

THE LONGBOROUGH MORRIS - THE CONTEXT OF A RECOVERY

In 1964 I was the fool for the Farnborough Morris from Hampshire in a show near Stow-on-the-Wold outside Longborough's Post Office, dangerously equipped with a horse-whip lent to me by one of the villagers, when I heard it said that "Mr. Taylor wouldn't have had that!" Several of the crowd were remembering how the grand old generalissimo of the Longborough Morris used to stop visiting sides from Oxford and Cambridge in the 1920's because they were not jumping high enough. Afterwards I spoke to two men who had started to learn the local morris in the 1920's. This was followed up the next day by visiting Harry's youngest son Fred, then living at the top of the hill above the village's only pub, in the third council house from the bottom on the right. Later that year I came back with Ewart Russell, a friend and then Morris Ring Bagman, to meet the local fiddler George Joynes.

This account, first started in 1964, collates that information with material drawn with permission from Sharp's *Morris Books*, formal manuscripts and rough Field Notes, from discussions and access to that time to the papers of Clive Carey, R Kenworthy Schofield, Douglas Kennedy, to various Travelling Morrice Logs and interviews with several other participants. There was an early expansion of the first part following exchanges with Keith Chandler at the start of his research. It has now been cross-checked for accuracy against Keith Chandler's publications, particularly for the names, but essentially with his help it has been made more readable.

This article is an account of aspects of the interaction of the revival and the tradition. It has been necessary to cast the net widely to suggest the flavour of the times, otherwise there would be too many gaps to make an interesting story.

The Travelling Morrice is often mentioned. This is a part of the Cambridge Morris family providing two or more week-long tours each year away from the Cambridge local territory for current and ex-members. The usual contact has been John Jenner. The equivalent arrangement for the Oxford University Morris Men has been called the Ancient Men. Roy Judge has prepared a manuscript history of May Morning at Oxford and the early days of the OUMM.

PART ONE - THE ANECDOTES

Henry, colloquially Harry and called thus through-out this paper, was born in 1843 at Longborough to Stephen and Elizabeth Taylor. His father was a morris dancer. As a young boy Harry used to risk a thrashing by playing truant to watch the morris. At that time the local sides were accustomed to meet at Stow-on-the-Wold to compete. Until 1852, the last in which morris dancing took place at Dover's Games, this included the right to dance "on the hill". Only one side was allowed there and they gained the privilege of selling the yellow Dover's favours, what we would call today rosettes. The last year a meeting was held the dancers came from Longborough, accompanied by one or two older Chipping Campden men, according to the manuscript history written by John Horne of Campden in 1898.

The Dancers

The team consisted of six dancers, a fool, a fiddler and a hand with the money box.

The Travelling Morrice were told that Harry Taylor and Mark Taylor, perhaps distant cousins, were widely known as dancers. Harry claimed he was foreman for many years, he called it "nearside top". There were obviously close ties between the dancers in Longborough and Lower Swell. Fred Taylor said that his father usually had a couple of the best dancers living in Lower Swell in his side, mostly Hathaways. At one time it could have been all Taylors and Hathaways, suggesting it was essentially yet another "family" side. Henry Hathaway, a roadman then living at Upper Slaughter and aged seventy four, told the Travelling Morrice in 1933 that when Harry came to dance with the Lower Swell men he used to lead the set. Russell Wortley was also told later that some of the Lower Swell men were taught by Harry's father. Local fiddlers spoke of playing for the Lower Swell side, so possibly there was only one side between the two places in the 1870's and 1880's. A newspaper advertisement for 19th June 1886 in *The Moreton Free Press* said,

Morris Dancers. The Longborough and Lower Swell Morris dancers will give an entertainment in the Swan Assembly Room, this evening, at seven o'clock.

One forms the impression that there were few rigid demarcations between sides in the area of Stow, teams being organised around personalities rather than from villages. Most dancers seemed to know the others, perhaps having danced with or against them, eg at the competitions. Several revival dancers have commented to me that those they met spoke about the competitions, presumably repeating what must have been heard when younger. Little appears to have been recorded of what was said about the participants, for example at the pre-WW II Stow Ring Meetings, and the Morris Ring Logs contain nothing significant. The comments passed about the judging inspired an early article on competitions in *Morris Matters*. The local papers to consult are *The Moreton Free Press*, *Campden Herald and Stow-on-the-Wold Advertiser* published weekly at Moreton from 1858, *The Campden Herald* from 1862, *The Shipston News* from 1878 and *The Stow-on-the-Wold News* from 1879.

Fred Taylor, born May 1885, was too young to remember his father dancing in a team, as he gave it up in his mid-forties. It was his father's only hobby, but everyone, including his sons, used to take it as a bit of a joke. His dad was very musical, but never played anything. In those days only fiddles were cheap and they were considered the most difficult instrument to pick up. Fred remembered his father step dancing to hornpipes. He had lots of fancy steps. He also used to dance morris jigs with friends at the pubs. Fred remembered in particular another Taylor who used to dance at Oddington, see next paragraph. They liked to do a dance for two together called *Princess Royal*, which was his father's favourite.

Charles "Minnie" Taylor, living in his old age in Church Icomb, the dancer from Oddington from whom that village's dances derive, knew the Longborough, Sherborne and Bledington styles as well. He was well known as a dancer at least as far away as Ilmington, to which he had been known to walk to dance for Sam Bennett. On the 23rd August 1912, Sam had stated in *The Stratford-on-Avon Herald*,

... I hope to be at Earls Court next week with the Morris Dancers and am taking an old man of seventy four to give the *Sherborne Jig*, which is a very hard dance.

And again on 6th September 1912,

The old dancer (seventy four) walked fourteen miles and then danced jigs and morris for three hours and declared he could go on all night ... The many friends who wrote to me have said that they wanted to see morris dancing done by villagers and they wished to see it done in the old style.

Other Individual Dancers

Why did Sharp and the collectors who followed concentrate on Harry Taylor when there were other dancers around?

George Ackerman, born 1849 and living in the village when Sharp visited, but as he was thought not to be a first rate dancer, Sharp never followed him up.

John Collins, was also living in the village and met by Clive Carey in 1913. A man of this name was baptised in Stow-on-the-Wold in 1849, whose parents lived in nearby Maugersbury. He died in 1925 aged seventy five and was buried at Stow, and was local enough to have been this dancer.

Edward, also known as Edwin, "Ned" Hathaway, born in 1852. He danced No.2 or "offside foremost". He was living in the Alms Houses at Stow-on-the-Wold when the Travelling Morrice visited him in 1925 and he died about 1932. In 1875 he married Elizabeth Jeffries, the widowed step-daughter of the fool George Hathaway whose first wife was a Jeffries. Sharp visited her when she was living at Chipping Sodbury, but recorded nothing from her husband.

Alf Tuffley, living in the village when Sharp visited, was fifteen years younger than Harry. Sharp worked with dancers of this age elsewhere, so perhaps in this case it was because he had not danced for very long before he stopped.

Tom Tuffley, was the same age as Harry, but in 1910 he was living at Shottery near Stratford where, "he has a bit of land and gets his living off it".

Oliver Budd Webb was another local fiddler who knew his tunes by ear. His two sons (Robert) Frank (or Fred) and Joe(seph), born 1876 and 1878 respectively, danced with Longborough, but would have only been boys when Harry was active. About 1892 they moved to Bloxham, near Adderbury, where Frank was interviewed by the Misses D Daking, P Marshall and Janet Blunt in February 1914 and by Cecil Sharp on 15th September 1922. John Mason, the fiddler living in Stow in his old age, but earlier at Icomb and Bledington, married a Sarah Webb in 1851 at Stow.

Another dancer who knew the Longborough and Bledington dances was (John) William Spragg from Stow. He claimed that his father and grandfather had been noted morris dancers, and that he and his brother had been discovered by Cecil Sharp on 5th July 1906, because they were whistling morris tunes whilst mending the sewers outside Sharp's house at 183, Adelaide Road, Islington. Spragg was then living at 18, Cardian Street, Hammersmith. Accounts always appear to differ in detail, which makes the derivation of history from such material a little uncertain. In commenting on an early Esperance Club show, *The Manchester Daily Guardian* of 20th September 1906 said that two men found in Hammersmith were to bring their grandfather up from the West Country. *The Morning Post* for 14th January 1909 reported that two men working in a sewer in Hammersmith gave the Esperance girls

the benefit of dances and songs that had made their father famous in Gloucestershire.

Douglas Kennedy met Spragg at Stow during a tour by Sharp's mens team in 1912 when Spragg played his mouthorgan and danced Longborough and Bledington dances with the side. (Are there any newspaper references to this tour around?) After World War I, William lived at 38, Cecil Road, Hammersmith and used to come to the EFDS displays in Hyde Park with his grandchildren, where he always had a few words with Douglas Kennedy and his family. Born in 1878, he died in 1940. He would have been only nine if he had learnt his Longborough morris from any of the sides in which Harry Taylor danced. Is this suggestive of there having been a boy's side?

The Costume

There is sketch of the Longborough costume inside the front cover of Sharp's Field Notebook 1910 II. The dancers wore caps or half-high hats, although high hats were the right thing. They tried to have pleated shirts and to wear two, the second to suck up the sweat. Mrs Edward Hathaway had helped to make the shirts, clothes making was a common chore for daughters at home, and they were broad pleated.

A straight pleat down the centre, little frills on each side, and all the shirt with small tucks, very narrow, as narrow as could be done, four or five on each side. Frill about an inch broad. Didn't all have them, but the best ones did. No sticks ...

or so she told Sharp. His written-up manuscript says a diagonal scarf, but the sketch shows a conventional crossed baldrick in blue braid and a band around the dancer's waist in red braid. The words "bow" and "rosette" are used almost interchangeably, but it seems that what was intended was,

- a rosettes on the shoulders, possibly red, as the other rosettes are red, and likely to be very high up because of,
- b ribbons on breasts (at heart level),
- c ribbons around upper arm, tied with a bow and having three short streamers, one red and two blue. All bows were blue and red.
- d red rosettes at the lowest ends of the baldrick. Both here and at the shoulder there were probably bows as well,
- e a bow at the tie point for the waist band.

Most of them wore trousers, but breeches and blue stockings were considered to be the right thing. The bell pads had three vertical rows of bells on each leg, tied with green and other coloured ribbons. Harry Taylor told Sharp,

Can't dance in heavy shoes. Can't get off the ground. I always used light shoes, well nailed. Must have nails when you dance at Stow, as stones so cruel.

They carried their handkerchiefs tied on the middle finger. They did not use sticks, at least not during Harry's time. Denis Hathaway's Campden side, though, had a dance called *The Longborough Stick Dance* and he had come from very near Longborough. The tune used was a version of *Young Collins*, a common tune

locally for both a stick and handclapping dance, thus it is not impossible that Longborough had at least one stick dance at some time, as a few were almost universal around Stow. Mason told Sharp that his *Highland Mary* was for handkerchiefs but sometimes it was used for a stick dance.

The Philosophy

The side,

... used to go up to a lane with a fiddler and practice night after night about this time of year ...

that is, before Whitsun. They danced publicly only during Whit-week. Dover's Games was always on the Thursday and Friday. Fred Taylor said that they would go out for the week, starting each morning with clean shirts and rosettes, to walk to places like Shipston-on-Stour, Stow-on-the-Wold and Moreton-in-the-Marsh for the clubs, dancing at farms on the way for cider. The club days then were grand affairs with bands and entertainments, the clubs being the Friendly Societies. They would normally have their annual meeting associated with a club walk and feasting, as well as having an entertainment.

The side sometimes had a new fiddler who played fresh tunes and then he used to tell them the steps to be danced to them.

Harry seldom had a good set of dancers,

Put your best men on the near side, the duffers on the other.
We never cared so long as we had three good 'uns.

He also suggested, "Put the tall 'uns in front, short 'uns behind."

During the seventh Travelling Morris tour Harry Taylor complained that their shirts did not get nearly as wet as those of a traditional team. In his day one dance left the team so exhausted they couldn't immediately perform another.

The Merriman

The fool for Harry Taylor's set was usually George Hathaway from Lower Swell, who died in 1894 aged sixty eight. He was called "Squire" or "Master". It was he who used to announce, "One dancer and six fools!" George's widow and second wife Jane was Harry Taylor's sister, already a widow and also named Jeffries when they married in 1860. Aged seventy five in 1909, she said, "they always called me the Squire's wife", and thought, "it was a grand enjoyment it was", and, "he used to go and do Merriman for them, then we had a merry come up!" This was another local title, used for example at Guiting Power. George's brother Samuel was the fool at Lower Swell. George's step-daughter Elizabeth, who had married Edward Hathaway the dancer, had her father's bells when Sharp met her at Chipping Sodbury.

The morris fool always had a blackened face. Another of George's brothers, William "Snobby" Hathaway, the lame fiddler, said that the whistle player from Bourton-on-the-Water, Jack the Lad, used to black the fool's face. This must have been the widely known "Jim the Laddie" who died of excessive drink probably in 1856, and

whose real name was MacDonald, born in Edinburgh in 1811. He was an uncle to George and James Simpson at Sherborne where he lived from 1841 at least.

The fool always carried a stick with a bladder at one end and a cow's tail at the other. He wore a hairy thing on his head and had a red grid-iron marked on his seat. A blue linen smock that had been used by a Longborough fool was given to the Travelling Morrice by George Joynes about 1950 and they use a copy of this smock. Of about three-quarters length it was admitted by the CMM that this is not a very good example of a traditional smock.

The fool often danced the jigs, the most frequently mentioned were *Princess Royal* and *Jockey to the Fair*. Only the fool was remembered as doing the Baccapipes dance, to the tune of *Greensleeves*.

An oft repeated story about Hathaway as fool was how at one farm a dog went for him, so he dived into the dog's kennel, which was half a barrel, and barked and made faces at it.

"That mixed the Dog! ... Dog never good at housekeeping arter that!"

Soon after Sharp first visited Harry Taylor, Sharp was lecturing in the Lesser Queen's Hall, Langham Place, London on 31st May 1910. *The Morning Post* and *The Farnham Herald* for 1st June 1910 gave the story thus,

On one occasion the "Squire", on entering a farmstead was warned by the farmer that a ferocious chained dog would probably make demand for "fatted calf" if approached too closely. Having enticed the dog to the full length of his chain, the morris man, making a sudden dart, got into the kennel himself, and, kneeling with his head and hands just outside, growled in such an ominous fashion, that the dog, so far from being anxious for the man's calf, was thoroughly cowed and his master declared that he was "good for nowt ever afterwards".

In the same lecture Sharp told of the fool, who when asked "What's the time?", produced from his fob a large padlock and chain. Whacking his questioner on the head with it, he replied "just struck one!"

William Hathaway told Sharp, "the Squire of the morris, that's the tomfool, used to run round and sing"

"Greensleeves and yellow lace
Boys and girls they work apace
They earn some money to buy some lace
To lace (sic) the lady's Greensleeves,"

You must not have a natural fool, but a man with his head screwed on, as I may say, for Squire.

It was this Hathaway who described Sherborne as a "desperate morris place!"

Another story told by Sharp after his visit to Longborough was in *The Times* of 1st June 1910. It was of the two enthusiasts who slept in a barn and could never get to sleep comfortably until each had danced *Jockey to the Fair* in his bare feet.

The Fighting

Fighting was a more tolerated part of working men's culture in the past than it is today and pub sessions at weekends could often end with brawls. The morris often had an adverse image because of working class drinking and disturbances, whether justified or not.

Not all the contacts between morris sides was cordial. There was, for example, a lack of sympathy with the supposed "Gipsy Folk" settled in Wychwood Forest. Somewhen in the 1850's Longborough went over to Ascot-Under-Wychwood on the day of the club feast and ran into Leafield, "Fieldtown for short", in fighting mood, who considered this to be poaching on their territory. There were other similar stories. Henry Franklin the Fieldtown dancer told Sharp that the Finstock and Ramsden morris, "was like a nature with Leafield", but, "the young men from Leafield fell out with Finstock, had a row or two, but decided to have it out." It was a "jolly good battle" - there were two fights at the Whit Hunt, presumably during the celebrations that followed the capturing of the deer in the Chase Woods. George Steptoe, one time Fieldtown foreman, with a reputation for barefist prize-fighting, fought a man from Finstock and lost. It was a proper fight with a timekeeper.

Whilst going round with the box at Lower Slaughter on the Travelling Morrice tour of 1933, Walton Abson, next year to become the first bagman of the Morris Ring, spoke with an old man who remembered the morris at Lower Swell and Longborough. In addition he told of his wife's father who danced at Little Barrington. There was a great rivalry between the Little Barrington and Sherborne men and on one occasion when dancing was going on at Sherborne, the Little Barrington dancers got George Steptoe to come over from Leafield and act as fool for them. With him they went over and held a rival show, with the result that the two fools fell foul of each other and the dancing ceased in favour of a stand-up fight between Steptoe and Thomas Kench. The old man's father-in-law was in the Little Barrington team on this occasion and it was evidently one of his choicest memories.

In the book *R J E Tiddy, A Memoir* by D R Pye, published in Cambridge June 1923, it is mentioned that Tiddy bought the Priory Cottage at Ascot-under-Wychwood, built at his own expense a dancing and reading room in the village and started a local WEA branch. An old dancer, aged over ninety, invited to tea and asked what it was in the old morris days he liked best, said "The Fightin". Attitudes have changed. Boxing booths were once common and well supported at fairs.

The End

Why the morris stopped is unclear. The last regular annual Whitsun performance at Stow was on Whit Monday 1885. The end must have been for a mixture of reasons.

One was distaste amongst the local gentry. In the Peacock collection there is an item from the wife of Captain Maynard, the Travelling Morrice fiddler known as "B.M.", who was the granddaughter of the Rev. Etches, sometime vicar of