

## THE COTSWOLD MORRIS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

The Cotswold morris is alive and well, a century after it was supposed to have died. It lives in a myth, a myth that has only one chronological point, Sharp meeting the morris in 1899. Of course there is much more to it and this paper attempts to pull out some of the threads.

### 1 THE ANTIQUARIANS

The first discoverers of the morris saw it as something to be used or displayed, a typical 19th century approach. The first that we know is D'Arcy Ferris who had been pageant master at Ripon. When he went to live near Bidford on Avon he realised that the morris had possibilities. He got a group of youths together, employed local dancers to teach them dances or just to dance with them, and took them with him on a lecture tour during 1886-7, records of which can be found in newspaper accounts. He had drawn attention to the morris and this was probably as influential on the future as the village revivals for the two Jubilees of Queen Victoria and the Coronation of King Edward. The dancing did not continue as a village affair in Bidford after these tours.

Percy Manning was interested in an academic way in customs and relics. He paid for a side to be reformed at Headington Quarry, taught and clothed and used them to illustrate a lecture in Oxford. He avoided direct contact and took no further interest. The side ran on for a little, accidentally discovering Cecil Sharp on Boxing Day 1899, but died from continued lack of local interest.

The Guild of Handicraft moved out of London and settled in Chipping Campden in 1902. The basic idea did not work out too well but they were instrumental in starting up a local morris and mummings. The lead was taken by Denis Hathaway, who came from near Longborough, who remembered the morris although he had not actually been a dancer. Thus the dances contained "Longborough" elements. The team adopted the tourney form of hobby horse because it had been introduced at Bidford and everyone "knew" that it was an integral part of the morris.

Evans was a vet in Stratford who became secretary of the Shakespearean Festival and arranged for the morris to be introduced into the performance as an anti-masque. He got together the same people in Bidford who had danced for Ferris and he and his children went over for practices. Evans had an early Edison machine that produced wax cylinders and he recorded folk songs, music and interviews. He died before his material or activities had any wider influence.

We owe the idea of spreading the dance outside the original villages to Mary Neal. When asked if there were any dances to go with the folk songs Sharp told Neal of meeting Kimber whose tunes he had noted and used to illustrate his lectures. She went to Oxford, located Kimber and arranged for him to come to London several times to teach the dances at the Esperance Girls Club. Of course Kimber had not been formally taught the morris and not only changed his teaching over the visits but sought help from older dancers in the Quarry and so making it very confusing when doubts were cast later on the degree of his authenticity. Over the next few years Mary Neal invited over 30 traditional dancers to London and many participated in public displays, often at the Kensington Queens Hall. The first was in December 1905. The interest sparked off by these displays led to requests for the girls to teach the dances throughout the country and so the foundation for <sup>a</sup> national society was laid. Sharp came in and helped the musical director of the club collect the Bidford dances in 1906 and Neal sponsored the first two editions of the first two volumes of the Morris Books. Mary Neal was an original member of the WSPU committee formed by the Pankhursts and she, her friends and their activities were for several years linked to the Woman's Suffrage movement.

Sam Bennett is today thought of as a folk performer. He was a major farmer and employer, carrier etc and was able to impose his ideas on what went on in the village. He was involved as a youth in one of the Jubilee revivals. When he heard that morris dancing was becoming the rage he revived a side in the village in 1906, also adopting the tounney hobby horse following Bidford. He went around teaching Headington dances because that was what was wanted and he made himself a nuisance at Abingdon pestering them for the tunes. Every place which had the dance had Sam Bennett's stories. After Sharp attacked his side in the press in 1910 when Mary Neal invited them to London he seemed to change his attitudes, but he remained always prepared to help anyone.

Thomas Cadd at Yardley Gobion learnt something of the dance while living for a while in Lancashire. The interest in morris led to the introduction of the dance into his home village with material apparently gathered where he could. The dancing was closely tied to the village festivities although not authentic by the standards of the time.

The Rev Broughton of Brackley arranged for the local side to dance regularly in the town as an attraction for visitors

These are the first people we know who used the morris. The attitudes have been with us ever since. Probably patronage and well meaning but ill informed interference has always been present.

#### 2 SURVIVORS INTO THE 20TH CENTURY

Some village morrises survived into the 20th century without apparent benefit of outside influence. Local interest from one or more of the "big houses" was important but the common element seems to have been a strong family involvement.

At Bampton, a small town once very prosperous and still then with its annual horse fair, the Radbands and their relatives the Tanners dominated. One learnt the dance from relatives or older friends but one had to be formally invited to dance with the side by the Captain. The close ties to particular families continued for most of the 20th century.

The Rolfes provided the continuity at Bucknell. At one time there was a complete side drawn from the one family. Bucknell did dance in 1902 and tried to get together in 1911.

The side that seems to have been most vigorous was Eynsham. There existed in the decade up to WWI a young side as well as a large number of older dancers who were prepared to get together to dance for Sharp and his friends. Only the war stopped the dancing and, unlike at Bampton, its survival seems to have <sup>owed</sup> little to outside interest, visitors to the village for their "day" or publicity. During the period of interest the Russell family were the leading influence.

Particular families were important elsewhere eg the Hemmings at Abingdon. However one must question whether the true driving force was the family or particular individuals who were able to make their relatives and friends turn out. At any one time there was always a natural leader, not always a dancer, eg Caroline Hemmings at Abingdon, who would be the focus. One thing is certain, there were not "village" traditions even though this is the way it is presented today.

## 3 USE OF NEWSPAPERS TO ATTRACT ATTENTION

The media played a significant role. Reports of the morris in the press in the 19th century have not been many although what has been found by Keith Chandler is very illuminating. Brackley seem to have been the first team to benefit from a deliberate attempt to tell the world of their existance. In 1886 they could produce a side at two days notice, they claimed. Sam Bennett wrote about the Ilmington morris and local goings on, particularly to the Stratford on Avon Herald in the period 1910-2. Sam was interviewed by the Daily News in April 1910 and he maintained his was the oldest original set of morris men in the country. Jinky Wells wrote to the editor about Bampton's claim for continuity and he in turn was interviewed by the press. Wells always considered that it was his letters and publicity that brought the crowds to Bampton in the period 1912-14. Both Ilmington and Bampton made the most of their invites to perform for Mary Neal at the Queen's Hall. Of course the actual visits to London by the dancers left very profound impressions on them. Tom Hemmings of Abingdon went up with his father and uncle and other dancers the evening before King Teddy died. Some bigwig, probably the local mayor, congratulated them on their dancing and took a drink from the Abingdon cup. In later years the Hemmings were convinced it was the King himself, although at the time he was in a terminal coma.

Sharp chose in 1910 to engineer the break with Mary Neal. He had stopped lecturing with the Esperance girls in 1908 and started classes at the S-W Polytechnic Institute Chelsea in October 1909 but it was the Bennett interview that seems to have triggered off Sharp. "In the process of revival many of the most beautiful and essential points of the dance were lost, as anyone conversant with the attributes of the traditional morris would see at a glance" and later "the dances had not been handed on in a correct form and that the steps were as untraditional as they were uncouth, that the figures were incorrect and the tunes untrustworthy." When Sharp investigated the Ilmington tradition in more depth in 1912 he chose to publish a reconstruction of what he believed the dances to have been like c 1860.

In May 1910 Sharp made the first public attack on the standards of the Esperance Club and it went on till WWI. Often bitter, it showed little understanding for the tradition.

## 4 THE COLLECTORS

Outside of the villages the morris has been dependent on the collectors. First must be considered what was published.

Sharp was the major publisher, about 80 dances. A progression of teaching through the Morris Books became enshrined in the EFDSS grade structure and these dances became almost the only dances done up to the mid 1950's. Neal published two books of mainly Headington dances with some Abingdon and Ilmington material, Graham published the Bidford morris and Miss Herschel printed a small book of Headington dances derived from Trafford's teaching of Dandridge. Although unpublished material was used by the Esperance club none of the non-Sharp material seems to have been used after WWI. The Travelling Morrises collected material but Schofield only published on Eledington, Longborough and Fieldtown in the Journal of the EFDSS. The tradition was rediscovered in the mid 1930's and plans were made to publish a lot of handbooks but it got <sup>only</sup> as far as drafts for Bampton and Headington. Although there was much talk and circulation of duplicated material nothing was really done till Lionel Bacon with the author's help published the Handbook for the Morris Ring and specialist magazines such as Morris Matters and the Morris Dancer appeared.

Few of the collectors had any great influence at the time they were collecting yet their material is invaluable and could well have been correlated decades earlier than it was to the advantage of active collectors such as Schofield and Wortley. Most of the early material is now available in libraries. At the Vaughan Williams library can be found the mss of D'Arcy Ferris, Sharp, Carey (Bampton, Oddington, Longborough and bits) Butterworth (Eledington, Badby, Bucknell), Elunt (Adderbury), Schofield (Eledington, Longborough, Brackley, Ilmington). Manning's mss are in the Bodleian as is Miss Herschel's. There were many minor collectors Toye, Tuke, Canniford, Fryer, Williams, Putterill, Bacon, Wortley and Peck some of which is accessible but some of which is not. It is noticeable that once the collector is dead his papers often get to a library, although speaking from personal experience not without difficulty. Significant material held by active collectors is usually not accessible.

One major problem that inhibits collectors making mss accessible is that it then disappears. Both Putterill and Hamer lost their mss collections at Morris events by

leaving them on display. Many people know the problem of the whereabouts of material in the VWL. Some collectors do not operate a policy of openness with material yet I believe it was given to us by the old dancers to use and be proud of, not to be buried.

It is easy to see which collectors affected the revival. Ferris and Manning were collectors only in passing, their major influence being the sides they initiated. Other than Sharp, the others' influence has been local, although the Cambridge Morris spread its influence very wide through a long string of personalities who went on to found sides all over the country, and which led to the Morris Ring. Sharp had a tremendous impact on those who met him in his lifetime and the EFDS and later EFDSS kept his influence alive. Who remembers the great personalities of the EFDSS? The traditional sides/<sup>only</sup> talk of Douglas Kennedy.

Did the collectors have any real effect in the villages? In my experience only Sharp is ever mentioned when collecting, but he did little to influence what happened in the villages. He deliberately kept others away from his sources, seldom giving names in print, did not invite dancers to teach classes and let the network of classes that the EFDS set up through the Cotswold teach Headington dances rather than the local material. In the 1960's one could meet a side of men who had known the older Fieldtown dancers still able to perform their Quarry dances but no memory at all of their own tradition. Franklin of Fieldtown was so upset at not being allowed to show how the dances were supposed to be done that he wrote to the Oxford Times in 1912. It became the orthodox view that Sharp had collected all that was worth preserving and people were continually surprised in later years to find it possible to meet the tradition.

There was an influence on the tradition, but it was different for each side and therefore each has to be taken in turn.

## 5 THE TRADITIONAL SIDES - ABINGDON

Thomas Hemmings died about 1885 and that was the end apparently of the old way of celebrating the annual horse fair with mayor making and morris. Meck mayor making was wide spread, although it has not been the subject of any recent study, and there were other examples in Berkshire. The regalia of horns and cup have much in common with initiation ceremonies at major sheep and horse fairs or on drovers' roads and it is reasonable to see the Hemmings family and the morris/<sup>as</sup>grafted onto the other customs of Ock St. The Hemmings family believed that the morris had been performed in front of the Prince of Wales' family for which the dances had been stretched to include more dancers and which were known as the Royal Morris.

After Thomas' death the morris did not turn out regularly and the last time was just after the turn<sup>a</sup> of the century. Mary Neal learnt of their existence from /young man at one of her lectures and wrote and then visited the two older Hemmings brothers. Her visit created quite a stir. On April 1st 1910 she and Sharp went to Abingdon and saw a side perform the current repertoire. The excitement restored the festivities till WWI. An unrelated Mr Hemmings raised a childrens side that also appeared at local fetes, and did at least one joint show with Mary Neal's dancers.

The war killed several dancers. William Hemmings was blind and the necessary spark was lost. In 1930 there was an attempt to kindle interest and a side dressed up for photographs but nothing came of it just as nothing had come of the visits of the Travelling Morrice. James Hemmings died just before the Silver Jubilee in 1935 but the town asked for the morris to be represented in the Jubilee procession. For this 4 man carried James' younger brother Henry to represent the Mayor of Ock Street even though Henry had been a step dancer not a morris dancer. It reflected the Hemmings family belief that the eldest active Hemming<sup>s</sup> was rightfully Mayor.

The Wargrave Ring meeting in 1936, at which it was discovered that there were important differences between Kimber's memory of the Headington dances and what Sharp had published, had an afternoon tour through Abingdon. While they were dancing Henry Hemmings and his son Percy turned up on a coal cart. Jinky Wells who was fooling for the tour and Henry who was an old friend insisted on dancing a double jig. Realising there was morris to be collected and not knowing what Sharp had got,

Schofield and others went over for interviews. The surviving correspondence shows that this was not followed up quickly and the next they knew was seeing a poster advertising the morris for the Coronation in 1937. Major Fryer invited them over to Wargrave Hall for the EFDSS Staff Conference. The Abingdon men asked Schofield to become president but he declined and recommended Fryer. The Major helped the side over how to organise tours, the annual show in the Abbey Gardens, negotiated with the BBC and the local press and provided transport. He also wrote frequent letters to outsiders on what was going on in Abingdon. He contacted Mary Neal and arranged for her to meet the side at the Stow Ring meeting in 1938.

The club met weekly for practice and kept a minute book of what they remembered and what they decided which was read out at the start of each meeting. All the dancers contributed although only Tom Hemming had clear memories. Percy as bagman (secretary) contacted other old dancers. New dances were not introduced until old ones were mastered. As a result they got bogged down over Maid of the Mill, not getting an agreed version till the early 60's, after several men had died.

Up to 1942 the side danced to raise money for the war effort and carried a board showing their contributions to various appeals. Then the musician and mayor died and Fryer was asked to hold the money. It took a long time to get going after WWII. Jack Hyde who had joined in 1939 - he had been asked to join in 1910 - became secretary and Fryer played. Then followed an active period with the highlights of two Ring meetings and a visit of the Queen as well as getting boys sides together at Dr Benardo's and Fitzharris school. Tom, his brother James and Fryer all died in the winter of 1960-1 and the side dropped in numbers. Outsiders became the mainstay rather than occasional support and even major town events found only four dancers active.

Enough men with roots in north Berks came in from Oxford City and University sides to keep the dancing going but at the cost of the local association and divided loyalties. In the late 60's Abingdon were asked to teach their dances to the Rover Scouts at Longworth for a Jamboree and several came to the club. As others joined there developed two factions culminating in splitting to do separate fetes.



Internal difficulties led in the end to the formation by the members of the Hemmings family and their close friends of a new side, Mr Hemming's Morris Dancers.

Because of the Mayor Making in Ock St, the interest of the Mayor of Abingdon, who often attends, who recognises the value of the Mayor of Ock St and who uses him to substitute on minor local social occasions, the use of the side in the twin town festivities etc, the Abingdon side is a real part of the town life and therefore, although a long way from what it was like 100 years ago, can be considered to have found a proper niche today.

#### 6 THE TRADITIONAL SIDES - BAMPTON

William Wells is the thread through 20th Century Bampton. He was not so highly regarded within the village as in the Folk world, perhaps originally because he was probably the illegitimate son of an illegitimate daughter, and after training as a gardener spent most of his life being self-employed. He became famous between the Queen Victoria Jubilees for his fooling, he was likened by Carey to a Russian grotesque in the Ballet, and his dance style was untypical for the village in later years. In the 30/40's when he was the senior man he was noted for criticising the dancers but not for teaching them. It is not surprising that the Morris Ring who employed him to teach in London in the late 30's and who recorded the dancing in 1937 formed a different impression of the traditional style to that current in the village.

Sharp invited Wells over to Stow in August 1909 and got him to teach the dances to a . . . side of family, servants and friends for which he was paid. This money never found its way back to the team and Wells was accused of selling the morris. In 1914 Wells wrote a mss history of the morris which he updated about 1937, giving his side of all the troubles. Wells did a lot for the morris and he and his sons went with the morris when it was invited by Mary Neal for a performance at the Globe Theatre. By the time they danced they were reputed to have been drunk and they did the dances that they wanted to do rather than those that were being announced. Wells was paid to teach a boys side at Alvescott from which some dancers were drawn to form the post WWI teams. Flux became the secretary and after a series of disputes the team dropped Wells.

There was a marked change in the morris over WWI. Before, it was remarked how individual each dancer was and the upright posture they all had. Carey noted in detail what particular dancers did and there were significant differences between his notes and what Sharp had published, based on Wells, what Sharp noted in 1919 and what we know the dancing to have been like from direct contact with dancers and films. After WWI the style was more crouching and the intention was uniformity, although observers commented on the infinite variety that was actually achieved. New tunes and dances continued to be added throughout the century.

Wells considered the morris part of his birthright and raised his own side, the "Young 'Uns" in 1926 while the "Old 'Uns" had Sam Bennett and Bertie Clarke to play. That was the only year that Bampton was seen to dance with a hobby horse and a music stand. Sam played for the non-Wells sides till he died. Clarke replaced Wells when Wells died.

After WWII all the dancers got together and formed one club with Francis Shergold as President and Arnold Woodley as secretary, Arnold doing most of the teaching. After Wells' death the difference in approach of the two leaders led to a break in 1950 and two sides till 1959. Arnold Woodley then had a decade of bad health and Saturday employment but finally got a side together again in 1971.

The Shergold side reached its nadir with only 4 dancers, a musician from Whitchurch and a fool from Cambridge about 1961. Friends rallied round, Reg Hall came to play, and the Shergolds were persuaded that at least the outsiders cared and it quickly picked up. The side sponsored Barn dances and emphasised links with the "Spadgers" a charity organisation in the village. Perhaps the most significant happening was the breaking of the link with the annual share out. It had acted to minimise the numbers involved and its size had been a powerful way of poaching dancers from the other side. When it was decided to devote the bag to an annual social the way was clear for a great increase in numbers and a somewhat widening of the area from which dancers could be drawn.

The EFDSS has had quite an effect on the morris. An invitation to the Albert Hall Show caused the Shergold team to practice and rationalise all they did so that there was a step change in detail rather than a slow evolution.

When both sides were invited the Woodley team was asked to dance on the Sunday afternoon at Cecil Sharp House. The men who went up to London were the older of Woodley's dancers and they did not want to dance on the Sunday, so Arnold sent them on their own way. The next Spring Bank Holiday saw them dancing as a separate side in Bampton, after all they were as authentic a side as either of the others. The third side, now under Alec Wixey, now dances more like the sides of 20 years ago whereas the others seem to have deliberately developed their own new styles.

All the Bampton sides have benefited from the upsurge in Folk Club engagements and Folk Festivals and find no difficulty in getting a large following in Bampton on the Bank Holiday and in keeping out of each other's way. It has been this huge turnout of visitors that has kept the morris alive in Bampton. For nearly 20 years it has been the habit to invite other sides to dance in the evening to provide variety. It has provoked some local interest but the crowds are still mostly of visitors.

The morris at Bampton has survived because of outside interest. Keeping the leaders enthusiastic through pub sessions, band playing etc has also been very important. The Bank Holiday has changed in character. Once it was where the drinkers, players etc from neighbouring towns and villages came for the day because the village was in celebration of which the morris was part. Now the visitors are of the Folk World.

#### 7 THE TRADITIONAL SIDES - CHIPPING CAMPDEN

Sharp went to Campden in 1909 but did not get on there. Some say he borrowed some bells and never returned them, others that he would not pay enough, most that he would not buy the men any beer, all seem unlikely. Dennis Hathaway got a team of boys together and taught them the dances and showed them to Sharp in 1910. The dances noted by Sharp are not quite as they have been done since so they may have been adjusted or improved for the occasion. After WWI the side was reformed with 2 of the old men dancers and 4 of the boys side, including Dennis's son Bert. In 1919 Campden had a "jazz" band with concertina, tin whistle etc with which the morris associated and the dancers packed up when the band stopped.

In 1929 Miss Mayne of Worcester got the morris interested again and they went to the Malvern Festival where they met George Bernard Shaw. Dennis had died and his son played. Campden had a retired American circus clown Orman Plastid who was naturally marvellous but rather distracted the crowds from the dancing. A proposed overseas tour by the Travelling Morrice in 1932 which had fallen through led the Cambridge men under John Coales to arrange a tour of the North Cotswolds. They discovered that there was already a local side extant. The TM met the side again in 1933, 1937 and 1946. The Campden morris was an important part of the town's Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1935. Since WWII the morris has had a part in Scuttlebrook Wake. The EFDSS invited them to London soon after the discovery and several times since.

From 1949 a new generation of dancers came in and in 1960 they came over to Bampton for the first time. They now are part of the Festival circuit and so on but they keep themselves to themselves and will not have their dances published or taught to anyone else. They remain opposed to the women doing the morris and will not join a show with womens sides. Abingdon take a similar view now but it was not always so. Twice the Abingdon dances have been taught to Abingdon women's organisations.

#### 8 THE TRADITIONAL SIDES - EYNESHAM

In 1914 the active side was quite young but when Sharp visited they got together a side of older dancers. The younger men continued for a while after WWI, 1924-7 but interest dropped and by 1930 they decided to sell the old smocks. Lady Mason at the big house persuaded them to dance for the 1937 Coronation and with encouragement locally, from the EFDSS and from the Abingdon morris they carried on till WWII. They even had a boys side at a schools morris competition against Headington and Abingdon.

#### 9 INFLUENCE OF THE "REVIVAL"

Through these case histories it is possible to see clearly that the "revival" of interest in the morris outside the Cotswold villages had some influence. In 1910 it was strong enough to revive the Ock St celebrations in Abingdon and for Cox and Kimber to have separate mens and boys sides at Headington. It is impossible to guess what might have happened if there had not been the War. The visit of the

Travelling Morrice encouraged a group at Longborough under Taylor's son, with the help of the local fiddler Joynes who had assisted Sharp, to start practicing even though they never danced out in 1925. The TM also affected Campden and later Eynsham. It is easy to see the outside interest from outside and undoubtedly it has been important in keeping dancing going but I am not at all sure that is why those in the teams would see it. Personal experience is that particular strong personalities keep the morris going almost regardless of outside support or indifference. To claim to be really effective the outside influence has to be fairly frequent and the annual celebration or occasional collectors visit is not of that ilk. In the last 20 years it has been different. People have gone to live in the villages to join the morris and others have given direct and frequent help.

#### 10 DEATH OF SIDES

It may be worth examining why sides stopped.

WWI stopped much. Bidford were training a new generation of dancers, Ilmington were planning to start, but neither survived the trauma of the War. Other teams were badly hit by either casualties or the death of older men who might have been built on. It changed the character of the morris at Bampton, it stopped Abingdon and Headington etc.

Where the sides got going again it proved difficult to maintain interest in the locals and the dancers. Brackley struggled for a few years, and others already mentioned. Kimber tried to raise sides and at various times had a policemen's side, a women's side and a boy's side. The cry was usually the problem of replacing dancers - there were too many other attractions.

The people interested in the morris between the wars were not the same class from whom the dancers were drawn in the villages. It was going to take the national celebrations in 1935 and 1937 to interest the local communities in their own traditions, just as it did in 1887 and 1897. The "revival" was in classes and clubs and something had to happen to bridge the gap.

Why did not the depression bring out sides? Had the image of morris as a begging activity already gone under the influence of the "revival"?

## 11 VILLAGE REVIVALS

So far the paper has concentrated on where there has been some element of continuity. The recent phenomena is of village revivals. They owe the possibility of existence to the collections, to the revival and to local recognition of the past.

There are three phases to consider.

### A EFDS CLASS INSPIRED

The EFDS had a network of classes in schools and village halls which in some places owed much to Mary Neal's pioneer organisation. The people it reached were not those who would take the morris back onto the streets. It may seem sad that the group in Sherborne learnt Headington, Flamborough and Playford but the class was probably meeting a different community need. Class attendees when interviewed saw nothing odd in the situation.

### ASCOTT-UNDER-WYCHWOOD 1912-1922

A school based class which had Tiddy to lead and which brought in teachers as needed eg Miss Sinclair. Tiddy built a hall in the village which currently has photos of the various years of the team. It catered for boys and girls. Before WWI it danced whatever had been published and as Tiddy helped collect the Eledington dances with Butterworth they did those dances at Tiddy's teaching. They had little direct contact with the old Ascott dancers but Sharp's notes on the Ascott dances were available and several learnt a jig. The standard reached still caused adverse comment from other local dancers such as those at Leafield. Ralph Honeybone was Tiddy's batman during the War and danced afterwards. Later he became a student at Oxford and danced for the EFDS display team for a while.

### LEAFIELD 1920-22

Although a short lived school team, memories have proved long. They never got any help from known Fieldtown dancers. Their teacher came across from Oxford.

### KIRTLINGTON 1920's

A youths side of which one survivor still lives in the village. Nothing was available on the local dances so they could be forgiven for doing something else.

### DEDDINGTON

The next village to Adderbury and including Adderbury dances in their repertoire.

## BLEDINGTON 1936-8

A dancer from Gloucester came over to teach them the morris including Bledington dances. Never quite enough men to be a viable club.

## ILMINGTON

A somewhat different example because it was dominated by Sam Bennett yet it produced the same effect of being imposed from outside. Childrens sides mostly and doing mainly country dances, but survivors have described stick dances. No group ever lasted.

The common factor is that the lead was from outside the team, they were not run from within the structure of a club and could <sup>not</sup> survive the loss of the leader. However they did precondition their areas to the idea of morris again and have helped provide links with the past for more recent sides.

## B THE MORRIS RING

It is necessary to pay a little attention to morris outside the Cotswolds. It is a neglected research topic. It is not known widely when sides started or by whom or where they first learnt their morris or what sort of person was attracted. The Cambridge Morris was started about 1922 to combat the effect of so many women doing the morris. For many years this club set the style for the rest. It invented the posts of Squire and Bagman, the idea of an Annual Feast, the idea of touring and because they could <sup>not</sup> make all dancers honor <sup>ary</sup> members the idea of an association of clubs. Rolf Gardiner used the word Ring to signify the association of mainly professional people with Springhead, near Fontmell Magna in Dorset. It seemed a natural extension of the idea of association to apply it to the morris. The Ring started with 6 clubs in 1934 and immediately held Ring meetings for instruction and dancing in public. The size of clubs in the 30's was small. They would not be considered viable today. For example Wargrave often borrowed a dancer to have 6 at a public display. But the numbers of clubs quickly grew. Many were really off shoots of classes. A few were formed of working people.

Most sides took a long time to get going again after the War and till the mid 1950's at least they followed the prewar pattern. Then a new generation started forming teams and the numbers took off.

Till then one could take a dancer from one club and put him into another side and he would not feel out of place. Oddly, people who did change clubs, even if they had moved half way across the country, were frowned upon and considered suspect. To many of us it was boring. In 1956 Geoffrey Metcalf preached a revolutionary idea, clubs should be distinguishable, they should invent and adapt dances, they should start to be more like the tradition. It worked. Today clubs look different, dance different and even when they announce the dance and the village one does not know what to expect. The need to be different led back to the mss for new dances, for new interpretations, and the reconstruction of dead traditions.

The first reconstruction was Lichfield in the mid 1950's as a result of genuine mss arriving through the post and tunes over the telephone. It split the original club and there are still two strands of interpretation in the Green Man's and Stafford. The next reconstructions were done with the help of the Thames Valley club using the Carey mss on Oddington and the Sharp and Fryer mss on Wheatley. These were the subject of the Ring instructionals during Bacon's Squireship. The next were Ascott which combined Sharp and Williams mss with locally collected material on details of steps and handmovements and Stanton Harcourt which combined Mannings mss with Williams mss. Both were originally presented at minor instruction<sup>als</sup> and spread by many hands leading to the great variety of interpretations currently available. Ducklington, Kirtlington, North Leigh are the most recent.

Some invented dances became very popular, Fieldtown Balance the Straw and Valentine, Eledington Black Joker. Other sides invented traditions from scratch, Moulton, Cardiff, Broadwood, Chanctonbury, Hedcorn, Kemp's Men, Chingford to name those met by the author. A few sides have greatly extended their chosen tradition, Westminster (Longborough) Old Spot (Longborough) Great Western and Berkshire Bedlam (Fieldtown) Windsor (Badby and Brackley) while others have tried to preserve the way it was given. Nowhere is the two approaches more evident than comparing Silurian and Shropshire Bedlams on Border Morris - the first is a closest approach to roots, the other an artistic development to achieve a coherent set of material.



It is against this background that it is possible to consider the recent village revivals.

#### C THE POST WAR INTEREST

##### HEADINGTON QUARRY - 1948

A very special situation because of William Kimber. A great dancer and musician who went right through the revival. Many Quarry men in the 30's were taught their local dances by a woman teacher at school and some went onto Oxford City. When Kimber took to coaching the boys at a local school in 1948 it was decided to form a Quarry club. Barely a handful of Oxford City men did not qualify although one or two from elsewhere who had connections were rejected. Quarry found they could not resist Kimber's changes to the dances or his remembered dances, who was there to challenge him? Several boys sides have existed but the club is still carried by the original 1948 dancers. The side today shows what is achieved by dancing together for 30 years. Quarry have extended their repertoire to other traditions and the rapper as well as the nummers at Xmas.

##### BIDFORD - 1955-61

John Masterson, a village schoolmaster, started the morris in 1955. The boys had not worked up a dance in time for a BBC broadcast so they just jiggled the bells, lucky it was on the radio. They had the help of two brothers whose father Salisbury had been the leader before WWI and who had started to teach them the morris. There were two others with knowledge as well, as well as the man who had made the original basketwork hobby horse. These memories were essential to understand the Graham book which was otherwise completely confusing. Not all the dances were revived. For several years they danced at the annual Bidford pig roast, after the carnival procession and the pub race. One year one dancer preferred to go to a wedding to dancing so they were too few and that was it. The tradition is being carried on by Shakespeare but they have lost the life that the local informants insisted the boys incorporated.

##### BRACKLEY - 1961

Roger Nichols was a teacher at the Magdalen college Brackley. Hamer had been collecting at Brackley and a full<sup>ler</sup> idea of the tradition then existed. Bedford were considered the repository of the tradition at that time. The surviving traditional dancers looked

in at practices but contributed little except confidence. The club did not become part of the town life till it broke away from the college.

ADDERBURY - 1975

The impetus for Adderbury came from a group that met on 26 April 1974 at the Banbury Technical College to learn Headington. Led by Brian Shepherd ex-Moulton and living in Adderbury and Tim Radford of Totton, Hants, ex-Twynham and Oxford City they moved to Adderbury on 21 June 1974. They assembled copies of all the mss, Sharp and the 4 variants of Blunt and set about a reconstruction and other than on Sweet Jenny Jones they had no other outside help. The first outing was on 26 April 1975 but by the end of the year they had split into two, Adderbury Village for the village and Adderbury for the world. The village side stuck to Blunt and the styles diverged but they only lasted two years.

This revival showed a new facet. Previously reconstructions were for sides with a repertoire of more than one tradition so the motivation was to look for interpretations that were different from other traditions if there was any element of choice or uncertainty. However there was also the urge for rationalisation, smoothing out irregularities from dance to dance. This was not how the tradition was where anomalies seem the rule rather than the exception. If a side was to stay with one tradition it had to look for the variety needed within its repertoire so anomalies are encouraged. Also its repertoire is not complete and some new dances have to be found. However they have only one dancer who lives in the village.

ILMINGTON - 1975

It had some local contacts including fiddler Sturch who's father had played for the morris at Shipton-on-Stour. Once it was showing signs of being established locally they started to pick up comment which led to small changes to the dances. The club has found it necessary to dissociate itself from both Bennett's and Sharp's versions of the dance.

WHEATLEY - 1976

Only source is mss. So far not invented anything but fully involved in the community.

EYNSHAM - 1980

The tradition here was recent and several dancers are available to help, in particular

Phil Lambourn. Memories are providing dance movements and the repertoire is becoming quite extensive as forms are fixed rather than allowed to be free. Mss and film has been of some help but it owes a lot to the village.

KIRTLINGTON - 1980

The available mss was two dances but Paul Davenport of Green Oak has squeezed a lot of ideas out of what else is available and we now have a fully fledged tradition where none was before. The side has revived the ladies of the lamb, the forest feathers, the procession through the village, all on Trinity weekend before the Lamb Ale. What they do looks so natural and is so dancable that it must be traditional!

BUCKNELL - 1980

A womens side because the men could not be interested.

SHERBORNE - 1980

Following Sharp closely.

DUCKLINGTON - 1981

The latest, after a false start a few years back that led to the first attempt to reconstruct the dances. The reconstruction taught by the author owes a lot to one dancer who had been taught a jig as a boy by his father and tries to be different from other styles. The village side has to try to be as close to the old way as possible and follows the mss

To summarise, each history is different, the lucky ones have surviving contacts with the older sides, all have strong leaders committed to the sides and an involvement with their community. There are possible revivals still to come, possibly North Leigh, perhaps Badby and surely one at Stow.

12 TYPES OF INTEREST

Having wandered through a maze of sides, people and places it is helpful to precis the story.

- 1905-14 Mary Neal and the social use of the morris especially among children.
- 1910-24 Cecil Sharp and the EFDS with classes, artistic objectives and attracting the middle class.
- 1924-29 The Travelling Morrice finds dances and builds the modern concept of a morris club

- The EFDS builds an image of tennis shoes on the vicarage lawn and classes with grades.
- 1934-37 The Morris Ring but in the Cambridge Morris style and dancers in penny numbers.
- 1936-37 Rediscovery of the tradition and more collecting and traditional revivals.
- 1949-60 Reconstruction after the war but no new initiatives.
- 1955- New traditions.
- 1956- New style specialist sides.
- 1965- Explosion in numbers of mens sides.
- 1971- Start of womens sides doing Cotswold dances.
- 1975- Village sides in the Cotswolds.

13 AS IT IS TODAY

- A. Social conditions are quite different today from anytime in the past.
- The morris would surely have taken off before if it had fitted into the scene.
- Society accepts the form of entertainment again without any of the bad odour that it had a hundred years ago.
- The type of person doing it now understands the people being entertained.
- B. Only the village sides seem to be involved in their own locality and/are known as individuals as were the old sides.
- C. As a consequence the "revival" sides are still giving emphasis to the dance rather than to the occasion.
- D. New clubs are being formed with emphasis on the social side and on entertainment.
- They have often to solve the problem of achieving a high dancing standard!
- E. There is a drive to be different so there is now invention within the tradition.
- F. Single tradition sides exist but they play at being the tradition by remaining remote and inward looking. Spot them by whether they are thoughtful of others or self centred in a pub.
- G. The womens sides have brought a new dimension and new insights.
- H. There is also an incredible growth in foreign cultures especially the USA and Australia.

- I. There is still an enormous lack of real knowledge of the history of the morris.  
 Ideas have not been updated for 70 years. The morris world has to catch up with modern folk lore studies if they are to continue to make public comment on such matters as origins.
- J. The dances still spread by "work of foot" and there is a need for accurate and permanent notations. Film/video records are second best because they can only reflect one day, one performance, one interpretation.

Each of the above statements could be the starting point for another paper and it is hoped that they will stimulate discussion.

#### 14 DISCUSSION

This paper has tried to argue that morris has a complex, very parochial history and that simplifications and generalisations have to be made with extreme caution. Some changes this century have been very great, others remain much as before. Each side has to be motivated and driven. A form of club, of performance has emerged which fits our culture today and appears to be carrying us into the future.

How many are now dancing? The official address lists show,

Morris Ring - members	158
- non-members	159
Womens Morris - members	69
- non-members	36
USA - men and women	40
Australasia - men and women	20
Open Morris	?

At least 500 sides, perhaps 10,000 persons throughout the world, and then there are those who do not bother to get onto lists, those that are too new to get onto lists and all the childrens sides. To put it into perspective it is about as many as there are girls doing Carnival Morris or girls being Majorettes.