart! That is the wonder of the Morris. But if there is this great psychical excitement, there must be no apparent physical excitement; "plenty of brisk, but no excitement," as one old Morris dancer pertinently explained it; there must be great restraint, great dignity, a sense of perfect economic expenditure of energy not resulting in any apparent physical distress or over exertion. Grace and strength, and perfect poise and control, these are the qualities of the Morris dancer.

## THE SECOND TORONTO MORRIS ALE

by Bill Marckwick

On Friday, August 24, the Toronto International Airport was greeted by the arrival of the Westerly Morris Men of Rhode Island who came in kit from the plane straight into a side and delighted the line-ups of passengers with some impromptu jet-set Morris. The Second Toronto Ale thus got off to an early and appropriate start as Westerly was met by members of the host team, Green Fiddle, and taken on a guided tour of a local brewery.

Later that night we were joined at the mid-town hall by the rest of the teams: Forest City of London, Ont.; Ann Arbor Morris of Michigan; Willow Wood Morris of Buffalo, N.Y.; and Three Rivers Morris of Pittsburgh, Pa, plus individual members of several other teams.

After Saturday morning massed dancing on the spacious grounds in front of the hall, the teams divided into three separate walking tours of the downtown area, most of which were reached by subway. This provided subway patrons with a most unusual experience: the sight and sound of a hundred multi-colored, jingling Morris dancers accompanied by a horse, a unicorn, and a human-sized bright red lobster (Westerly's

"hobby lobby"), all loudly singing sea shanties as the trains carried us into the city. The teams danced in various parks and urban locales, alternating with pub stops along the way. There were some unexpected results of the afternoon: on the tour I was on, an MG driver became so engrossed in the streetside Morris that he drove straight into the back of a Corvette stopped at a light. The cars were solidly locked together, and as the teams danced, two policemen and the drivers bounced up and down on the cars trying to separate them. Supper and a country dance completed the day.

Sunday after breakfast everyone piled aboard two buses for the tours of sites such as Harbourfront, Fort York, and High Park. Then all the teams converged on City Hall for the memorable massed dancing in Nathan Phillips Square. The huge Winster Processional wound down the long sloping walkway to the square, framed on one side by the curving twin towers of the futuristic City Hall, and on the other by the graceful arches of the large fountain and pool. It was an unforgettable rhythmic blend of colour and flowing handkerchieves as the sound of the music echoed from the surrounding buildings. A Talent Night got underway later in the evening; descriptions ranged from "unusual" to "bizarre." One definitely "had to be there."

On Monday morning the teams gathered to bid each other farewell until the next gathering. A few decided to stay to hold a dance workshop, but the few increased until there were thirty-five or more. No one really wanted to leave, an indication of how successful we all felt the weekend was. Special thanks to all of the willing volunteers and especially to Joan and Jeff Weed who laid the groundwork for last year's Ale and were largely responsible for the success of this one. See you all next year!

#### OTHER SUMMERTIME MORRIS EVENTS

July: "The Binghamton 'Morris Sudze' took place over the weekend of July 13-15 in Hamilton, New York. It was fine! No man wanted for food or drink. J. Michael Blanford and others were conspicuous by their absence."

Jan Kaplan, for the Binghamton Morris Men

August: The Fourth Annual American Travelling Morrize, a week-long tour by members of Binghamton and New Cambridge Morris Men, occurred this year in and around Camden, Maine during late August. Special guest this year was Morris Sunderland from England who fooled for the tour and smoothed the ruffled feathers of at least one local constable thus avoiding a serious confrontation!

#### 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.

Ann Arbor Morris "is replenishing its depleted ranks. (Summer takes its toll in this college town.) A few new dancers have joined and old dancers are returning so we're now hoping to finish the summer with a revival of separate men's and women's sides. We're all working on Bucknell, Bampton, Headington, and Adderbury for the summer, and are hoping to prepare border dances for Christmas. We will be dancing at Ann Arbor's Art Fair and Medieval Festival and at the Toronto Ale. Peggy Gerber is continuing as squire with Carol Mohr holding the bag. John Cavanaugh and Deb Low are 'forepersons.'"

Ann Miller, 14110 North Territorial, Gregory, Michigan 48137

Forest City Morris and Sword team reports that "the Rapper team is now a reality its first public performance last May 13 was a resounding success -- a great crowd pleaser " The morris team danced at the opening of a "'genuine' English Pub with

real English beer" where they were "'first to the bar' after the ceremonies. Other major engagements of the summer were the Home County Folk Festival, Owen Sound Folk Festival, and the Toronto Morris Ale." The latter was "a great success. The chance to dance with and observe other teams is a valuable learning experience. The calibre of dancing was very high and will be an inspiration for us as we practice this winter." Finally, "we have had a change of Squire: Alistair Brown resigned, due to other commitments, and Kathy Dean was elected in his stead."

Ron Duncan, 372 Cedar Avenue London Ontario

Minnesota Traditional Morris: "Harvest time is a 'second season' for MTM, the gathering in providing another occasion for celebration. Our new lads are reaching the end of their first season and the team feels most cohesive after six consecutive weekends at the Minnesota Renaissance Festival. We were fortunate to have had visits during the Festival from individual members of the Black Jokers, Foggy Bottom, Village Green, and Madison Morris teams, as well as visiting English folk from Lancashire, Sussex, and a gentleman from Bampton who is familiar with both sides in the Bush. The Fair also returned to us Nick Lethert from a long visit in England and Ireland. He found that 'Mr. Softie' has made a hit in Morris circles there. Our bagman deserted the Festival in September to raise the glory of Morris to new heights by dancing the Bampton Princess Royal Jig on the 4,003 meter (13,167 ft.) summit of Cloud Peak in Wyoming's Bighorn Mountains. So far as we know, this is the high altitude record for the Morris dance. [There has been morris dancing performed in airplanes. -Ed.]

"Coming events include a workshop with Tony Barrand and John Roberts and three performances including the 125th anniversary of the city of St. Paul. We are working up rapper and longsword dances earlier this year in hopes of bringing them nearer the standards we saw demonstrated at the Marlboro Ale. We will be learning the dance from Flamborough.

"Finally, an historical note: several of the original Minnesota Morris Men, suffering the pride of longevity, requested that the record be corrected to show that the side has danced continuously since 1972 rather than 1976 when our correspondence with the AMNewsletter began " [Correction noted. My apologies! -Ed.]

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

NewTowne Morris Men: "have kept up a busy summer schedule: practices in the carriage house of Dave Dusenburg on the huge Honewell Estate (there are dozens of real carriages still in the building!) and numerous local tours. We were asked to dance round Beacon Hill and be filmed by CBS cameras for potential use on a TV spot. We may show for all of nine seconds. Who knows? We will be dancing on the Fourth American Travelling Morrice, this year to be held in Maine."

Mark Wilke, 22 Prescott Street, Arlington, Massachusetts 02174

Village Green Morris Men "are doing quite well now. A very regular eight men are coming to practices, plus a full-time musician and another man working on pipe and tabor. Three of us were at Pinewoods English dance week this summer, so exposure has begun. We dance Headington and Bucknell and will add either Bampton or Bledington this year. We have a longsword dance in our repertoire as well: Escrick, performed at the Winnipeg Folk Festival this year. Several tours and performances will keep us busy into September and we hope to organize a Christmas show of some kind, probably based on the Boston 'Revels.'"

John Trevenen, 392 Campbell Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3N 1B7

Personal contacts or telephone conversations provided news of continued activity and reasonable health of Berkeley Morris, California; Fiddler's Reach, Maine; and Moose Mountain, New Hampshire. News in the form of short letters or postcards will be greatly appreciated for the January issue of this Newsletter. Club correspondents, please take note! Thanks, FMB.

## BELLS HAVE TURNED GREEN (Author Unknown)

"Fiddler's Green" by John Conolly is a fairly well-known song which got "oversung" after it first appeared in England. This "parody was brought back from Great Britain by Louis Killen, who heard the members of a Morris team singing it one day. He recalls that they said it had been written by a local schoolteacher, but neither he nor anyone else we know remembers the author's name. If anyone out there does, please let us know." It is reprinted here as a result of several requests. The song (and the above quote) appeared in the Winter 1979 issue of Come for to Sing (Vol. 5 no. 1) as a part of an article by Tony Barrand entitled, "Nothing is Sacred: Parody in Folk Song." Reprinted by permission.



As I walked by the brewery one evening so rare,  
 To view the still vats and to sniff the malt air,  
 I heard an old Morris man singing this song:  
 "Oh, bury me here, boys, for me galleys have gone."

Chorus:

"Wrap me up in me bells and me baldricks,  
 No more in the pubs I'll be seen,  
 Just tell me old sidemates I'm taking a slide, mates,  
 And I'll see you someday when your bells have turned green."

"Now, Bells Haved Turned Green is a pub, I've heard tell,  
 Where Morris men go if they don't go to Hell,  
 Where the beer is all pretty and the girls are all free,  
 And they'll take you to heaven and won't ask a fee."

"Where Utica Club\* is a sign that is banned,  
 And the fool never buggers a dance that is planned,  
 And the bagman is there, buying drinks by the score,  
 And everyone says, 'Good, we'll have twenty more.'

"Now, me time has been good boys, I've have a good part,  
 And from your kind company I'll happily depart."  
 These words slowly dripped from his lips and his jaw,  
 And he sank down contented in the booze on the floor.

\*Original was, "Watney's Red Barrel," an English beer abounding with additives. Substitute your own local dubious brew.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

"I agree so strongly with what you write about the seasonal nature of the morris and I think you have made the point extremely well in your Editorial. At the same time you have related this seasonal character most cogently to the practical and contemporary problem of 'over-dancing.'

"It is marvellous to know that even after a 3000-mile transplant the various types of English morris can still 'feel right' when danced at their appropriate seasons -- as they certainly do to many of us here. All strength to your arm, therefore, and the very best of luck in your efforts to maintain in a new environment those essential characteristics of the English murrises which make them distinctive and recognisable. Change is essential to continued vitality, but this comes without conscious effort and is a gradual and inevitable process -- quite different from consciously imposed changes affecting those essential characteristics, which can only be destructive of the true character of morris and a disservice to the maintenance of its traditions "

Russell Wortley  
 Ely Cambs, England

"I think that in your recent consideration of why we do the Morris (and, therefore, when we should) you left out the reasons why Pokingbrook started dancing, and why, I think, we were successful as a demonstration team. Quite simply, we loved to dance Morris. The ritual, the history, the mystery were all known to us and contributed to the excitement of the dance, but we basically enjoyed dancing, and that came through in our performances. It was clear to our audiences that we were doing something we considered exciting and fun; they like watching us because it was interesting and exciting to watch, but also, as many people commented, because it was so obvious that we loved it that it was infectious to watch. Our motive was simply to have a great time doing something we loved to do and something others loved watching us do. Our number and extent of tours naturally limited itself by the fact that we all had other interests and weren't going to give up everything else for Morris, and it wouldn't have been as much fun if we had 'overdanced,'

"I have a suspicion that the teams which dance our all the time aren't doing it because they really enjoy it, but have other motives (hubris at being able to do something no one else can do, a theatrical yearning for the stage, or some such); but not real, simple, pure joy in dancing Morris because it's what they love to do. I could be dead wrong: it may be that there are people who really live to Morris and find dancing all the time the most fun thing they could do, but I doubt it."

Chris Hodgkin  
 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Editor's note: My editorial assumed enjoyment of the Morris (or whatever other reasons exist for people to dance it) and dealt only with when it should be performed and some reasons for the choice of time and season. -FB

## NEXT ISSUE: SPECIAL FEATURE

## Part I: American Morris through English Eyes

This Fall, many clubs in the Northeast had a visit from Morris Sunderland, morris man, fool, and former Squire of the Ring in England. He was on a 'fact-finding mission' to discover what, in fact, was going on in North America. "Rumors abound in England," he said. "and I wanted to come and see for myself what American Morris is all about." He regretted being unable to visit all existing clubs, a feat which would have required much more time than he had available. As it was, he and his wife, Barbara, and their 'chauffeur' Roger Cartwright, covered an amazing number of miles. In response to a request from the Newsletter, Morris has agreed to write an article about his trip for the January issue.

## Part II: English Morris through American Eyes

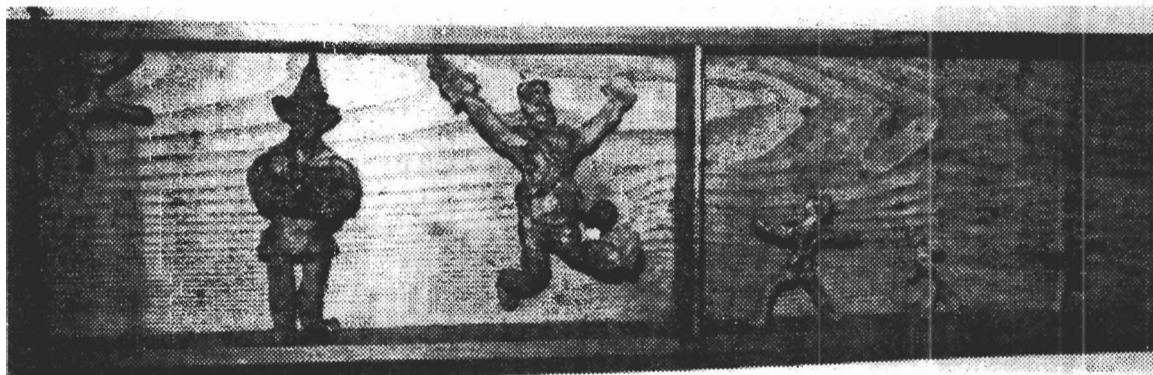
Two American morris teams (Ring o' Bells of New York City and Berea College, Kentucky) and several other individual dancers visited England during the last several months. The editor hopes to cajole several of the travellers into producing some observations of their trips for the January issue.

## CORRECTION

"In teaching 'Mr. Softy' at Pinewoods, I used four hat passes (in the 4th DF) since it fits the music better. I had thought that three were needed to get one's own hat back, but the half hey inverts the order of the side, so four hat-passes get the hats back to their owners. Sorry for the slip."

Tom Senior Kingsessing Morris Men

## MORRIS MAN IN CERAMICS



Peter Leibert of Westerly Morris Men has combined his profession with his hobby. Last spring at the Art Department of Connecticut College, he displayed this frame of the evolution of a Morris man from a baby to dancer to musician to star in the sky. Inspiration for the work, son Damon now one year old, wears his own miniature Westerly vest, hat, and bells when he accompanies the team on tour.

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