

## THE LOWER SWELL MORRIS

### A. CRITIQUE OF "THE MORRIS AT LOWER SWELL"

An article by a key member of the Morris Ring Archival Committee which arises from the archival activity is important. The objective, despite the disclaimer, is to combine the results of recent archival activity with the skills and intuitions of experienced performers of the morris. However archival activity is most effective when all the available information is used. The author has found the problem met by all users of Sharp's field material that it is not annotated by "tradition". The material in the Field Note Books has to be sorted by relating to the corresponding entries in his MSS, which is the properly written up source. This relating was first done by Alex Helm 20 years ago and can now be found in the Folk Lore Society Library. Then I identified the dance material and produced a master index that was first written for the Morris Ring Advisory Council 20 years ago and available ever since in the Vaughan Williams Library. Much use has been made of the material in recent years, despite the impression given, and I for one have written brief accounts, brief because that is all there is, on Brilles, Forest of Dean, Noke, North Leigh, Steeple Clayden and Withington, sticking very closely to the collectors' own words.

There are many pitfalls in collating material, usually from ignorance of the background. For example the "Stretton-on-Fosse" morris mentioned not for the first time by the Archival Committee is nothing more than Sam Bennett's 1906 Ilmington side, none the less important but already included in Bacon under Ilmington 1906. Most relevant Ilmington material has been available for many years in "Mss Material on the Ilmington Morris 1805-1930" which was prepared for the Advisory Council and fairly widely circulated. This document quotes from Sharp's and Bennett's letters about the side (Daily News 25.4.10, 29.4.10, 10.5.10 and Morning Post 25.5.10) and from Sam's letters to Douglas Kennedy, all of which are available in the Vaughan Williams Library. Sam's side used to dance at the Stretton Flower show. One year the side would not dance while Sharp was there because of his adverse comments on their standard of dancing in the competition at the Corn Exchange, Stratford. But as Sharp said, he already had the dances in his collection but he would not dream of publishing them.

Much of the available background material to the Longborough and Lower Swell tradition was sold as notes at the Ring Instructional in 1964 and an update, including Keith Chandler's work on kinship and newspaper reports, is to be published in serial form in Morris Matters. There is much to suggest that there was only one team between the two places and perhaps it was really the "Lower Swell" tradition originally. There is a newspaper advert in the Moreton Free Press of 19.6.86 for the "Longborough and Lower Swell Morris." A draft of this revised paper was sent to the Morris Ring Archives.

The sources quoted, William (Bill) and Jim Hathaway were seen by Sharp on 30.3.07, 4.4.07 and 1.8.07. There is no material for 1909 that I am aware of that is relevant to Lower Swell or Longborough nor am I aware that these two Hathaways were ever seen again by Sharp. In the Field Tune Books for 1910 volumes 1 and 2, for the period April and May there is Longborough material from Harry Taylor that matches the material in the Sharp MSS and appears to me to be the source material for the dances in the article.

The material for this period was used by L Saunders of the Westminster MM in evolving the WMM view of Longborough and some notes by him were available before the 1964 Ring Instructional which emphasised the movement and caper variants.

The list of Hathaway tunes omits the 18th title which presumably is "Country Gardens", although the tune given to Sharp was actually "Highland Mary". Both the Hathaways, John Mason and Harry Taylor seem to have made the same confusion when talking to collectors. We think that John Mason of Stow married the daughter of the old Longborough fiddler Richard Webb and as the morris was kept within families he probably was associated with the Longborough and Lower Swell morris. Mason had a Black Joke jig "as played by Bill Hathaway". Mason also said that Highland Mary was a handkerchief dance but sometimes sticks. Taylor stated that there were no stick dances at Longborough but Chipping Campden called their stick dance at one time the "Longborough Stick Dance" so perhaps there was a time, either early or late, when they did bother to carry sticks. Sharp published Constant Billy, London Pride and Marriage Vow in Folk Dance Airs 1909. He used Constant Billy for Taylor's Longborough dance and Maid of the Mill for the Ilmington dance. This hardly counts as using freely. Jockey to the Fair did not come via Sharp but through Bill Hathaway's friend Stagg (Spragg). He copied out the tunes Sharp had noted and later added Jockey. He gave the tunebook to Helen Kennedy and this includes in its annotations,

Marriage Vow - sidestep and hey dance, also called Saturday Night,  
 Country Gardens - called it Morning Star,  
 Highland Mary - called it Country Gardens and said it was a jig,  
 Young Collins - a stick dance.

This adds Highland Mary and Morning Star as possible tunes. If one ignores what I believe to be Taylor's material then I do not find that Constant Billy or Young Collins are handclapping dances or that Shepherd's Hey is a handclapping jig. My note against Greensleeves says "over baccapipes, finishing up with the broom stem dance." Again I have no note that tunes came from elsewhere, only that Sharp was identifying the place names in titles, or cross referencing to similar tunes collected three years later at Sherborne.

Sharp had from Jim Hathaway that side stepping was 123 cross feet, then 123 straight, repeat crossing other way, right foot first. Sharp's MSS (Tune 1372) repeats this in a more confusing way. As Taylor had the different sidestep dances done with small variations no general deduction is possible. In 1907 Sharp was still 3 years away from his major morris collecting and hence his detailed understanding of the varieties of morris movement. When he first met Harry Taylor he was still meshed in the terminology of the Esperance Club days, for example "come and go" for half gig. One interesting point is the use of "hey" for half hey and "double hey" for whole hey by informants. The Field Notes are often closer to the traditional terminology than the Morris Books which as Sharp pointed out had to include rationalisations.

The dance notations contain more than "a certain amount of reconstruction" - why spoil good honest inspiration by expressing it thus? Why say a "dance consisted of" when the mss only said "morris off, ring once or twice, making obedience and then straight off." Also why say "but the half capers appear to be missing which means that

each distinctive figure is a fighting type" when what is really meant is that "only fighting is mentioned so let us ignore other possibilities and fight every time." The Travelling Morrice found that Sharp had not collected all the corner movements of the Longborough dance, but the kicking chorus was included in Sharp's MSS, but not the Field Notes.

Where is the mss evidence for the suggested or the Longborough half rounds stepping? Does the author intend one 4 step, ft. j, 4pC because "2 bar 4 step, j and caper" or "2 bar 4 step, ft. j & 4pC" do not add up to 4 bars of movement. Gallant Hussar is not similar to William and Nancy, Bledington, which is either corners half through or couples two by two.

The mss says of Marriage Vow,

1. The Marriage Vow is a morris. All stand in a string, a sort of sidestep.
2. In single file (all 6 of them) first man dances towards fiddler, half side stepping and half capering.

Under entry Tune 1372 Sharp says,

3. 6 men in single file. First advances and recedes towards fiddler, side stepping and half capering.

This could imply the second half of the Bledington movements or even the whole of it, but, most significantly, it is the only piece of information that is not like Taylor's dances.

I am prepared to be told that some of <sup>my</sup> transcripts are incomplete or inaccurate and that not all of my comments are justified and I hope someone will correct any errors of fact. However I do not see why accurate scholarship and practical inspiration can not go hand in hand. Also I think that it is a good concept to combine alternatives within a tradition with some new ideas to provide yet another starting point which must surely have been the traditional process.

R L DOMMETT

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