

WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING TO THE MORRIS?

It is very difficult to extract from older dancers information on the way they were first taught. Perhaps it is the feeling that the ways of the EFDS and the early Ring are in some manner suspect and that now it is possible to get behind the early teaching to something more authentic. We forget that the new approaches are alternatives not substitutes and were often promulgated to force dancers to choose consciously what to do rather than dance without care for the detail. Often the scholarship is dubious, based more on Morris good sense than the received tradition. Those who have received a strong tradition should not be denigrated. The potential weakness of what has come to us through Cecil Sharp is seen when comparison is made with the tradition at Bampton and Headington, but in general Sharp has stood up well to further contact with the tradition and indeed for several Sharp is the only source for teaching even when there is an apparent wealth of additional tunes and dances from more recent collectors.

This note is a plea for help in tracing and understanding what has come to us by example rather than by the written word. How close was teaching before 1939 to the Sharp books? I feel that Bampton at least must have been "interpreted". What was emphasised in the teaching, how technical was the teaching or did it rely on emotive or metaphorical language? How were jumps, shuffles or galleys taught? What tips were given for any movements that are remembered as helpful? Are any of the older EFDS teachers able to describe what they did?

The uncertainties in the printed words centre on distance travelled in figures and the hand movements, particularly with backsteps and slow capers. For example how far was the travel in the Eledington figures? How many places did one go round in half rounds in each tradition? How far apart were the lines in Once to Yourself in Badby?

Some things have been changed because of the persuasiveness of the new source, whether informant, collector or interpreter. It can be difficult to find out what was done before. What was Longborough before Westminster in hand movements in the stepping and the jumps and the slow capers? What was it for Eledington or Fieldtown in the capers and galley? What was the sidestep movement in Fieldtown and Bucknell originally? Was there a standard size of movement for the hands with the basic stepping in Adderbury, what did people do for the Headington backstep hand movements at various times in the past, how much swing was there in the Ilmington back and forward? When precisely were the turns on the jumps in Ilmington? Or was there always a spread in interpretation from one teacher to another?

Where did some things come from that do not appear to be in the tradition such as the Eynsham hand movements for Brighton Camp, the low waves in the Bampton sidestep, and the Bucknell double caper.

We would all benefit from remembering these aspects of the roots of what we do.

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