



# American Morris Newsletter



October, 1981

Volume V Number 3

## NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

Well, all the editors of AMN are now back off the mountain tops of far-way places and out of the woods of the north country. The back to work schedule has taken longer to get back to "normal" than expected; enough so that once again we are late in issuing the newsletter. Such is the tempo of Morris in the Midwest.

We welcome back all our Canadian friends. All of the summer's newsletters had to be shelved due to the postal strike. It would be nice to hear all the news we didn't get a chance to receive as a result of that interruption.

We also welcome J.S.Haddon of the Australasian Morris Ring for his submission of this issue's feature article continuing the discussion on the origins of Morris dancing.

## RESEARCH ON THE HISTORY OF THE MORRIS DANCE

BY J. S. Haddon

Much research on the origin of the English morris dance is based on the history of the name of the dance. However, many of the eighteenth and nineteenth century morris dances of the Cotswolds show a recent origin from the hybridization of several dance forms. These philological origins have been dealt with by R. Dommett in various papers to morris dance journals.

If, however, we look at the dance forms we can see there are several different types of pre-seventeenth century folk dance combined into one form. The predominant name varies according to the region, hence "morris" in the Cotswolds, "molly" in East Anglia, and "morys" in the Severn valley. If we look at the latter two names we see a different origin than the north of Spain for the word.

"Morys" also crops up in a Polish word for a boundary marking ceremony accorded to a Polish friend of mine. This is very interesting in view of the fact that Poland is the area from which the Goths originated and is also alongside the area of the Rugii tribes who became the Saxon component of the Anglo-Saxons. Now the Poles do look more Germanic than Slavs of the rest of East Europe and they also have other Gothic words in their language--so my friend tells me. The French also lost their West Germanic language, except for a few latinized German words, in the ninth century. In the same way the Norsemen lost their Scandinavian language when they settled in Normandy. Again, we have Greek being replaced by Turkish in Asia Minor although the inhabitants there are ethnically Greek. So why should not a Slav tongue replace Gothic for those Goths who stayed behind in Poland?

Those Goths who left what is now Poland migrated first southeast and settled for about a century in an area from Crimea to the lower Danube. So in Rumania today we have the Calsuri dancers who dance in a style similar to the morris in order to make the crops grow.

The Goths in this area formed a small empire before splitting into two groups, the Visigoths and the Ostrogoths. Their empire was overthrown by a Chinese tribe, the Huns, who allied themselves with the Ostrogoths and drove the Visigoths across the Danube into Northern Bulgaria, then the Roman frontier. After several raids across the Roman frontier the Visigoths were allowed to settle in what is now Bulgaria as Roman subjects. This remained peaceful for about fifty years until a disagreement caused the Visigoths to march into Greece. Here they came into contact with the Kalamatinos dances, a Greek war dance done in lines. Could this be how some South European moresque dances got the name "matachine".

Eventually the Visigoths moved west along the shores of the Adriatic Sea into Northern Italy. This happened as the rivalry between the eastern and western empire was heating up. The Visigoths settled for a while in the Po Valley until ousted by the Lombards, also an East Germanic people. In Northern Italy we find a form of moresque dance called "matacino". There is also one which bears reference to the wars against the Turks in its name.

One wonders about the size and composition of these mobile hordes. I would venture to say that they would have been made up of ten to twenty per cent of the population they left behind at each place of settlement. They would have been about three quarters adult male and a quarter female and children and half overall from the warrior class. This made for easy movement of the horde and easier conquest of those left behind by the Slavs in Poland. Warrior scouts, like Attila, would not have been greater than 5,000 men and would have had no women along so they could move swiftly and with an element of surprise, much in the fashion of modern day guerillas. If they succeeded in holding an area they would send back a small party to bring up parties of women, children, and other warriors providing they had not been subjugated by another band. They also took the widows of the people they subjugated as wives. Children from these mixed marriages would have learned the cultures of both mother and father, so the fund of customs was added to by both conquerors and the conquered.

The Visigoths, having been driven out of Italy, settled for a while in Southwest France before entering Northwest Spain. Here they formed a Visigothic kingdom which lasted until the Moslems invaded at the behest of rebels in Andalusia. It is in the Basque area and the Galacian province where one finds moresques dance today, likewise in Andalusia. It is also in Spain where the Church adapted the moresque to its religious rites in the Sieses Dance of Seville Cathedral.

The Ostrogoths in the meantime fell out with the Huns and migrated to Illyia and the Save-Danube area. In this area we have the toriko lane dances of battle mime between Turk and Christian, also of the moresque type. It is the settlement of the Ostrogoths in the Po Valley which accounts for the blond hair of the Northern Italians.

Another group of East Germans, called the Vandals, moved across Bavaria and Southern France, and through Eastern Spain about the time the Visigoths were settling into Northwestern Spain. They settled at first in Andalusia but were driven out by the Visigoths and settled in Morrocco. Here they set up a strong kingdom until the Moslem invasions and here also there is a dance of the moresque type.

Mention must also be made of two other East German tribes, the Burgundians who settled in Burgundy, and the Alans who were absorbed by the Maggars. No one, so far as I know, has found moresque type dances in these areas.

We now turn back to the Rugii. This tribe lived between Rugen Island and the Holstein, bordered on the north by the Angles of Anghelm and the Goths on the east. They were excellent swordsmen, with short swords called "sache". They were recruited by Roman legions to guard coastal areas of Britain and Gaul as mercenaries against pirate attacks by the Irish, the Scots and the Picts. These attacks were especially prevalent west of the Solent and Cherbourg Peninsula. Because they used the "sache" the Romans called them Saxons after the weapon. Some of them grew wealthy on their pay and elected to stay in Britain rather than return to the Rugien area, settling mainly in the Itchen and Avon vallies of Hampshire.

Now as mentioned previously, the Rugii were in contact with the Goths, who with other East Germanic tribes seem to have left moresque type dances wherever they went. Recall that the Poles, who appear to be Goths left behind, have a word for a boundary ceremony in which "morys" is a syllable. So it seems likely that the Rugii used a similar ceremony to mark tribal boundaries and took these processional ceremonies to England when they migrated there as Saxons. A possible twenty per cent of the Rugii migrated to Southern England as Saxons when the Romans left to join their fellow tribesmen who had settled in Hampshire on Roman pay. They took with them their customs, sword dance and boundary processional dance. So the Saxon component of the morris is probably the processional dance since there are old manuscripts that speak of the "morys" in the Severn Valley area.

The molly seems also to be a transscription of a German dance called "Perchten connected with the goddess Holle. In this dance men used to dress in masks and women's clothes and dance to frighten death away from their departed ones and give them rebirth in heaven. It was supposed to be unlucky for women and children to see the men thus dressed as they processed from one house of death to another in an area. The rebirth was carried out by the dark maskers fighting the white

maskers with staves in a dance outside the house of the departed. This dance remained strong in Bavaria until the nineteenth century, however it was formerly extant all over Germany and Jutland. So this gives researchers a chance to look in England for references to Bertha, Percher dances or ceremonies prior to the eighteenth century .

Returning to Spain, we see the name "morris" applied to the dance. It was also dressed up to hide its true meaning of defiance against the Moorish invaders. R. Dommett has traced that portion of its history and its application to the English dance in other publications. It is my contention, however, that this is only one component of the dance that developed in the eighteenth century from several "marriages". Before the Moorish invasions the Church in Spain was also applying a moresque dance to its Corpus Christi ceremonies while churches in the rest of Europe were trying to suppress these "heathen" dances that the Goths had left in their places of sojourn. These were called the "seises". Today the seises are danced twice a year in Seville Cathedral before the clergy by ten boys.

It seems that the Greek soldiers in the Roman legions danced the aforementioned kalamatinos just before battle wherever they were stationed in the empire. The Romans derogatively referred to this Greek custom as "mores est". So any Greeks stationed in Britain would have left their mark in these dances too. It is also likely that the locals copied these dances, hence the change from the familiar circular dances around a sacred tree or a stone circle.

It seems to me that it was the restriction on outside dancing during the Commonwealth that may have been the trigger which set about the amalgamation of the various "heathen" ritual dances of the English Midlands into a single dance form. What better cover than under the name connected with the Church's fight against Islam and the name connected with the miracle plays. The persecution of witches was rife at this time too, so people who wished to do the ancient dances had to amalgamate to carry on their customary dances of worship, just as the Visigothic Iberians did during the Moorish invasions. This amalgamation probably took a hundred years to complete and used popular tunes of the time to assist in that amalgamation. However there could still be isolated groups in country areas who carry on the old religions of Britain, Saxon and Angle, still do the original dances to Holle, or whatever ancient deity.

J.S. Haddon  
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#### EDITORIAL

"None but the pedant would . . . debar women from participation in a dance as wholesome and beautiful as the morris."

C. Sharp, The Morris Book

Invoking this statement by Cecil Sharp as a rationale for a more balanced view, an organization called the Open Morris has recently been formed in England to provide a neutral missile ground between the militantcies of the Morris Ring and the Women's Morris Federation. "Open Morris feels that it is the state of the living tradition in late twentieth century England that is of importance and relevance. The fragmentation of dancers into the exclusively male Morris Ring and the predominantly female Women's Morris Federation does little to promote the image of the tradition in the eyes of the public and denies the experience of large groups of dancers to those in opposing camps. Mutual exclusiveness and squabbling about the interpretation of the past does nothing to improve today's standard of dance. . . Membership is open to any organization, side or individual dancer or musician who supports our aims or who feels that they can benefit from our . . . programme--be they all male, all female, or mixed-sex sides."

It seems to us that this is a refreshing attempt to facilitate communication between the two sides of this debate which deeply divides the morris community and which mirrors events in the larger societies out of which morris has arisen or within which it has been revived. In Australasia the Australian, New Zealand and Hong Kong teams formed an umbrella organization, the Australasian Morris Ring, from which the New Zealand teams split over the issue of all male sides. In the U.S. and Canada the issue has been largely avoided at the national level with each team left to make its own decision and with some restrictions placed on some of the large gatherings.

Open Morris seems to place the whole issue in a sensible perspective. The past is only a part of any tradition. Mircea Eliade has argued for years, in fact, that one role of traditional rituals is to free a society from the very weight of responsibility for the past, "the burden of history", in order to maintain a sacred shining present that keeps the world moving in its inexorable cycles. It is this sacred shining presence that radiates in the exuberance and skill of morris well done as the charisma of the dance and provides its power to touch both dancer and onlooker. It provides a sort of symbolic exorcism of our psychological baggage which allows us to get on with it. In the interest of maintaining this "presence" arguments about how the dance was done historically or who was permitted to perform it are helpful--even necessary. They are, however, directions and not destinations.' It would seem that any attempt to bind the present with any one historical argument runs a grave risk.

Steve Parker

(Interested parties may contact: Open Morris, 27 St. Ann's Lane, Godmanchester, Cambs, PE18 8JE, England.)

#### TEAM NEWS

A feature of the American Morris Newsletter dependent upon your letters, postcards and telephone calls. The response this quarter reflects the flow of that constant open communication. The names of the correspondents appear at the end of each club's news.

#### BELLS-OF-THE-NORTH: Minnesota

The schedule of performances for BNM has been quite full this past summer and fall. In July we auditioned for the Minnesota Independent Choreographer's Alliance showcase to be performed in December, and we were chosen as one of six groups to feature dances by a new choreographer - ours being Jim Brickwedde, our foreman, and the dances will be two new ones added to the repertoire of our new tradition called Minneapolis-on-Mississippi. The rest of the summer saw us performing at various parks around the Twin Cities - the Leprechaun Days Festival in Rosemont, MN, at Loring Park, Mpls, and in Bloomington, MN for Bloomington Arts in the Park, MN. September saw us performing two new Minneapolis-on-Mississippi in conjunction with the unveiling of Cork Marcheski's neon sculpture "Long Green". Instead of using regular sticks and hankies, the dancers used clear acrylic tubes filled with green phosphorescent flares. This nighttime performance, sponsored by First Bank Minneapolis Corporation, was uniquely spectacular (our bag has never been so full). The September closed with BNM joining Minnesota Traditional Morris and Oak Apple Morris of Madison, WI for the last weekend of the Renaissance Festival. In October we were asked (along with MTM) by our favorite pub, Gleuk's Brewery, to celebrate Downtown Salutes the Arts by dancing and carrying on for two nights with free beer and munchies provided. Pat Talbot stopped in town the middle of October, and a few of us participated in a Sword Dance Workshop that she offered. Finally, we performed at Saltari '81, featuring Denise Kania as our first fool and performing our first ribbon dance to the delight of all.

Beth Hennessy, 2733 Portland Ave. S. #103, Minneapolis, MN 55407

#### BEREA COLLEGE MORRIS MEN: Kentucky

Yes, the Berea College Country Dancers Morris Men are still very active. During the school year the men rehearse and teach new dancers each Monday evening. They tour with the Mountain Morris Men during the Kentucky Guild of Artist's and Craftsmen's Fair in the spring and fall, as well as with assorted morris dancers from all over the country at Christmas Country Dance School Morris Tour (we also have a morris class during that week taught by Griff Jones from England). There is a short tour in March which includes teams of younger morris men from Somerset, Kentucky and Lenoir, North Carolina and occasionally others (Lexington and Woodford County, Kentucky) during the Mountain Folk Festival.

In addition to this we have started a side of women taught at Christmas Dance School by Elaine Ford of the Green Willow Ladies Morris of Coventry, England. They do Lancashire Clog Dancing and North Country Morris according to traditions kept alive by women. They also tour at fairs and festivals and meet weekly.

Both groups average about 30 dancers yearly.

Pamela Corley, Recreation Extension, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky 40404

## FOREST CITY MORRIS: Ontario

Here is some brief but belated news about the third Forest City Ale, which took place in June. This year we expanded to a two day event (three if you count the Friday night party). On Saturday we toured several villages by Lake Huron, culminating in our favourite stand of all time - at Bayfield, where the local reeve ensured traffic-free dancing by blocking the main street with his car. After that, all 8 teams were treated to a civic reception - free beer, sandwiches and all. Saturday wound up with a boisterous country dance.

Our Sunday walking tour of London's downtown area was also successful, although our mid afternoon stop at the Poacher's Arm was extended by an hour or two, when the deluge which usually arrives on this weekend came dead on time. No matter. During the brief intervals between showers, we sent teams out to dance in the pub courtyard, while the other 70 of us did jigs, had a marvellous ceilidh, and drank the pub's week's supply of Murphy's Stout.

We ended the day with the traditional barbecue and singaround at the Cockoo's Nest Folk Club (with a cast of thousands).

In attendance this year were Forest City Morris teams, Thames Valley Morris Green Fiddle Men & Women, Bluemont Morris, Ann Arbor Morris and Greenwood Morris. Sides interested in next year's bash should contact: Tom Siess, Bagman, Forest City Morris, 37 McKenzie Ave, London, Ontario, Canada

Alistair Brown, 9 Prospect Ave, London, Ontario, Canada N6B 3A4

## MINNESOTA TRADITIONAL MORRIS: Minnesota

A hectic touring pace marked the summer months as the morris men toured to Ironwood, Michigan, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Duluth and New Ulm, Minnesota. Local gigs were sandwiched in between and finally ended with the annual six weekends at the Minnesota Renaissance Festival. The last weekend of the Festival turned into a mini-ale as Oak Apple Morris from Madison, WI and the Bells-of-the-North joined us for a weekend of dancing. A new mummer's play was added during the summer. Side mate, Rudd Rayfield, wrote the script and created all of the magnificent costumes.

Illness has once again struck the MTM side. Our illustrious fool has succumb to the advance of age and has decided to get hitched. That's right lady morris dancers of America, that long haired, blue eyed sweet heart Nick Lethert is getting married. A May 22 wedding is planned ( as well as possibly a few small morris antics).

For the winter months, the rapper and longwords are being primed and readied for the solstice and Twelfth Night doings, etc. We will return to Cotswold Morris in the middle of January.

Stephen Parker, 4 NE 4th Street, Minneapolis, MN 55413

## OAK APPLE MORRIS: Wisconsin

With the courage only true ignorance can support, (most of our members had not yet attended an Ale much less planned one), our morris team boldly decided to host the first midwest Morris Ale, June 5-7, 1981. We are happy to announce: 1) we pulled it off, 2) it was a success, and 3) we are looking forward to next year.

Our modest goal (and Point of No Backing Out) was to attract three other sides, so it was with growing concern and delight we received confirmation from seven other sides from five different states. Our amazement was completed when they arrived: Ann Arbor Morris, Bells-of-the-North and Minnesota Traditional Morris, Bloomington Quarries (Indiana) Ladies Pleasure and Wild Onion Morris (Chicago), and Sourwood Morris (Tennessee).

Saturday, all teams participated in mass dances at the campgrounds before setting out on their tours of Southwest Wisconsin... converging late afternoon at Vilas Park in Madison for yet more mass dances and demonstrations. A potluck dinner, mummer's play (courtesy of the indefatigable MTM), contra dance, and general revelry session (complete with bad conductor-lightbulb jokes) completed the day's activities.

With the departure of most teams early Sunday, we realized that brevity should not be the soul of Morris Ales, and resolved to try for a three-day event next year.

General comments gleaned from conversations: Quality of dancing was better than most expected... to much driving (a petition to shorten Wisconsin's highways is before the General Assembly even at this writing)...need more dancing and drinking time... need time for workshops...LET'S DO IT AGAIN!~

Mike Weimberger, 7316 Elmwood Ave., Middleton, WI 53562

## RING O' BELLS: New York City

"Not the American Morris Newsletter" of "Morris Hanky-Panky" !

Ring O' Bells Unchained will be published by Grove Press in time for the after New Year's doldrums; available in hard or soft cover on a sliding scale (according to our needs and your abilities).

Ring O' Bells revealed: T-shirts are again available to those who put out! At the Ring O' Bells encounter group, it was decided that all was well with us and talk changed to news of encounters with other Morris dancers (not Pinewoods, not the Black Jokers, not Muddy River, not Kingsessing, and not the Bowery Boys).

Beverly Francis, she knows lots of dances, frowns upon this communique.

P.S. We danced out alot this spring and are available for for next spring. For further information on ROB call: (212) 976-3636.

REMEMBER: When God greeted Morris Men, She was only Practicing.

(Editors Note: She did such a perfect job the first time, God only knows why she came out with a second model.

Diane Rasweiler, 74 River Road, Cos Cob, CT 06807

## SOURWOOD MORRIS: Tennessee

Sourwood Morris hosted a morris tour in conjunction with the Jubilee Community Arts Gaelic Festival. The tour and festival took place October 16-17 and included concerts by Michail O'Dommail, Kevin Burke, Norman and Nancy Blake, Mick Maloney and Eugene O'Donnell. There was a dance after Friday night's concert and music and dance workshops on Saturday. And of course, Morris Dancing!

Susan Conant, Laurel Theatre, 1538 Laurel Ave., Knoxville, Tennessee 37916

## THREE RIVER MORRIS: Pennsylvania

Three River Morris is regretfully saying goodbye to its leader, Andreas Hayden, who is off to graduate school. We'll still be dancing at Carnegie-Mellon University on Saturday afternoons (Eamptn & Adderbury) and would welcome visitors.

Allison Thompson, 5673 Hobart, #8, Pittsburgh, PA 15217

## WOODS HOLE MORRIS MONGERS: Massachusetts

The Woods Hole Morris Mongers made their first public appearance on August 15 in Woods Hole and Falmouth, MA. They began rehearsing in March of 1981 and have built a repertoire of six Headington dances to date. In the fall they will be taking new members and beginning Ilmington. Their squire (protem) is Emily Ferguson and bagman is John Helfrich.

Since many team members play instruments, there is no fixed musician. Instead, everyone dances for a while until they feel sure of the tune and tempo and ready to play. Then different people play during rehearsals and specific ones are appointed for each dance on a tour.

Emily Ferguson, P.O. Box 453, Woods Hole, MA 02543

## WESTERLY MORRIS MEN: Rhode Island

(Ed. Note: This is condensed from the Westerly Morris Men's Newsletter.--SP)

The Westerly MM have kept a busy schedule throughout summer and fall of 1981. In July they danced for fairs at Conneticut College in Guildford, Canterbury, NH, and the Westerly Hometown Festival (in the company of Mystic Garland). On July 19th they appeared with the Westerly Community Chorus for a performance of the 1812 Overture. August was a quiet month, but September brought performances at the Florentine Fair in Lincoln, RI, a visit from Curt Hayashi and the Eisteddford Folk Festival at South University of Massachusetts in South Dartmouth. The christening of foreman-founder Peter Leibert's son (Peter L. M. Leibert) was another occasion for high spirits. The announcement reads, "Rev. David Cannon, rector of the church, will bring the kid into the Christian fold; then we take him out on a pre-Christian rite." In October there was a tour with the Pinewoods men on the third and a Country Dance on the 17th. They expect to keep dancing on into December as well.

George Utter, 54 Elm St., Westerly, RI 02891



ANNOUNCEMENTSFrom Kesteven Morris, Lincs, England

As a team we probably have a more commercial outlook than most other morris teams and always cover all our members' expenses in any tours we do. (including a visit to W. Germany last year). What we were initially investigating for a tour in America was whether it would be possible to fully finance a trip from the money gained from performances, lectures, instructionals, etc. From further investigation, including recently talking to Arn Whear of Windsor Morris about their tour this year, it seems that this would be very difficult to do. The two main problems it seems are (i) in spite of all efforts of people like yourself, the general lack of public awareness of the morris in the US and (ii) the complications of actually earning money and hence the need for work permits. However, the American Morris scene is very interesting and British teams are very appreciative of the hospitality and help they have received in undertaking tours in the States, so we will obviously maintain an interest in getting a tour together some time in the next few years. (Editors' Note: Kesteven Morris had sent us an earlier announcement of their intention to tour the U.S. and a request for contacts here. (See AMN, July 1981, Vol. V. No. 2) )

John Swift, 40 Allington Garden, Boston, Lincs PE21 9DW, England

From Chelmsford Morris Men and Ladies, Chelmsford, England

Chelmsford Morris Men and Ladies are currently making tentative plans to visit the U.S. in 1983 as part of their tenth anniversary celebrations. They are hoping to be able to offer the following to interested morris sides or other organizations: a) displays of Cotswold Morris (over 14 traditions including their own), N.W. clog morris and garland dances (ladies), rapper sword dance, Lancashire clog-step dances; b) workshops in all of the above plus music for morris dancing, munning plays; c) other activities including Ceilidhs (English style), folk singing sessions (especially when the ale flows) and mumming play(s).

At present, they are seeking contacts in the North Eastern States who may be able to help with regard to ideas for the visit, dates of morris ales & other such activities American organizations who may be able to offer sponsorship and perhaps even morris sides whose members may be able to offer hospitality in return for the above. The visit must be by necessity during the school vacations either at Easter or in the summer of 1983, and will most likely be for two weeks.

Steve Monk, Bagman, 59 Hawfinch Walk, Chelmsford, Essex, England

From The New England Folk Directory

Wayne Licov of Brattleboro, VT has written us to request our help in announcing the preparation of a folk directory for the New England region which will include listings of "folk singers and musicians, dance musicians, dance leaders and callers, dance groups, storytellers, organizations, festivals, coffeehouses and concert promoters, radio programs, record companies, books, periodicals, and retails or mail order suppliers of folk records or musical instruments." He intends the research to be ongoing and will update and expand the listings periodically. Publication is planned for early 1982 with a second edition in early 1983. Anyone interested in the project, listers, listees, or customers should write Wayne Licov, P.O. Box 1278, Brattleboro, VT 05301.

From Berea College

The Berea College Christmas Country Dance School will take place once again this year starting December 27th, sponsored jointly by the College and C.D.S.S. We regret that delays in bringing out this issue of AMN have exceeded the initial registration deadline of Nov. 1. For further information contact the Berea College Extension Dept., CPO 287, Berea, KY 40404 or telephone (606) 986-9341 ext. 513.

From The Westerly Morris Men

The Westerly Morris Men's newsletter recently carried an announcement of a U.S. tour by the Bampton Traditional side, Saddleworth, White Rose of Huddersfield and one other team. They expect to arrive July 28th and tour for two weeks and three weekends. George Utter, Westerly's bagman, is working on a touring itinerary and everything is very tentative at the moment. Interested parties should contact George at 54 Elm St., Westerly, RI 02891.