

## THE BRACKLEY MORRIS

### BACKGROUND TO MORRIS AT BRACKLEY

Keith Chandler's article (ED&S 43/1) shows how evidence from one place can illuminate many aspects of the history of the morris while avoiding generalisations. Brackley was a town, so were many places where the morris survived late, also towns form a focus in the history of many village sides.

Bampton, or Bentone, was an important King's manor in Domesday and its market yielded 50s. It remained significant until the decline of the horse fair and its associated industries. The interpretation of the history of the morris must take account of conditions at the time, Bampton-in-the-Bush, as it is called on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey maps, gives the impression of isolation, but the "Bush" was the centre piece of the town where the fire station now stands.

Another possible false impression exists in connecting early references to the morris to local performers. In "Drama in Gloucestershire" by T Hannan-Clark (1928) it is mentioned that Elizabeth I visited Gloucestershire in 1553 and later years and was entertained by morris dancers amongst other things. Master Arnold's Servants were one company of players that were paid 20/- for "bringing in the may" but only 5/- for being the May Day morris dancers. Lord Berkeley had a similar company of players from 1556 till 1610 which toured going to London and in the present context most significantly to Abingdon. These players turned their hands to everything, perhaps all these early references are to professional performances?

Darcy Ferrers was told that Brackley would turn out at 2 days notice by Thos. K Curtis who dealt with Timothy Howard in 1885/6. Later Sharp did not consider this troupe to contain regular traditional dancers. He took the same attitude elsewhere. It is difficult to read into his introduction to Abingdon that a complete side had danced for Sharp in 1910 "of the original dancers only two survive". Presumably he was interested in the dance as it once was not as it was developing.

In an old exercise book in the Ferrers mss is a list of dances that does not quite match that given in the Banbury Guardian two years before. The list starts with Round Morris or Broad Capers. As this is not a stick or a hank dance it could be the opening or closing dance like Bonny Green at Bucknell. Is it the Broad Cupid of the other list? The stick dances are given as Country Gardens, Rosy London City, Rodney, Mad Kaisar or Mad Muller, Robin and Joan, Balance the Straw, Rax Marlow, Greensleeves, Constant Bill and Shepherds Aie. The handkerchief dances are Jockey to the Fair, Queens Delight, Lads a Bunchum, Cuckoos Nest, Room for Cuckoo, 29th May, Bell Isles March, Bonny Green Garters, Trunkhose, Maid of the Mill and Black Joke. Ferrers was told that some dances were called single and other double. There were 20 or more different names but the same dance goes to 3 or 4 different tunes. Maid of the Mill, Lumps of Plum Pudding, Queens Delight and Lads a Bunchum were all footing up & stepping and half capers. Lumps is not on the main list and was given in the other list as a jig. Both lists contain 22 titles. Ferrers does not have Saturday Night or Old Woman or the 4 jigs. In 1910 Howard told Sharp that Shooting was called Beaux of ("Rosy") London City.

Sharp learnt of Brackley from material sent by D.S. MacColl which is now recorded in Folk Dance notes Vol 1 in several handwritings about September 1909. Sharp went off with T. Howard, Manor Road, Brackley on the flyleaf of his field notebook. Perhaps it is not realised how many of Sharp's informants were found for him. Howard's and Stutsbury's versions of Shooting are recorded together as if at the same occasion. Stutsbury's versions were 40 years earlier so would appeal more to Sharp. Sharp never seems to have doubted that Stutsbury was a Brackley dancer although in August 1912 Shooting was described in a programme as from Hinton in the Hedges. In his tour of the Northants-Bucks border in September 1922 Sharp visited Hinton and Mrs Smith, then aged 70, told him there had never been morris in Hinton.

Shooting appeared in another furore. The Harrogate Times 7.11.08 reported that dancers from Northants and Warwickshire had been up to London to teach their dances and that on Nov 1st the Esperance Club did a Northants Beansetting. After the Queens Hall Show in May 1910 Sharp wrote to the Morning Post (10.5.10) to complain about its lack of authenticity, classing it along with Sam Bennett's Ilmington as faked, revived and decadent. John Graham defended the Esperance Club (Morning Post 17.5.10) - "the essential point of striking the ground is retained, but it varies in having the sticks clapped overhead instead of while stooping down". Sharp replied (25.5.10) that he had traced the dance to its source which was Shooting and except for the "dibbing" it bore no resemblance whatever to the dance under discussion. The dance in question was from Thomas Cadd of Yardley Gobion.

The little that was collected from Stutsbury is mostly available but not the words for Getting Upstairs - "3 blind horses, 2 blind mares, 3 blind donkeys a getting upstairs, such a getting upstairs I never did see."

Sharp went back to Brackley in 1922 with Maud Karpeles. They started enquiries at the Brackley Union. They were told of Shady Law, John Paxton, Jimmy Watts (tin whistle and drum) Tuckey (fool with cow's tail and bladder), Timothy Faulkner and Tom Makepiece all dead. Of the living there was Will Giles living in the old town behind the church, Henry and Timothy Howard and Harry Howard at the Union, William Cardcain, known as Curly, was rag-man. Harry Hayward near the Fire Engine House was a dancer and mention was made of Jas Smith at Sulgrave opposite the Manor. Other possible informants were Sarah Giles, living in Ard's Lane near the Town Hall, close to the chemists, also Margery Salmons her daughter who could sing the tunes, Jane Makepiece and Bessie Whitehouse living opposite Nichols' Coach Builders whose husband used to dance.

Sharp wrote (F.D. Notes IV p 92-3, 11.9.22) Timothy Howard (71) tried to show us dances at his home in Manor Road, at the back of the Hotel, but was not very successful, partly because rather stupid, but mainly because so unmusical he could not give me the tunes. I got one or more from Mrs Sarah Giles, widow of Will Giles who died 40 years ago.

In an interview about 1960 Dr Karpeles told how impressed she had been by Howard's dancing and the extraordinary height achieved in the stepping. He performed every dance at great length, padding the usual dance sequence with additional foot-ups or downs and or whole heys as well as splitting the side-by-sides and back-to-backs. A typical full sequence was published by Sharp in MB III (2nd Edit, p92). Howard never repeated a sequence even for the same dance and nearly always ended with Hey-down, Hey-up and Ring-&-all-in.

Sharp started his 1922 investigations at Buckingham on August 8th. At the Union he was told of morris at Dadford and Steeple Claydon. He cycled to the latter and on return through Winslow was told by Mr. Clear that he thought he remembered the morris at Maids Moreton or Tingewick. John Stokes at Dadford said his uncle and father used to join in with the Brackley dancers who passed through Dadford on the way to Stowe House and Maids Moreton. Somewhere about 20 years since they came here. Brackley men used to have for music a tin whistle and small drum slung over his wrist, same man played both. Mr Bagford at Maids Moreton said only Brackley dancers came through his village, last time 20 or more years ago. At Tingewick Sharp was told that Brackley dancers came through. Some came from Fritton and Middleton Cheney. At Westbury Sharp met Mrs Johnson nee Makepiece. Her father used to play pipe and tabor for Westbury Morris and Brackley Morris. Doubtful if Westbury ever had an independent side of its own. Her father died 40 years ago and then Brackley men got another old man to play the "drum and fife". Where is Fritton?

The Banbury Guardian (12.1.50) published two photographs taken on August Bank Holiday 1914 of the Brackley and Whitfield teams. Tim Howard "told the Whitfield men, walked every night to learn 'em". The Rev. H Broughton, vicar of Brackley at that time, was a great enthusiast and conducted regular rehearsals, and exhibitions in the town were given about every third week. The names on the Brackley photo from left to right were, T Franklin, T H Rawlins, A Giles, W Mallet (fool), A B Rawlins, T Howard, F Wooton and W Giles. The Whitfield men dressed in smocks and wore top hats with a single coloured ribbon. The photo was recently published in ED&S. The names were, back row, J Ayres, W Billingham, A Coles, C Wynne, H Somerton, front row, E A Kendall, A Blencowe, W Blackwell and W Freestone.

In 1950 one old Brackley lady remembered them back to 1876. The annual procedure was a tour on foot of Brackley, Buckingham, Banbury, Towcester and intervening villages on August Bank Holiday week. They had at that time a piper and a side-drummer, the latter a recent addition. When the great war ended, repeated efforts by T Howard and one or two others of the old troupe were unsuccessful and it faded out.

On 4.9.37 Dr and Mrs Kenworthy Schofield, Arthur Peck and Rev Jack Putterill visited Brackley and saw W Giles and C Blackwell. They obtained tunes from both and figures from Giles. They did not see any other of the dancers then alive. Schofield's mss are mostly in the VW library, Peck's mss are still with his papers in Cambridge, Putterill's mss were stolen while being exhibited at a Thaxted Ring Meeting. Later Jack Saunders got some tunes from Kendall. Their whereabouts are not now known.

The dancers mentioned in 1937 were, team - W Giles (Vine Cottage, Brackley), Tim Howard (dec), Joe Castle, Bert Rawlings (called "Berb", works on railway), Albert Giles (dec), Joseph Franklin (dec), Tom Rawlings (dec). Fool - W A Mullet (Goose Green). Musicians - C Blackwell, A E Kendall (Church Lane). At Whitfield there were A E Blencowe (Post Office), Harry Newbury and W Tyler (concertina). Tyler gave tunes to Sharp on 12.9.22.

Kenworthy collected Shooting "substantially as Bean Setters" and Bean Setters with the corner movement of Shooting. All the dances given to Kenworthy and Hamer later only had 2 or 3 figures to the dance unlike the performance of Howard for Sharp.

Fred Hamer made enquiries about 1951. He met E A Kendall, Church Road, born 71 years ago, father died when he was 13. He learnt tunes from pipe and tabor man from Deddington.

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Berb Rawlins lived in Manor Road. He appeared in the 1914 photo, with his father, only because he stood in for his brother Harold. They had one or two extra practices specially for him. He believed that the movements of Beansetting all meant something. Harold Rawlins also lived in Manor road. The tours went from village to village stopping in the locals at night. The last time before 1924 that the Brackley morris turned out was to provide subs for a blind man. Mrs T Howard lived at 36 Manor Road and remembered Stutsbury. Hamer was told of Billingham who also lived in Manor Road (42?) and G S Stevens who came from Middleton Cheney. This is near Banbury and is a suprising distance. "Tweezer" Franklin was the fool.

The origin of the town of Brackley is a cluster of farms 2½ miles NW, the centre of the Saxon Parish of Halse. The "Old Town" is a daughter settlement, Bracca's Leah (or clearing) on good soil close to a ford on the Ouse on the Buckingham road, now only a footpath, with a church to St Peter mentioned in Domesday. The "New Town" derived from the short lived castle (Henry III). The market for wool was so successful in the 13th century that the burgesses rebuilt St. Peters, even though the huddle of houses and tangle of streets of the Old Town were never considered part of the borough, and founded St James chapel, at the foot of the castle, demolished in 1836. A hospital dedicated to SS James and John was built half way up the High St. The New Town has only one back lane, Manor Road, parallel to the High St and serving the long narrow burgess crofts on the west side. The hospital was used to endow Magdalen College Oxford (1458) and the Fellows established a free school in 1548. The hospital was used by the Fellows when the plague came to Oxford and now serves as a chapel for the school. Brackley was one of the rotten boroughs, in the keep of the Dukes of Buckingham, and the influence of Stowe House must have extended wide, as did Elenhiem over Wychwood. The town still shows its early medieval form and its development has been arrested despite some prosperity in the 18th century and the arrival of the railway in 1846-7. However there seems to have been enough opportunity for patronage to keep an activity like the morris alive.

It is appropriate that the present revival started at the College under Roger Nichols about 20 years ago under the influence of Fred Hamer's interpretation. They had the privilege of contact with the surviving dancers even if the information gained was very little. It is a pity that most morris dancers experience of the tradition is only Jockey to the Fair. Bedford Morris Men keep the tradition to the fore and have been the source of instruction for many years. One always thinks of Thaxted and Maid of the Mill. Now amongst the womens sides there is the Windsor Morris.

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## BRACKLEY

Early type - "Hinton" c. 1870:

### Order of Figures:

Foot-up, Back-to-back, Side-by-side & Show-out. Foot-up-&-down danced stationary. Back-to-back normal morris practice. Side-by-side done into line to the left at start on 2nd 1/2 of figure, pass back-to-back with partners in 2 steps into line again on other side retire at end of tune. Show-out was a Cross-over going as far as possible (15 yds.) turning to face partner & returning at end of bar 4. End facing up. Hopstep throughout.

The Dances:

### Shooting

Twirl sticks when possible in dance except Foot-up & Side-by-side Chorus - each corner in turn does: dib butt hit tip on ground shoot at corner dib butt hit tip strike with dornor/dance twirling sticks swaying on steps strike with corner on last beat. After corners set does a whole-hey before the next figure. Show-out ends with dib butt hit tips on ground & clash partners men being on wrong side of set.

### Getting Upstairs

Partners clap and 1/2hey repeat to places.

b.b.b.-/r+r.r+r.r+r.-/b.b.b.-/1+1.1+1.1+1./

Lads a Bunchum: hands down & up in Foot-up & Side-by-side, high twists otherwise.

1st chorus - corners in turn starting right foot do 2 plain capers, double step, 2 hopsteps, 2 plain capers & on the 2nd kicking right feet together. After each corner has danced in turn all do 1/2hey & repeat corners this time starting other foot 1/2hey to places.

2nd chorus - shake hands right then left in repeat instead of kicks.

3rd chorus - touch own hat, 1st with right hand then with left in repeat instead of kick.

There was some doubt as to whether the 1/2heys might not be whole. There is no indication of slip-heys & normal morris heys should be inferred. However if use slip-heys, corners in repeats are 1&4 3&2 5&5.

Later version c. 1914:

### Order of Figures

Foot-up-&-Down (FU&D), Side-by-side (SBS), Back-to-back (B2B) & Whole-Hey. There was a great deal of flexibility as there were long and short versions of each figure and there was a practice of interpolating Foot-up-&-Down or Down-&-Up or Whole-heys throughout the dance any particular performance would be constructed to a pattern. Dances were varied in length according to the interest they evoked. Figures included "rear-up" footing. Dances ended with 4 capers & all-in. DF = chorus.

Collected orders were -

- i. FU&D; DF; SBS both ways; DF; B2B both ways; DF; dance in position & all-in or Hey-down; Hey-up; dance in position & all-in.
- ii. as i. but all figures double length, either short or long FU&D and 2nd figure often FD&U.
- iii. as ii. but the SBSs & B2Bs separated by choruses.

- iv. as i. to iii. but Hey-downs and Hey-ups interpolated. e.g. from iii. FU; DF; FU; SBS; DF; Hey-down or possibly FU; DF; SBS; DF; Hey-up or FD; DF; B2B; DF; Hey-down; DF; B2B; DF; Hey-up; DF; Position & all-in. Sometimes only one SBS or B2B.
- v. as i. to iii. but FU&D or FD&U before each figure, e.g. from iii. FU&D; DF; FD&U; DF; FU&D; SBS; DF; FD&U; SBS; FU&D; B2B; DF; FD&U; B2B; DF; Hey-down; Hey-up; Position & all-in. Or instead of last chorus in dances in which men in wrong place or on wrong side, end Hey-up; Hey-down; Hey-up; Cross-over & all-in; or Hey-up; Cross-over; Hey-down; Hey-up & all-in.  
In this example SBS & B2B can be doubled at both ends.

#### The Dances:

Stick dances: recent informants insist that stick dances start with Whole-rounds - probably in place of Foot-up and that they ended dances on the chorus movement.

Balance the Straw - probably the following twice:

/-..o.o./-..e.e./o.e.o.e./o.e.x.-./ "doubles"

#### Beansetting

Partners cross 2 at a time doing dib butts 3x & clash butts with partner as pass dib butts 5x then measure out with stick on ground towards next pair to dance. After crossings all face dance & twirl & clash at end. Then without an intervening figure this is repeated by the corners in turn 1&6 going 1st. When going forward to clash in SBS shout "scare the crows".

Bobby & Joan - as Balance the Straw

#### Captain with his Whiskers

Hopsteps while hitting. Clap tips on 1st beat of each bar. Indication of additional clash, perhaps with butts on middle beat.

Rose Tree - as Captain... but swing arm out on 1st beat & clash on middle beat of each bar.

#### Shooting

Corners in turn dib butts, hit tips on ground, clash. When all do that with their partner or face twirl dancing & clash at end. Repeat all that.

Corner dances: in all corner movements dancers substituted quick capers for sidesteps & hopsteps at will. They usually did so when they had a large audience & felt energetic.

#### Bonnets So Blue

Corner dance starting with whole-rounds. Chorus possibly 4 sidesteps, 4 hopsteps & rear-up.

#### Jockey to the Fair

Chorus - 4 sidesteps, 4 hopsteps, 4 plain capers, 4 hopsteps & rear-up.

#### Maid of the Mill

Corners approach 4 bars hopstep, twirling fists as though to fight. In next bar take right hands at full strength & turn 1/2 way round & rear-up in opposite place.

Linked handkerchief dances:

#### Old Woman Tossed Up

Show-out as 2nd figure. Chorus - Hey-down & up then dance in position.

#### Shepherd's Hey

Partners Show-out then hey ad lib. In hey come in from either end passing under. Show-out again etc.