

THE NORTH LEIGH MORRIS

North Leigh is about 2 miles from Witney and called "Nor' Lye" by the locals.

Cecil Sharp met two old dancers, William Partlett, aged 79 in 1910 (b.1832) and Fred Gardner, aged 80 in 1912 (b.1833) and living in Corn St. Witney.

The morris ceased between 1860 and 1870. They were taught by Billy Brown (b.1819) who used to play pipe and tabor and came from Hanborough, the next village. They danced to the playing of John Lansbury, the Ramsden fiddler, who also played at Ducklington. The fool was Charles Green (b.1821) who had his face blacked. They wore white trousers and had ribbons on their high hats and bells.

Fred remembered 20 morris teams meeting at Woodstock. First they danced before the Duke, then repaired to a booth in the town where they competed, Nor' Lye of course winning. This was at a Lamb Ale which only took place once every seven years.

William danced the ordinary and sidestep with a straight leg - "you must step out forward. Got to shiver your legs in the capers. Fetch out the sweat on you." William said of Fred, he was as lissom as a cat, out and out dancer, like on wires. They called a galley a hook-leg, back to back a gipsy and half gip, half hands.

William said handks only, not sticks but Fred claimed they had a lot of stick dances and also used coco-nut halves. "You took a coco-nut, sawed it in half, scraped out the kernel, bored two holes in which you put a ribbon. That you passed your hand through like the strap of a concertina, and then clapped them together or against those of other dancers. Mrs Kasey a tune to which this was danced."

Partlett referred to Mrs Kasey, Princess Royal, Jockey to the Fair, Greensleeves, Constant Billy, Old Woman Tossed Up and Old Taylor, really Trunkles. Jigs were danced by two men who stood still between turns rather than walking round.

Fred said that the Old Woman was sometimes called "The Threadneedle" and indicated a movement with handks something like the ribbon dance in which partners joined handks together. This performed by the morris men. They had a stick dance in which tapping in the 4th and 8th bar was done as in the Fieldtown dance Bobbing Joe (Bobby and Joan) over the head. Often they would stop before half rounds and whole hey and kipper out and standing in their places sung a verse of the song through and then finished off the dance.

Cecil Sharp noted of Partlett's Princess Royal that the steps were almost exactly as Mr. Taylor's of Longborough. He gave the order as Foot Up, Sidestep, Half Capers, and Upright Capers to the "usual slow tune".

The North Leigh tune Boys of the Bunch is given in Bacon for the Ascot dance. The Ascot Black Joke from the Williams mss is so close to the North Leigh tune as to make one wonder about the sources of the Williams tunes. The Ascot Mrs Casey is also close to the North Leigh Mrs Kasey. Sharp had a fragment of the Sweet Highland Mary tune and a Princess Royal with a shortened A music.

It may be presumed that the dances started with a Foot Up and continued with half-gip, back to back and then singing followed by half rounds and whole hey and caper up. Mike Heaney suggests the following words for Mrs Kasey,

"Your rhino rattle, come men and cattle, come all to Mrs Kasey,
Of trouble and money, my jewel my honey, I warrant I'll make you easy."

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