

## NEW DIRECTIONS

Growing older, I regret the wilder extravagances masquerading as morris today.

Developments in the morris world this century have been based on some false impressions of the past whose impact are only now being appreciated. Collectors concentrated on the oldest, playing down the creative elements in the idioms, recognising the urge to improve as part of the traditional process, although obviously denying it for the "inexperienced" revival, but not seeing the variations found between teams as showing the equally important desire to be different, even though this was evident in the Cotswold villages where the morris had stops and starts. "Modern" dances and tunes, such as *The Rose Tree* at Bampton, were ignored as untraditional, as in effect were all young dancers and their performances. To older dancers long familiarity brought an apparent stability for which there is little hard evidence.

The received traditions include many dances which have been well honed for performance and this root material can only be distorted or ignored at our peril. However they are not intended to be only for museum-like reproduction. Today we do not know how accurate is our knowledge, we do not know how complete are the surviving repertoires or what were the popular dances, and we do not know how satisfied the older dancers were with each of their individual dances as remembered. Our judgement is based on a perception that the really great material for the performing arts is that which allows of continual regeneration and new insights within an accepted framework.

It is the nature of "new" things to be explored in many ways, eg the Border Morris since its recreation in 1975, not necessarily all successfully. When a dance tradition was "living", eg as in the North West, the variety was found to develop over a relatively short period. Once the "novelty" stage is passed, dance idioms settle down, as did country dance formations by the 18th C, and as has Carnival Morris and Formation Dancing more recently, often within self imposed limitations and having an emphasis on quality not freakishness.

Living dance is not static but adjusts to today's needs, which cannot closely match those of the past. Modern performances are built around shows which hardly existed in the 19th century. Unfortunately the number of recorded dances are insufficient to produce satisfying repertoires for the many attention competing clubs that now exist. Repertoires also need "light and shade", ie contrast.

Where might the "leading edge" be pointing?

**Cotswold** : Introducing a new chorus only changes about one third of a dance and its style still remains within the local idiom. Good dance ideas are invariably simple but hard to find. It is all too easy to be complex, making it slow to learn, difficult to practice and seldom "borrowed" by others. Part of the future has to be with the "new traditions", probably with fresh easy patterns rather than steps. For them the problem in achieving any impact remains in providing documentation and workshops, otherwise they die with their club.

**Border** : This is still evolving and remains largely raw and frequently inward looking and self indulgent. There will be more ordinary public resistance to the excesses of behaviour, especially to the yelling and the more ridiculous dress. In general the dances need to be shorter, with more structure and greater attention to dance and presentation skills. The successful sides seem to be those built

around "themes" or "house styles", which brings them into line with minstrelsy and street entertainers rather than the morris.

**North West** : The tradition was of a single processional/stage dance. The problem today is of having several in a contrasting repertoire. The dances often appear to come "by the yard", appropriate to unstructured procession performances, but not to more static audiences. Unfortunately most older dances use common movements and appear repetitive in performance, but introducing a few "Gee Whiz" figures is not enough compensation, although that was the traditional style. Because of the technical limitations of the idiom, novelty will always be important in order to keep the interest up in dance rather than event orientated groups.

**Long Sword** : This appears as only a limited idiom whilst the dancers remain linked, although in fact not many of the possibilities have been explored, especially with regard to timings within movements. This is one area where insights from European analogues could be most illuminating. While there are some fresh dances being created, new lock forms or methods of their assembly have been little explored. It is possible to form one with only four rigid swords and there are many proper possibilities for greater numbers which are not so symmetrical as those with which we are familiar or that are patterns within patterns. Dances which depend more on the manners of forming and the patterns of swords displayed may well have been within our tradition.

**Rapper** : This is a dance idiom which like step dancing cries out for some systematic work on establishing and cataloguing the possibilities, as most collected dances are sets of contrasting figures, and this does not highlight what can or cannot be done within the limits of the linked topology.

**Molly, Stave, Garland and the Rest** : These are weak English traditions with material akin either to the other traditions or which have been largely dependent on country dances. They depend for their survivability on contrast with other idioms and in having a unique style. There is considerable printed dance material out there from which choreographies can be quarried, and that was the traditional approach! Who can compose fugues, in which pairs of dancers perform the same steps and patterns but several bars delayed?

**Music** : Band skills are still minimal. There is a need to think about how the Irish tradition was used in Riverdance. Also, to consider the inspiration that can be gained from the "early music" of up to the end of the 17th century.

We need an honesty about the past, but also a respect, and a recognition that inexperience usually leads to mistakes.

Remember to take a long view, if it is not very good it will not last.

## THE TRADITIONS STYLISED

In the 19th century all the sides appeared to have a common repertoire of tunes and dance movements through sharing musicians, dancers and meeting at Ales and competitions, yet each achieved individuality. Today we chose to emphasise certain aspects of a tradition and to stylise it to distinguish between them in practice and outside performance. What features should be brought out? What makes each tradition different?

Many dancers are initiated to the morris through learning "simple" traditions which get them moving without much demand on them in terms of technique. Such are seldom relearned when the dancers have become more proficient, so they are often performed just as first learnt. Of course they need just as much skill to present as any other tradition, especially as much must be made of what limited features the dances do have. Equating of complexity with desirability of performance is a product of the practice room, because simple dances have been found satisfying to dance to the public and most of the tradition that survived into the 20th century was simple.

### BIDFORD

The sources are the Ferris mss, Graham's book, Sharp's mss and book, Stone's photographs, local memories and the performance of the local boy's side in the late 1950's. Apart from Graham describing everything from a spectator's point of view, no source is complete in itself. The locals insisted in the 1950's on a vigorous single step, which starts with the classical kick forward but then the foot is pulled back by lifting up to produce a "back-peddalling", perhaps an influence of the boots that were once worn. There is no backstep, but the jumps are high, and the sidestep has the feet in line with no body turn.

Unlike most other traditions, there was flexibility in the figure order, the choice of figures and the performance of the choruses. Informants said that the "handkerchief" dance which used the sidestep was done to many tunes, and the "stick" dance baton tappings could be chosen by the foreman at the time. The opening figure could be foot-up, both long and short, dance-facing, or rounds. The final figure could be "spiral", foot-up, perhaps fast, whole or half-rounds. The intermediate figures could be done ad lib, even the same one over and over again. Besides the spiral, which is a morris-off that doesn't, the interesting figure is the "in-&-out-hey" in which the middles only move forward and back to avoid the ends doing a normal hey. There is of course also a normal hey. Locals have insisted that the 4 bar chorus movements follow the halves of every figure and not just the half heys.

"Devil Among the Tailors", and "Heel and Toe" ("Monks March") tunes have been obtained but not the dances. Some of the dances are unusual. "Princess Royal" is a jig adapted for a corner dance and includes the tradition's only slows. "We Wont Go Home Till Morning" is a simple dance like "How Do You Do" (Headington Quarry) but it switches to the chorus of "Cuckoo's Nest" at the end for handshaking instead of having a reconciliation corner movement. "Bluff King Hal", a major version of the "Staines Morris" tune, is very unusual for a Cotswold dance, having a logical structure going from column to line of 6, to ring of 6 and rings of 3 and back to line of 6 and column. It would not have been out of place at Chipping Campden, but for the holding

hands in the rings and the bows. Fitting the dance to the tune and trying to improve the nods aesthetically have exercised many modern sides.

The Shakespeare Men have developed another satisfying way for the tradition and interpreted the uncertain dances. They have copied the old costume and dance in the village on the former celebration date of Trinity Monday.

## STANTON HARCOURT

The reconstruction is based on a verbose description of "Nutting Girl" in one mss and over-brief chorus descriptions in another. Repetitions, similar moves by the opposite, or mirror moves do not get mentioned. For example the handclapping in "Princess Royal" which is given as

probably means  $\begin{matrix} r+l \\ l+r \end{matrix} 3x, r+r 3x, l+l 3x, b 3x!$

Following Williams mss, there is no jump half way through dance-facing, cross-over is done right shoulders but left shoulders coming back, the forward-&-back is facing opposite not side-by-side as in half-gip, the middles go up towards the music every time in the half heys and the rounds at the end open out before the caper-in. The backstep in all the figures is done facing opposite, including in the half heys, so that the hands are out at the side and almost touching in a line along the side of the set. It is deduced that there is no stick clashing on jumps in the figures.

"Greenselves" and "Nutting Girl" are "goey" dances, the former is not a usual tune for a set dance. Attention should be given to standing upright in hitting one's opposite stick. The stepping in "Nutting Girl" is done facing up every time, it is very vigorous with larger arm swings than normal, and the step is like Eynsham with possibly a pronounced slap down of the forward foot in the "sidestep". In the "Nightingale" there is a choice of to turn or not when receiving hits. The song tune "Nightingale Sings" fits the dance, with the odds hitting the evens 3 times, the evens holding their stick horizontal, the odds capering and hitting on the middle beat of the bar, then a half hey and in the repeat the evens hitting the odds. A suitable tune for the "Clock" is "Grandfather's Clock", but as said before the clapping intended is uncertain. "Beanplanting's" tune is something like Badby. "Brighton Camp" is a piece de resistance, but it must be learnt from different positions. It is recommended that dancers keep turning to their right between clashes. Invented dances are "Jockey", 4 bar sidestep like "Nutting Girl", a whole-hey and 4 plain capers, and "Constant Billy" with sticks, like bars 3-4 of "Brighton Camp" done twice. Datchet and Pilgrim have created new Stanton dances.

Most dances will be seen in variants. The commonest change is to "Princess Royal", quite often filling the B out with a whole-hey rather than the next figure.

## WHEATLEY

The sources are Sharp mss, Major Fryer mss and the current side. It used the singlestep and a backstep. The hands went up and down, with the arms well bent at the elbow, from near the waist to above the head, with emphasis on the first strong beat of each bar. The lift that this gives the body is

exaggerated in the half-capers, which are always off the same foot. Because the first move is a "lift", there is nothing in O2YS. The figures are only foot-up, whole-rounds and whole-hey. Each is danced with 6 bars of hopstep and then the backstep and jump, that is, no break at half way. The hey can be repeated without pause, and the dancers can change to half-capers, and the whole-rounds continued by dancing back anti-clockwise to place, this also can be switched to half-capers. The order is not fixed other than starting with a foot-up and ending with whole-rounds and all-in.

Some of the dances were described to Fryer in criticism of Wargrave doing Adderbury and Headington versions. "Room for the Cuckoo" is the simplest dance and used for the boys and beginners. "Shepherd's Hey" is interesting because of the stepping inserted in the clapping chorus and the clapping instead of stepping at the end of figures. The stick dances have simple bold movements, without half heys! The tunes are all a little different from the norm, the "Processional" is a derivative of "Brighton Camp" and "Trunkles" may be a "Hunt the Squirrel". For a team just over the hill from Quarry and who used to go around in the same gang, the dances are suprisingly different.

The current side shows how well these dances can be presented. They have created "Ladder Hill" and "Windmill".

In its last days the side went out with a concertina, drummer and only three dancers, which could explain the limitations of the collected dances.



# ADDERBURY SING AND STICK

## Background

Adderbury sang old songs and other popular town songs of the day, often executing some of their stick movements whilst they sang the choruses. They did this to keep the crowd quiet while they were resting themselves. Sometimes they danced as they sang.

Janet Blunt (1859-1950) lived in Adderbury from 1892. She with the occasional help of friends, Mrs Elliot Hobbs, Miss Kennedy and Miss D C Daking, collected songs and country dances from 1907-1919, the morris only over the 1916-18 period. Several copies of her mss were made to pass to other people, such as Cecil Sharp who appears to have ignored it, which differ in details, so all have to be consulted. The Blunt collection was used by Michael Pickering for a thesis and a book "*Village Song and Culture : A study based on the Blunt Collection of Song from Adderbury, North Oxfordshire*" published in 1982 by Croom Helm, London. This puts the material fairly into its context of period and locality. Keith Chandler considers the people involved in his books.

The major informant on the morris was William "Binx" Walton (1837-1919), at least a third generation morris dancer, and, with his brother, a well known local singer. The village orchestra was disbanded in his boyhood, but he sang treble in the church choir. He had a difficult teenage as his father was convicted of two counts of theft in 1844 and died in 1848 soon afterwards, so William was in the workhouse until apprenticed to a bricklayer and builder. However he became a lifelong bell ringer from the age of 15. He married a girl from Coventry in his early 20's, when he was probably already a morris dancer, and he claimed that he was its leader from about 1860 to its end just before 1880. He had four brothers who were also morris dancers. In the 1881 census he was a builder and shopkeeper, in the later 1880's and 1890's he kept The Wheatsheaf public house in East Adderbury until 1899 with an attached shop. When Blunt first met him he was a vigorous and upright man full of dance as can be seen in the Blunt photographs. He met Sharp and Karpeles in Hampstead, London on the mornings of 25th and 19th March 1919 by Janet Blunt arranging for him to visit a married daughter. He died in that September aged 83. Sharp said he was hale and hearty, rather blind although he can hear well, walk with a firm step and sing with a strong baritone voice. At first it was difficult to get his memory back and it was only by degrees that he was able to recall the different evolutions with their many technical details, despite Blunt's success over the previous few years.

In the 1950's and 60's the Sharp and Blunt mss material was rationalised for circulation to be consistent with the existing Sharp publications. From the 1970's the various slightly different copies of the Blunt mss were treated as independent descriptions widening the interpretation possibilities. Unfortunately 1919 was in the period that Sharp appears to have pressurised informants, as at Abingdon, Brackley and Wheatley, and his interpretations can not be completely relied upon if there is alternative evidence.

## Style

The handkerchiefs, half a yard a side, had two opposite corners tied and held between thumb and forefinger. The hand movements were not very stereotyped

but varied considerably, although always within certain limits. The arms were held in front of the body, the elbows curved and held well away from the sides. The movements were "counter-twists" in rather large vertical circles or ellipses. On the first beat of a bar the movement was outwards going down and then up. Sharp elucidated that they could be a slight upward pull using mainly the wrists when the hands met dropping in front on the 3rd beat.

The sticks were held vertically in the middle with the hand at shoulder level and a little in front of the body. The tapping in choruses is normally "doubles".

o = odds strike evens, e = evens strike odds, x = clash tips.

*Hands Round* : clasp hands at waist level.

*Whole Hey* : the top two pairs pass right shoulders, turning the easy way into it.

*Shooting* : The dancers stood upright, as if firing a shotgun, which they would know all about, and never crouching, which would be dangerous to the person.

## Dances

The following is based on transcriptions of the Sharp and Blunt mss and not on previous publications such as Lionel Bacon's book..

**BLUE BELL OF SCOTLAND** - doubles stick hold

o o e e / o o e e / o e o e / x - x - // repeated.

Pattern : (1) and (4) partners; (2) and (5) middles up; (3) and (6) middles down. If they are to be done twice, it needs at least 6 figures.

**BRIGHTON CAMP** - doubles stick hold

o e o e / o e o e / o e o e / o - x - // repeated.

**(COME LANDLORD FILL THE) FLOWING BOWL** - doubles stick hold

Normally they sang the figures without dancing.

o e o e / o e x - / o e o e / o e x - / o e o e / o e x - / o / e o e o / x - x - //

Pattern : can use different striking patterns inspired eg by *Blue Bell of Scotland*.

**HAPPY MAN** - Four Part Song - doubles stick hold

Normally sang and tapped sticks. Would clash across "to close" at end of lines.

(Blunt) o e o e o e ..... x

(Bath) o o e e / o e e / o e o / e x - / e o o / e o o / e o e / x - - // repeated.

Step : 1 1 2 hop,  
2 run with heavy step on first beats,  
3 like *Jenny Jones*.

End dance with a repeat chorus performed faster.



## **LADS A BUNCHUM**

In the "High" hold the sticks in both hands, stand pointing left shoulders to each other, evens facing up, odds facing down, and raise sticks well above heads horizontally and parallel to the files. When striking the dancer makes an overhead movement pivoting right hand over left, so as to strike down with his tip on to his partner's butt.

**POSTMAN'S KNOCK** - Two Part Song - doubles stick hold

Adderbury tapped only, Wootton danced foot-up and half-gyp, foot-up with singing, stand facing an tapped without singing, ad lib.

e o e o / e o x - // four times through. Note start with an "e".

Because of the tune stretching in the last bar of the sticking to make the B music nine bars long, it is often stretched further by adding two more strong beats for a tenth bar and doing two extra taps.

End dance with a repeat chorus performed faster.

**ROAST BEEF OF OLD ENGLAND** - doubles stick hold

They only sang and tapped before the club dinner, outside they might dance. This was a typical formal song before army mess dinners.

o e o e / x - x - / o e o e / x - x - // repeated.

Collected with tapping through the A musics as well.

**(SWEET) JENNY JONES** - alternately doubles and singles stick hold

Figure order as *Washing Day*.

Sang on the last foot-up in the last chorus.

Collected both in 3/4 and apparently in 6/8 time.

in 3/4        o e o / e o e / o e o / e x - // twice

in 6/8        o e o e / o e o e / o e o e / o e x - //

Step : in 3/4 time pause on 4th step (etc) with weight on both feet.

**WASHING DAY** - alternately doubles and singles stick hold

Danced for as many as available. Figure order : foot-up; half-gip; sticks across diagonals in fours; foot-down.

o / e o e o / e o e o / e o e o / e - x // repeated.

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