



Chair's Report to the 2020 AGM

It seems a lifetime ago that I proudly attended my first event as Chair of Open Morris – the Stepping On conference at Cecil Sharp House in November 2019. That event was a coming together of many dancers from all over the world, a fascinating and convivial foray into the history and development of step dance, and the feeling of community and creativity engendered there made it a very fitting place to begin my term as Chair.

In company with Malcolm Hills and John Scholey, I attended the JMO AGM in Nuneaton in February, another event that seems now to belong to another life. It was not long after this that Covid-19 lockdown hit, and it was my very unexpected duty to inform OM that Morris activities were sadly off the cards for an indefinite period of time. I've said elsewhere that the way in which the Morris community has pulled together virtually, and thought outside the box to keep connections, friendships, traditions and skills alive during the pandemic has been utterly breath-taking, and I applaud everyone who has been part of this re-imagining or has made an effort to keep the Morris fires burning. The future is uncertain, with many areas returning to lockdown amid rising infection rates as I write, but the ingenuity and commitment to Morris that has been shown makes me very hopeful indeed for the future of the Morris world.

Navigating the pandemic from a Morris point of view has been no easy task, and there will doubtless be further hurdles in the future, but this period has meant that the JMO Committee have been working closely together towards common aims, and one of my hopes for my term as Chair, to foster those ties of friendship and common purpose with The Morris Federation and The Morris Ring, feels like it is well underway. The JMO has begun a dialogue with the government and is now hopefully well-placed to ensure that Morris is not forgotten when restrictions can eventually be lifted, as well as being able to provide our members with the information and resources that will be needed to return to activities when it is safe to do so. In addition, as I'm sure many people will be aware, the JMO has had more issues than just Covid-19 to deal with. The issue of full face black make-up has come to the fore and is likely to form a large part of the 2020 AGM. I've laid my thoughts on that subject out elsewhere in the AGM paperwork, but I would like to express that my chief concern has been to act responsibly and fairly whilst dealing with this difficult issue. I hope that all OM members will engage with the debates surrounding this in an informed and friendly manner.

I would like to thank the OM Committee and all of our Officials for their hard work and friendship this year. Whatever challenges the future brings, we are lucky to have a dedicated and skilled team, and I hope that with their support I can ensure that OM thrives during this uncertain period in history.

Jen Cox
Chair

Open Morris