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🌀 Cover image of Paul Cornell as the Isolation Bear 🌀
(Photo by Ady Bull)
Dancing On! logo designed by Christopher Todd

Editor's Column



A Year of (Not) Dancing



Hello again! Well, what a year it's been. With the world having felt like it stopped turning, it's certainly been a lonely time. Many of us have lost people dear to us, celebrations have been put on hold, and our morris world may feel a little smaller when we get back to it.

So what does 'Dancing On' mean when there's no dancing going on? That's the question that troubled me as I put together this second digital edition.

We've survived a year where morris has been missing from our weekly routine, and some of us may have forgotten it was ever there.

But if you look at how lively events such as Straw Bear Online (page 6) or the Virtual Mark Jones Day of Dance (page 8) have been this year, and see what love and energy the organisers put into those events and making them run smoothly, we may start to find an answer.

The mutual love of music and dance brings us together - it is what has always brought us together.

Seeing the return of these beloved events in virtual form was, for me, morris asserting the life it still has to give. I also found myself enheartened by the wonderful article by Milkmaid Molly on page 12. It was all proof of the love of morris persevering, and I thank all my contributors this issue - because their love is evident in their poems, their art, and by the simple desire to want to write about our shared hobby. I also want to thank Hilary Maidstone once again for her scrupulous proofreading.

Every day we are a step closer to dancing together again, to seeing our friends again. It has been far too long.

Conor Smith, dancingon@open-morris.org

Chair's Column

Hello! Like many I'm sure, my picture here represents my year's Morris activities very well - zooming with dearly missed friends, reminiscing about past fun and planning all the things we'll be so overjoyed to do together when it's finally safe. I dread to think how much time I've spent in video calls during lockdown, though



some of that time has of course been spent dancing. Step Clog over zoom is very possible, and while Raglan is a little more challenging (especially if you value the integrity of your kitchen light fittings), it's been really great to see some of my teams grow and recruit even whilst practising virtually - it can be done, and the Morris world will bounce back from the pandemic, surely different, but strong, and with a renewed enthusiasm.

As things unlock and we look forward to being able to return to our activities, I hope we will all consider the safety of our members as paramount in all we do. I've been disappointed to see people on social media looking for loopholes in guidance and regulations, and I hope the Morris world will be able to wait to resume activities until it's properly safe to do so. It won't be too long now, hopefully, with rates falling and restrictions being lifted. When we can organise events again I look forward to dancing to honour the memory of those who have fallen to Covid-19.

I'm also looking forward to the virtual JMO Day of Dance on April 24th - we've been busy planning lots of fun and I hope to see many of you there!

I'd like to thank all of our fabulous OM team for everything they've done over the last year, and I'm especially pleased to be welcoming our new Secretary Hetty Bevington and Archivist Lally MacBeth into the fold, it's great to be working with new people! Many thanks are also due to our compatriots in the JMOs, and in particular Sally Wearing, Health and Safety Advisor to the Morris Federation, who has been tirelessly reading guidance all year on behalf of the JMO, and is set in for a lot more of the same over the next few months! Congratulations are also due to Conor for his excellent second edition of this magazine, which I hope you'll all enjoy reading as much as I have.

And to all OM members out there, here's to the lot of you - keep dancing as they say on a certain show, and take care of yourselves - we'll be back out there doing what we love before we know it!

Jen Cox, Chair

Meet Our New Secretary, Hetty Bevington

I started dancing with Tatters Morris 13 years ago when I moved down to Cornwall. The side struggled with members for a while and then lay dormant, but we recently started dancing again until the Covid lockdown put a stop to our practices. These days, I tend to play with the band more than dance. I have also played for a couple of the other local sides when they have been short of music. I also run dance workshops in schools, sharing the joy of morris dancing, maypole dancing and country dancing with the next generation.

When I'm not morris dancing I am busy working on my new business as a tour guide, taking people on tours around the old industrial heartlands of Cornwall, telling stories of local characters, customs and folklore. I play in a ceilidh band and have three small children to keep me busy, all who thankfully love a spot of morris dancing.

I'm enjoying being part of the committee of Open Morris and the new challenges that the pandemic has brought to morris dancing.

Hetty Bevington, Secretary



Paul Cornell was the Isolation Bear
(Photo by Ady Bull)



Straw Bear Online!

Whittlesea Straw Bear Went Online in 2021 . . .

How to run a festival that is based around a central figure dressed in five stone of straw, that usually depends upon crowding several thousand people into a small Fenland town? That was the dilemma facing the Straw Bear organisers as it became clear that live events were not going to be possible in January. Over the summer, we began an eight months' planning process that became Straw Bear Online.

Two things we agreed very early on were that we would try to run our virtual festival in a way that followed the format of the live event as closely as we could, and that we would put a Bear on the streets of Whittlesea in some form.

The making of the Bear was one of the first things to be finished, mainly by Brian Kell and Ady Bull, using Brian's garage as a workshop. Paul Cornell had already offered to be the "Isolation Bear", and a lot of planning was put into a route, risk assessment and whether a small number of the Straw Bearers would be able to serve as a distanced audience along the way. However, as December came around and with Tier 4 and lockdown looming, three generations of the Cornell/Randall family pulled out all the stops to take out the Bear on Christmas Eve and film some poignant footage that had several of our YouTube viewers in tears as it formed the finale of the "Procession through the ages" video.

We were also keen to include some exclusive content that people coming to visit for the weekend might not ordinarily see. "How to build a Bear" and interviews with some of the many people who have driven the Bear over the years were well received, without taking away the mystery of the festival's central figure. As Brian said: "The driver is not the beast. All the driver does is give the Bear mobility. It's an entity all of its own."



The Bear makes its way down Gracious Street (Photo by Christine Kell)

We were also able to bring people together in real time with a selection of Zoom events to choose from. Over 400 people enjoyed two live music sessions led by members of White Rose Morris and the Straw Bearers, who are often found in the Letter B until the small hours of Sunday morning, an at-home ceilidh with top musicians Doug Eunson and Sarah Matthews, with caller Martyn Harvey, and a talk on “40 years of straw and string.”

Putting on Straw Bear Online was a huge amount of hard work, alongside our everyday responsibilities of work and homeschooling. I should particularly mention Rebecca Kell at this point, who built an entirely new website from scratch and did almost all of the video editing.

It was a trip down memory lane for many, and there were lots of fond reminiscences in the YouTube chat as they recalled past visits and spotted friends now departed in the archive footage. We were delighted to have it re-affirmed that Straw Bear means so much to so many people. It wasn't quite like being there in person, but it was the most festival-like experience we could put on while staying at home – and it was definitely the warmest Straw Bear ever! And we are all very much looking forward to the time – whenever that may be – that the Straw Bear can once again dance through the streets of Whittlesea.



Grandson and Grandfather Bears, Noah Randall and Paul Cornell (Photo by Megan Randall)

Sarah Sennett



Straw Bear Online took place on 15-17 January 2021. Most of the videos are still online, and can be accessed via https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv-8lbs_18jFEbsI-YZW99A



The Virtual Mark Jones Day of Dance

The Ouse Washes Molly ‘Mark Jones Day of Dance’ is the biggest annual Molly-specific event, and normally takes place in January.

This year it went virtual, featuring 26 new and Covid-adapted dances that had been specially created for the event, including mass dances, show dances and a broom dance competition with celebrity judges and a public vote. There was also a virtual coach trip between dance spots, virtual soup, archive material and specially recorded music and songs. The 2-hour event included contributions from dancers and musicians from 15 Molly sides across the UK, US and Canada, plus a guest tune spot from Simon Care. It was premiered on Facebook by Spotted in Ely.

Creating the event involved the whole team, and a lot of help from our friends Misfit Molly, but a core group of three with the time and skills required led the effort. From inception to the finished product took just over four months, a lot of effort, and a lot of fun, Ouse Washes’ Dance Leader Lynda Stoney tells us more. *“We wanted the virtual day of dance to reflect what happens in the regular event and so the structure was decided quite early on. Invitations went out in October to all the Molly sides we could contact, asking for video contributions in the categories we would be featuring: show dances, a mass ‘Birds a Building’ to the tune of Rolling Home, and a broom dance competition.*

“It was especially important for us to include a mass ‘Birds a Building’, as this is something we do every year at The Cutter in Ely as a tribute to Mark Jones. Mark danced with Ouse Washes and tragically died in a car accident in 2005; the day has been named after him ever since.

“As Covid restrictions tightened we knew it would be difficult for people to meet and dance, so we were amazed at the ingenuity shown in producing the videos. For a while we only had two broom dance competition entries, but by the deadline we had 10, all highly entertaining and displaying a range of techniques.



Birds a Building Chorus Line (Ouse Washes & Misfit Molly)



“Once we started receiving contributions and creating videos the core team met on Zoom regularly to review what we had, decide where it would fit into the programme, and any changes required. Progress was reported back to the whole Ouse Washes team, and their ideas and contributions were taken on board, so it was a real team effort and one we are all proud of.”

The most time-consuming aspect of the project was the video processing, dancer Paul Thomas explains more. *“Filming and producing our own pieces for the event, including the introductions and links for the whole programme, came first, then incorporating everyone else's contributions. The work ranged from simply captioning and sequencing videos to the much more time-consuming creation of features combining multiple video and audio tracks, such as the mass dances.”*

“The final programme brought together over 250 videos, audio tracks and photos. Splitting the work into smaller pieces that could then be combined was essential to make the project manageable. Using a limited version of PowerDirector and a PC just powerful enough for the more complex tasks required a bit of ingenuity to make it work, but ultimately it did!”





Broom Dance Competition
Winners with their trophy:
Kate Skelton, Betsy, and
puppy Nancy of Black Annis

Music was an essential element of the day, and as musician Dave Beale relates, creating the soundtrack wasn't as straightforward as it may seem. *"For our own dances, and the mass dance, it wasn't possible to follow the normal procedure. Musicians followed the tempo set by the dancers, as they were recorded in small groups at different times and in different locations - to comply with Covid regulations. So, to ensure everyone danced in time, a dance tempo was agreed, the music recorded to this tempo and the dances performed to the resulting backing track."*

"Ouse Washes and Misfit Molly worked closely on the music and dance for the event, and quickly adapted to dancing to backing tracks. The same backing tracks were also used by their musicians, and musicians from other sides for the mass dance, to individually record additional parts - usually at home. The resulting recordings came in a range of different formats and sample rates which then needed to be converted, or resampled, before being mixed in ProTools to create the illusion of a full set of musicians playing together. As both the audio and video recordings were performed to the same backing tracks, everything could then be neatly synchronised in the final videos."



Socially Distanced Mississippi Mud Dance (Ouse Washes & Misfit Molly)

“A couple of the dance videos received had background wind noise so severe that the soundtrack was unusable. To remedy this, the instrument parts were re-recorded in the studio and blended with the originals to minimise the effect of the wind noise. Finally, adding a few deliberate background noises (such as the crunch of boots) to some of the recordings completed the process, resulting in the music as heard during the event.”

The day went extremely well, garnering some fantastic feedback and raising money for charity ‘Help Musicians’. At the time of writing the event has been viewed over 7000 times - a tad more than our normal dance outs! So fired up with enthusiasm, Ouse Washes then went on to create the Molly Moves lockdown dance group. Find it on our Facebook page ([Facebook.com/OuseWashesMolly](https://www.facebook.com/OuseWashesMolly)) where you can also watch the Day of Dance again.

Lynda Stoney, Dave Beale & Paul Thomas



Celebration Drinks with Ouse Washes Molly



Dancing for All with Milkmaid Molly

Nine years ago, January 2012, in Bury St Edmunds, a plan was hatched to create a new Morris side with a difference. This was to be a side that was to involve people with disabilities alongside those without and thus Milkmaid Molly was formed.

The plan was to learn dances, have regular practices, socialise, and to perform alongside other Morris sides. In other words, to enjoy the whole Morris experience. As Molly dancing was of East Anglian origin, it was chosen as our tradition of choice.

Currently our membership of 24 is split evenly between those with learning difficulties (Mollies) and the Buddies who are mainly dancers and musicians with roots in the Morris world. Whilst dancing, Buddies partner with a Molly, when guidance is needed, and the dances are devised or adapted to suit the abilities of those participating, including occasional members in wheelchairs.

Buddies themselves learn more complex dances, some self-choreographed and some taught by members of local Molly sides. When these are performed, the Mollies provide percussive (and a guitar) instrumental accompaniment with the musicians. Some of the Mollies take great delight in spotting when we make a mistake and even score us out of 10 (Strictly style!)



Performing and teaching at a local Special School



Dancing at Ely Folk Festival

Most of our Mollies live in the community in sheltered or supported living accommodation, some travel independently to practice sessions, and some bring carers if they need additional support. When travelling to dance outs we have to hire a minibus and we have been very fortunate in receiving some very generous donations to help fund this, and also to help with the purchase of our team T-shirts and hoodies.

Over the past few years we have been regular performers at Ely Folk Festival and Euston Rural Pastimes Country Fair (a very popular venue as our dance spot is adjacent to the excellent WI tea and cake stall!) We have even been seen a couple of times on stage at The Apex, dancing prior to The Demon Barbers Roadshow. Residents of Bury St Edmunds may also have seen us amongst the Morris sides participating in the Green Dragon Day of Dance or at several Oxjam weekends.

Our public performances always end with encouraging the audience to join us in dancing Circassian Circle. Our practice sessions are always joyous, if somewhat noisy, and chaotic affairs but always thoroughly enjoyed by all.



Dancing in Bury St Edmunds



Obviously the events of the past year have meant that we have been unable to meet together to dance, but we have kept in touch with them, sent a CD of Molly tunes, made phone calls to assure them we will meet again as soon as we can to enjoy our dancing together.

In addition to all of the above we have also managed some outreach work in a local Special School where one of our Buddies teaches. A group of dancers and musicians enjoyed a morning of performing and teaching some dances, and then it was back to the classroom to help with their project of making tatter jackets. Once all the restrictions are lifted we hope to resume this contact and encourage more people to enjoy participating in this truly inclusive activity.

For more information, please do contact us. We would be happy to chat to anyone who is interested in setting up a similar project.

Gill Bosley (Squire)

thebosleys@talktalk.net or 01284 767476

Penny Lury (Bag)

Plury7@googlemail.com or 07735 083258

Milkmaid Molly





Dancing at Ely

In addition here are some thoughts from a few of our Buddies:

Penny

As a (now retired) special needs teacher, I was delighted to hear about the proposed formation of a fully inclusive Morris side and have been an active member since the beginning. It is a real privilege to be able to share my love of all things Morris with our amazing Mollies.

Jill

I think I joined MM about six years ago and am one of the musicians for the group. I love being a Buddy because it has allowed me to meet and share the lives of some wonderful people whom I would never have met otherwise. The Mollies work hard to get things right, they love performing and tackle everything with a cheerful determination that shows in their smiling faces. They love their dancing and are a pleasure to play for.

Jan

I have been a Buddy since we first initiated the Milkmaid Molly Group. It has been a great experience getting to know people with such varied lifestyles and accomplishments. The Mollies have all become friends and it is a joy to be among them and see how much pleasure the dancing is bringing to their lives. Our practice evenings and outside events have always been filled with happy smiles and laughter. There is a very open atmosphere where ideas from both the Buddies and the Mollies on new dances, or improvements to dances are accepted and appreciated by everyone. I am looking forward to the time when we can all meet up and resume our energetic, noisy practises.

Lucinda

I was a line dancer and one of my friends from class told me about Milkmaid Molly and wondered if I would like to go along to a meeting, try a few dances and see if I would enjoy becoming a "Buddy" to the Mollies. I met many of the Mollies that evening and they inspired me - the joy they expressed when they danced was infectious and I was soon joining in. Not only were the dances unfamiliar to me, so was the music. The time went by so quickly that I was keen to go back to the next meeting and that is how I became a member of Milkmaid Molly.

The months passed by and it was soon time to dance out at a few events. I was a bit nervous, but the Mollies had no fear and took it in their stride. With the first couple of notes, and the Mollies' support, I was totally at home. We had so much fun, and I think everyone watching could see how much fun we were having and were captivated. I think of my time as part of Milkmaid Molly with such happiness and remember the feeling of inclusion as a part of a band of brothers and sisters.

Doing The English

I want to celebrate all things English
In fields, in towns, in lanes
At henges, village greens, bus stops
Or under motorways
Leave the factory, leave the forge,
Leave that pint of bitter
Let's dance out for both the Eids
Adha and Fitr
Guru Nanak will have his day
Dance like Shiva and Kali
Pesach, Yom Kippur and Whitsuntide
Boxing Day and Diwali
Cotswold sides will caper on
With moves and tunes to die for
Melodeons, pipes, and fiddles
And even a drum or two
Border dancers will be there
Some disguised, some decorated
The tava will run away with the spoon
And the dog will be elated
Look there are the Coconutters
With their own brass band
A fool, a horse, a couple of dragons
And a techno morris crew

Molly, Longsword, Flag and Bone
In full kit and looking dapper
North West sides have come along,
Clog, Shortsword and Rapper.
Diversity, perversity
All celebrate the British
I turn to our Taiwanese dancers
And say, "I told you so"
Our black and mixed race members
Will say, "This is our land too"
Britannia never ruled the waves
Let's open up the tradition
It's up to us, me and you
To realise this vision
For...
If we do not include all
Or divide to settle old scores
Our beloved Morris will only live
In colouring books or jigsaws
A land of hope not hatred
That will happen because
We recognise the reality
Not an England that never was.

Tony Roberts

Requiem

For those in the Morris who died
in the Covid epidemic 2020-22

We will emerge
Blinking new into the light
Remembering those left behind
Now cradled by the night
Empty places
Framing names and faces
Playing different tunes
Treading other steps
For this is why we dance,
Steel on stone
Painted faces
To flail arms against the dark
Clog and stick and handkerchief
In line, in concert, in companionship.
And thus forefend our own final falling.
Keep us from the clocks that fail
The dying of the light
Guard us in our own brief tumble
So when we dance again
They will be there in every memory and step
Where once they danced
They are now the dance.

Tony Roberts



Phoenix Morris in Rickmansworth have been using Zoom for practice nights since the middle of 2020 and most side members meet every Wednesday evening both to practise existing dances and learn new ones. It seems to work well and all that is missing is the dancer's position in the "set" which, as we have not danced together for almost a year, we hope we can brush up on in the not too distant future.

We can only have one musician playing at a time as Zoom is not able to cope with any more and the dancers are all muted during the dance. We took the idea one stage further in December, when we held our Christmas Party on Zoom, and at the end of January when 25 of us got together for our Annual Dinner (always held on the last Friday of January each year).

For the dinner we set our computers up on our dining room tables and had our meal together. After eating we cleared the table and all played charades for a couple of hours. Both these "social evenings" were attended by a good number of the side and, whilst not as effective as meeting in person, made up for the fact that we were unable to meet up due to Covid.

We have found that it is vital to update Zoom on a regular basis which helps prevent "freezing" and other problems. Of course, you need to have someone in the Side who has a Zoom Account otherwise you are limited to 45 minutes. We are lucky in this respect as three of our members have an account so we are able to enjoy two and a half hours for normal practice and even longer for the two social events mentioned above.

Zoom is certainly keeping the Side together and we know that, with its help, we will see this problem through and we all look forward to meeting up in person in the not too distant future.

Michael Stimpson

Featured Artist: Megan Evans

The following two pages feature a very special Easter Spot the Difference called *The Bedcote Bunnies* by artist Megan Heather Evans.

Megan is a Birmingham based tattooist and artist, focusing mainly on sculpture painting and pet portraiture. After completing her Fine Art degree at Birmingham School of Art, Megan went on to complete her apprenticeship in tattooing and has tattooed full time for the past six years.

As well as tattooing, Megan takes on various commission work including pet portraiture and enjoys large-scale acrylic painting, working on many sculptures around the country for various art trails and raising over £70k for charity in the process.

We hope you enjoy Megan's *Bedcote Bunnies* and if you want to show Megan some love, you can follow her here:

Instagram @MeganEvansArtist
Facebook.com/MeganEvansArt
Twitter @meganevansart



Photo by Steven Wood-Matthews
Stevenwm.co.uk
@stevenwmphotography



The Bedcote Bunnies

An Easter Spot the Difference by Megan Evans



*How many differences can you spot?
(Answers on page 30)*



Discordant Comicals: The Hooden Horse of East Kent by George Frampton

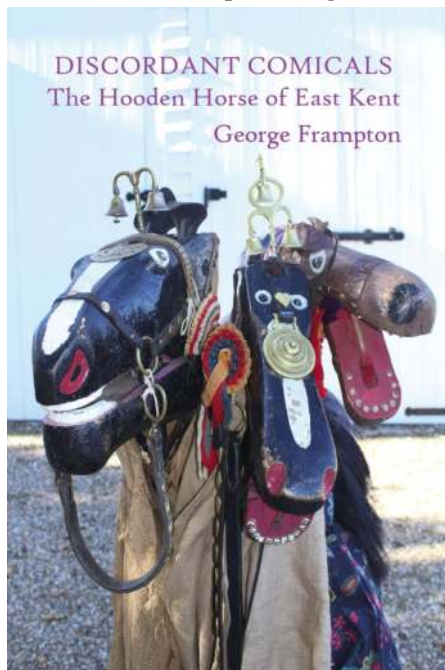
Book Review by Matt Simons

Emerging from the darkness of a December evening, the hooden horse announces its arrival with much gnashing of hobnailed jaws. The beast comprises an equine effigy carved from wood, carried on a pole by an individual wearing a gown of cloth or sacking. Usually accompanied by a retinue dressed in gaudy attire, the hooden horse was a familiar Christmas visitor across eastern Kent for much of the nineteenth century. In this book, George Frampton provides a thorough examination of the practice from the eighteenth century to the present day.

Though the practice of hoodening is peculiar to east Kent, it belongs to the broader family of Christmas visitation customs such as mumming and wassailing. The earliest known reference to hoodening comes from an 'Alphabet of Kenticisms' compiled by the Rev. Samuel Pegge in 1735–36, in which it was described as 'a country masquerade at Christmas time'. Equipped with the combined toolkits of folklorist and historian, Frampton pulls back the hoods, Scooby-Doo fashion, exposing the individuals underneath the hessian veil.

This book builds on a study of 1909 conducted by Canterbury solicitor and antiquary, Percy Maylam (1865–1939). In the late nineteenth century, hoodeners vied for patronage with handbell ringers and military bands, as well as the familiar carol singers. Maylam's book, *The Hooden Horse: An East Kent Custom*, pieced together the remnants of a custom which had all but disappeared, squeezed out by these new entertainments. More than a century later, Frampton has provided an updated version, based on an extensive survey of local newspapers and genealogical research.

Discordant Comicals begins with an introduction to Maylam and a survey of some possible antecedents to the hooden horses, including tourney horses used in civic processions across England, and the schimmel (white horse) of north Germany. Frampton refrains from making any conclusions here, leaving the reader to do that for themselves. A thorough geographical survey forms the book's core, proceeding in an 'anticlockwise ramble' (p. 38) around East Kent, setting out from Ramsgate and ending up in Upper Walmer. Along the way, Frampton relates topographical detail in a manner evocative of old travel guides, with a running commentary on the historical context.



Twentieth-century revivals form the basis for the penultimate two chapters, divided into two phases, with the revival at St. Nicholas-at-Wade in 1966 as the watershed moment. Many of these revivals used Maylam's book of 1909 as an instruction manual. The folk dance movement gave impetus to seeking out local customs, which in the 1950s gave rise to 'Hop Hoodening', a synthesis of hop-growing celebrations with hoodening and morris dancing. During the latter half of the twentieth century, hooden horses were also adopted by morris sides and carol singers. In these contexts, they performed a valuable service, fraternising with audiences and feeding on loose change.

The final chapter provides a critical appraisal of hoodening as performance and tradition, considering the peculiar socio-economic contexts in which it took place. Frampton is also alert to the dual significance of hooden horses as artefacts of performance and products of handicraft, providing descriptions of their materiality and the methods employed in their construction.

If you read this cover to cover, you may find the narrative repetitive in places, as the earlier chapters which comprise the geographical survey overlap with those on twentieth-century revivals. To distinguish Frampton from his sources, long quotations are printed in purple, which I found difficult to read. These are minor criticisms, which should not detract from the many admirable strengths.

Bound in hardback and richly illustrated with colour photographs (many of which are colourised black and white images), this is a handsome volume. Frampton generously reproduces many of his sources at length, granting the reader access to press reports and first hand accounts. Eye-witnesses attest to the mixed emotions excited by the annual visit of the hoodeners. Children were often 'half frightened and half amused' by the rambunctious horse. Provincial newspapers often seemed ambivalent towards the practice, sometimes even censorious or condescending.

Supported by comprehensive appendices, the richness of source material contained in this book makes it a valuable resource for anybody interested in folk customs. Whether it gives rise to a new generation of hoodeners, only time will tell.

Matt Simons



Discordant Comicals is available for purchase on both Amazon and Waterstones. It is published by Ozaru Books.

George Frampton (pictured left) has researched, written and delivered lectures on Plough Monday customs, the Oak Apple Day tradition, and numerous other folklore-related topics. He is a member of the Folklore Society, English Folk Dance & Song Society and Traditional Song Forum.

The Morris Census 2020

In the summer of 2020, Jack Worth conducted his third Morris Census, which received responses from 569 teams across the JMO, approximately 70% of all sides in the UK. Here are the summary and conclusions from Jack's report.

Summary

Key facts

- The number of morris dancers in the UK has continued to grow, from 12,800 in 2014 to 13,600 in 2020.
- Seven out of ten morris dancers are aged 50 or over and just one in ten are aged under 30. The average age of a UK morris dancer is 55, up from 52 in 2014.
- Morris has reached gender balance. The 2018 amendment to the Morris Ring constitution allowing sides with female dancers to be members has led to a quarter of Ring sides having opened their membership fully to both sexes since then.
- Less than one per cent of UK morris dancers are of non-white ethnicity.
- UK morris sides recruited around 2,200 new dancers in the past two years. New recruits are, on average, age 45 and are 63 per cent female. A third of new recruits to Morris Ring sides were female.
- The proportion of sides that dance Cotswold has been falling over the past six years, while the proportion dancing Border and Rapper has risen.
- The proportion of sides that place importance on preserving tradition has fallen from 47 per cent in 2014 to 40 per cent in 2020.

Conclusions

The number of morris dancers in the UK has continued to grow, from 12,800 in 2014 to 13,600 in 2020. This is in spite of many signs of decline, not least a relatively old and ageing membership. Morris is also undergoing considerable demographic and stylistic change, albeit slowly.

Morris has reached gender balance and is likely to be majority-female in the future. The 2018 amendment to the Morris Ring constitution allowing sides with female dancers to be members is part of this story, as a quarter of Ring sides have since opened their membership fully to both sexes. However, the trends in recruitment (new recruits are two thirds female) and side dissolution (sides that are not optimistic about continuing in the future are more male than average) have been leading morris towards being majority female over the longer term anyway. However, more generally morris is unrepresentative of the population by age and ethnicity.

Seven out of ten morris dancers are aged 50 or over and less than one per cent are of non-white ethnicity. Stylistically, morris is becoming more diverse and less traditional. The proportion of sides that dance Cotswold – the most common style – has been falling over the past six years while the proportion dancing Border and Rapper has risen. The proportion of sides that place importance on preserving tradition has also fallen steadily over time.

These are long running trends that are shown by the three Morris Census surveys from 2014-2020 as well as the patterns of side formation and dissolution, and therefore look set to continue further.

**The full results of the census can be found on the
Open Morris website at:**

<https://open-morris.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Findings-from-the-2020-Morris-Census-as-at-202012.pdf>

Jack recently gave a presentation of his findings, hosted by the JMO as part of the excellent Morris Federation series of talks and workshops held on Zoom. At this event there was the opportunity for discussion in focus groups, as well as Q&As. Discussions across all of the groups tended towards issues of recruitment and how teams will survive the pandemic, demonstrating that these issues are at the forefront of a lot of people's minds.

Teams were asked to complete the survey this year as though they were dancing out in a normal year, without taking Covid-19 restrictions into account, but even so the trend towards an ageing dancer population is evident in the results. While undoubtedly there are many fine young dancers amongst our ranks, the average age has risen in the time the census has been conducted. Is this a by-product of a society where younger people have increasing pressures that might make it difficult to commit to a team or take up such a hobby, or does it show that older dancers are able, and keen, to keep going for longer than they were even seven years ago when the first Morris census was taken? The real answer is of course a combination of these and many other factors, but recruitment remains a pressing issue for many teams.

We simply don't know where we will be when Covid is a thing of the past, or how far into the future that may be. Undoubtedly there will be teams who do not survive the pandemic, but I like to hope that there will also be an upsurge of enthusiasm both from those who have missed Morris, and from new recruits who wish to experience and do all they can once the opportunity is afforded to them.

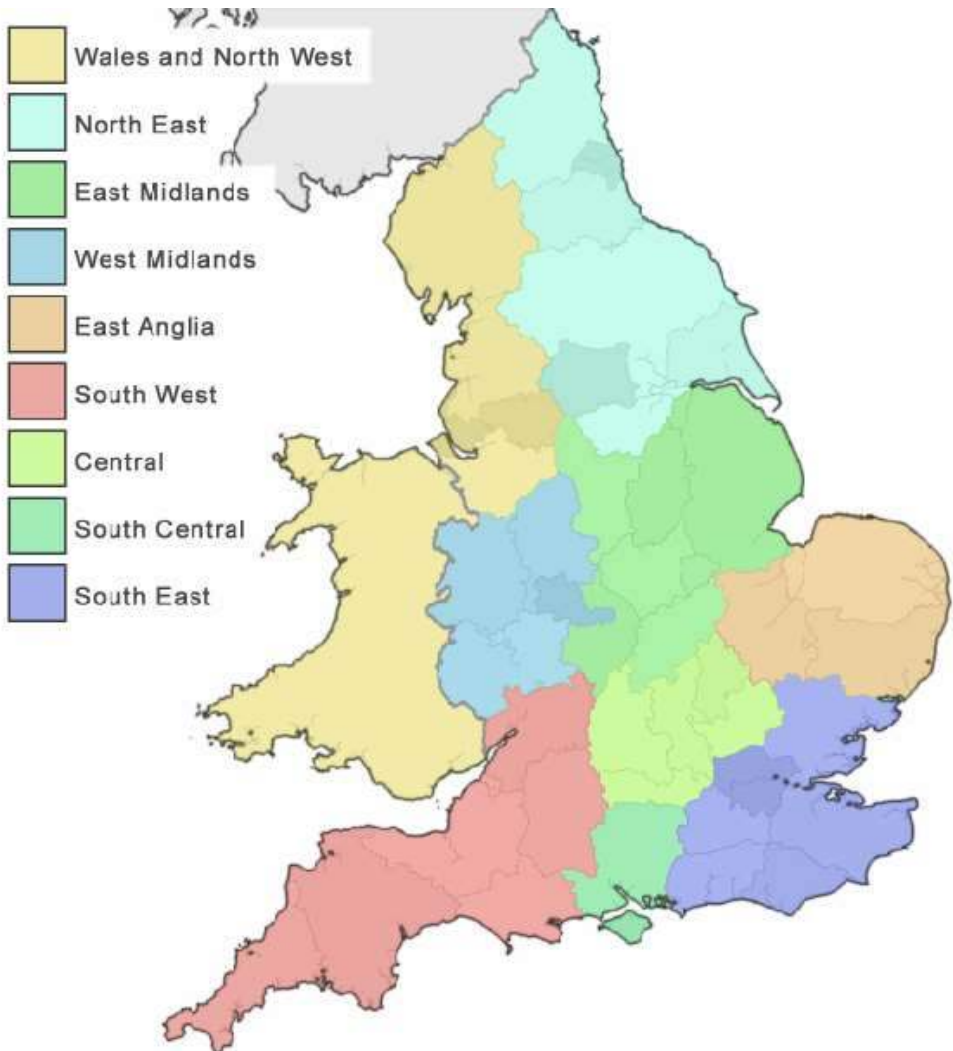
We must of course be proactive in order to ensure that as much survives as possible, and make a thorough examination of our recruitment practices and strategies in order to bring a robust Morris world out the other side of the pandemic. Jack's work will be very useful in assessing any damage that does occur as a result of Covid-19, and I'd like to thank him very much for all his hard work on the 2020 census. It was a pleasure to work with him in diversifying the census to include more detail for all traditions represented within the JMO this year, and I hope that even more of our OM members will be ready and willing to complete the next census when the time comes as a result.

Jen Cox

Open Morris Regional Areas

As I promised a while ago, here's a simple map showing how we divide the country up into areas for our lovely Area Reps to look after. This is a guide only; regional divides are not hard and fast, as we like to group teams as they might dance out together, and to keep roughly even numbers on each Area Rep's list.

Jen Cox



Looking Forward with The Buttercross Belles

When the pandemic struck, the Buttercross Belles of Otley initially resorted to dancing solo at home. However, after ten months of twiddling our toes we realised we needed to improve our fitness levels in readiness for dancing out. We readily agreed to Zoom classes created by our stupendous dance teachers, Sue Latham and Serena Hardman, accompanied by our fabulously patient lead musician Izzi Wade on violin with support from Gill Johnson on melodeon. Our Secretary, Janet Hindle, ensures we all gain access to our weekly practice despite occasional glitches, then we follow up with a chat session - not quite the same as visiting the Black Horse but enjoyable nonetheless.

After a few Belles took part in Morris Federation Zoom sessions we were invited by Gin Crewe of the Lancashire side Malkin Morris and their band, the Roughlee Ruffians, to consolidate those dances via Zoom. Also invited were Belfagan of Cockermouth in the Lake District (who we've collaborated with previously) so we comprised three sides from three counties all dancing solo in our kitchens - we've now confirmed our neighbours' suspicions!

We learned 'The Nelson' which is a traditional East Lancashire dance plus 'Lockdown' a socially distanced dance created by Chinewrde Morris of Warwickshire. We have already shared 'The Nelson' with Belles and look forward to cascading 'Lockdown'. These are sure to be firm favourites when we are free to dance out again: roll on 21st June!

**Jaci Bowman, Squire
The Buttercross Belles**



Save the Dates!

ClogZoom Workshop Weekend

15th and 16th May

Have you been missing the fun and, let's face it, brain ache of a weekend clog workshop during lockdown? We certainly have! So we're making it happen over zoom!

You'll have the opportunity to learn a whole routine from brilliant tutors over the course of the weekend, with social events and virtual clog stalls too! We want to recreate the weekends we love as faithfully as we can, and we're excited to announce that Toby Bennett and Melanie Barber will be amongst the tutors! We will be offering a workshop at every ability level, as well as a non-clog step dance class, so there will be something for everyone - you'll have to provide your own cake though!

If you are interested, please email chair@open-morris to be added to the mailing list - booking information will be going out soon!

And . . .

#nogoJMO is back!

24th April

On Saturday 24th April the JMO is coming together to host a full day of workshops, massed dances, music and Morris fun.

Do check out the Open Morris website, and our social media, for how to get involved!

Spot the Difference Answers!



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Dancing On!
needs you!

We hope you've enjoyed this edition of Dancing On!

Many thanks as always to all contributors to this magazine, and to all of the OM team for being efficient, excellent and a general delight to work with! The next edition of Dancing On! will be published this summer, so please send us what you get up to between now and then! Contributions should be emailed to dancingon@open-morris.org

Please note that the views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of Open Morris.

www.open-morris.org

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