

NOTES ON THE FOREST OF DEAN MORRIS FROM SHARP MSS & T.

MAYHILL

Thomas Phelps(73) of Mayhill an old morris dancer Gave it up about 30 years ago. Last time at Guim's Mill(?). Always danced a full week at Whitsuntide and at club feast.

Six men, no sticks, no handks, clapped hands instead. Williams played fiddle, now dead. Had many dances including Greensleeves which was a pipe dance and also a clapping dance.

Tall hat decorated with ribbons round band, round top and diagonally. Shirts covered with ribbons of all colours, back and front. Two sashes crossing diagonally and hanging down sides. Ruggles not bells on legs fastened onto strips of leather and tied on with yellow ribbons. He always bought new ribbons each year. Black trousers.

Fool with tail on end of stick 3 or 4 feet long.

Swordsman with 2 swords danced over them on ground. (Arthur, the Stratford fiddler told me they never did this but danced a very complicated sword dance with a sword in each hand to a tune I took down. This at Ruarden about 7 miles from Mayhill)

Flagman carried a flag 3 or 4 ft square on pole about 4 or 5 ft long. Flag with initials of flagman "R"(Richard) "W"(Williams) Gonders Green embroidered on it. The flag was striped red and white. The foreman of the morris was always the flagman.

Flagman and Swordsman were the top men of the morris, they walked in front side by side with 4 other men in couples behind them as they marched from place to place. Couldn't remember tune (Arthur gave me the Ruarden March Air)

(Elsewhere Sharp has fiddler's name as Henry Allen, the man from whom Sam Bennett got his old fiddle - RLD)

Thos Phelps of Mayhill told me many things. They always danced in Whit week from Monday to Saturday. One year they went to Gloucester, then down other side of Severn to Newnham, came over it where where they spent a night and so back up to Nottswood where they held the wake

Mayhill always used a fiddle. "We didn't go for money, we went for sport." They had 6 dancers, ragman, fool and fiddler. A large white flag yard square blue round edge, R W in red and something white couldn't remember

CLIFFORD'S MESNE

George Baldwin charcoal burner(88) now living at Newent in the Alms House used to be fiddler of the Clifford's Mesne morris. 40 years ago since it lapsed. Tho. Philpotts was fool, bladderman, John Alpin etc. dancers - all dead.

As at Mayhill they processed from place to place in column formation top left being flagman and top right swordman. The former had a large flag peculiar to the village which he waved in time with the music and the latter, 2 swords which he whistled round his head with the lilt of the music. He also danced the sword dance (swords on the ground) to tune of Greensleeves.

Baldwin used to play at all the wakes and gave me some interesting tunes. (CS2506 Polly Put The Kettle On, CS2505 Gloucestershire Hornpipe - country dances) collected 12.8.10

Morris March - this was processional march of Clifford's Mesne morris for whom Baldwin used to fiddle.

Morris Call - This was played to call morris men together.

The Call proper is the first 12 bars. The succeeding dance lilt was "just to excite 'em".

Wild Morris - Always played 'em off the green. They went off in same order as came on in the March only quicker and dancing instead of marching.

Morris Book 1 p.22 - the fiddler would go to the highest place in the village street at 6 o'clock on the Monday morning and there solely play the "morris call" to sum on the Morris Men. The purpose of the little snatch of dance melody in the second strain was he told us "to entice 'em to dance"

RUARDEAN

Anne Roberts(85) Her mother used to dress 3 morris dancers every year the flagman G.Harris and one of the Penns. White shirts sleeves and wrists tied with black ribbons about 2 in broad one on wrist, one on elbow. Broad ribbons (4 in) pleated all over shirt back and front.

White cambric flag, trimmed with ribbons. A large rosette in centre, 4 smaller rosettes at each corner of different colours. Flag about yard square not a long stick.

Six dancers, fool with swords, flagbearer. Danced a full week at Whitsuntide and at 3 other wakes in adjoining villages. Had a fiddler but could not remember Arthur coming to play.

High box hats trimmed with ribbons. Velvetreen breeches. White stockings. Danced with handks not sticks. Described a procession with flag and swordbearer at head as at Bayhill.

Henry Allen(90) at Stratford on Avon 27.8.09
Sword Dance - Dance of man who accompanied the morris dancers at Ruardean for whom Allen played down to about 1871-2. He held the swords in his hands and manipulated them as he danced. It was very difficult - DID NOT place on ground.

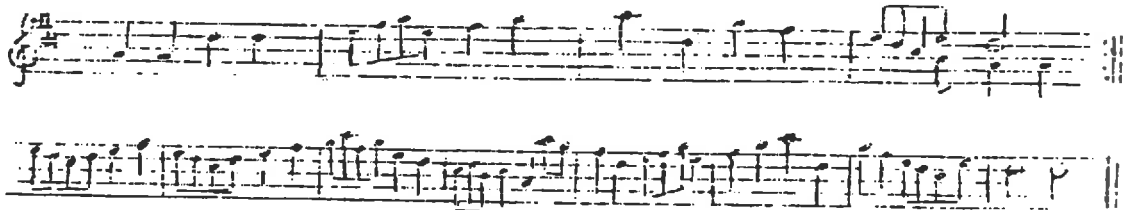
Morris Dance - this was always the opening air "to call 'em together". He also called it a 'march. The morris dancers numbered 6 or 8 - he could not remember. They had a fool or jerriman. A flagbearer and a swordbearer. The flagbearer cut the flag.

John Penn of Newport Mon. 15.4.47 collected by Russell Wortley. Tom Fool in Ruardean Morris and gave details of costume etc. Further information from Martin Penn at Ruardean (Aug 1946 - April 1947) and from Peter Ward at Joy's Green (25.1.46).

They had a processional (Speed the Plough) and 3 dances (Soldier's Joy handclapping dance handclapping collected by Russell Wortley Haste to the Wedding, Greensleeves) They danced at Whitsun (Whit Monday and following days going to Ross-on-Tye, Mitcheldean etc) The Penn brothers said 6 dancers Tom Fool, flagman and fiddler. Peter Ward said they danced 8 a side (10 in all) and Tom Fool (John Penn) and 2 men with 2 swords apiece which they twisted in the air in front of them and above their heads. This was the processional. No Molly or Betty. Last danced in 1884. It only went on for 2 or 3 seasons.

Mrs Watkins (granddaughter of Mrs Roberts who gave a Forest of Dean Morris shirt to Cecil Sharp; actually according to Mrs Watkins she and her mother made it under her grandmother's directions) she told Russell (1.9.57) that her grandmother told her that there was a fight at Pump Hill in which one of the Morris dancers was killed - there was no more Morris dancing after that

Sword Dance



Morris Dance

