

#### CONTEMPORARY CHANGE

Everyone believes that the morris should evolve but few have any idea what is happening. The biggest change in 30 years is the number of dances available and being danced. Exploiting old material has doubled the number of traditions. Village revivals and sides that specialise have extended the interpretations and repertoires. Some teams have built up extensive idiosyncratic variations which might get thrown away just because a dancer consults source material and the reason for what is being done had been forgotten.

An obvious change since the war has been in the dancing of Bledington, the introduction of hooks, now to be seen in every tradition instead of galleys, and the Longborough like uprights, mostly at the prompting of Russell Wortley. The Sharp published Tiddy and Butterworth old Bledington style is almost extinct. Some changes are more subtle, partly because the dances are being done by men who have a lot of dance experience and are letting dance sense control. It is particularly noticeable in handmovements - what are the original arm movements for the Fieldtown slows? Coming into the centre in Fieldtown rounds was once confined to The Rose, but since 1949 it has become nearly universal. Before the dancers used to turn to face back and then backstepped around the circle.

The popularity of dances has changed. Orange in Bloom has completely replaced Lads A Bunchum. New dances have appeared, such as Balance the Straw and Valentine which grew as Fieldtown interpretations of Ascot dances, and Black Joker which uses a Stow tune. It is just as well that there are not too many good new dances as we would soon be swamped if every side added a dance every year to the corpus.

Experience has brought less rigidity and more expression to arm movements. The greatest variety is in the interpretations of Bampton - a whole field of research in its own right - with much that is danced owing little to the ways in the village since 1919, that having remained remarkable constant compared with the variety in morris sides. The variation comes in the timing and speed of the lift of the hands, how far apart, what goes with the backstep and the jump, when to turn in the foot-up and the half-rounds. But where has the pram pushing and the low sweeping hand movements in side step dances come from?

One undesirable innovation has been the standard dip-wave in the side step. Not only are downward emphasising movements aesthetically poor but the action is not part of the received tradition from anywhere. Downward, earthy movements are outside the classical morris, especially in the basic double step. The signs are that basics are no longer understood and are being taught wrongly.

A good interpretation by a club changes everyone's perception of a tradition, for example Westminster's Longborough and Jockey's Ilmington, and it has needed a very deliberate return to sources eg Mss and DN Kennedy's memories, to find that there could be an alternative. Some traditions have changed permanently. Eynsham, first

by Bacon's film and now the village side showing how it was, has been found to be fundamentally different from Sharp's publication, as has Abingdon.

Another tradition that is currently evolving is Bucknell. It has gone away from its Fieldtown image, but there is still no majority interpretation of the handmovements or the hey and much experimentation is evident. The sources on Ilmington reflect a long history of restarts in the village so that in announcing one's origin it is almost necessary to include the decade from which one has started. The variations extend from classic Sharp, with galleys included in all the turns to represent the dance before 1860, through the dancing styles at the Jubilees and Sam Bennett's mens:side of the 1900's, to Schofield's teaching of Oxford City about 1960 based on childrens' dancing since WWII.

Some changes come under the guise of getting closer to the original, although this is in many ways unknowable.

However clubs still let a "house" style obscure differences between traditions or present rather stylised versions to exaggerate the differences. They still dance badly with little care for basics. They still do not do it as well as it used to be done - or is it that I am getting old?

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