Chair's Report to the 2026 AGM

Since our last AGM, I've been a little busier than last year, as I'm now dancing more normally after my 2025 injury. I've had a great time dancing at Chippenham, Hastings Jack in the Green, and of course DERT with Mabel Gubbins, at Priddy with Theale Tattoo, on a wonderful summer trip to the Lake District with Bunnies From Hell, at many of lovely events with Rockhopper and Sharp and Blunt, and at Camp Clog, and Wallopers Weekend.

I attended the JMO AGM, and was pleased to represent OM at the Morris Ring's ARM in March, and the Morris Federation's September AGM weekend in Stoke on Trent. Many thanks to the Ring and Federation for their lovely hospitality at those events.

After a variety of discussions with Reading Borough Council and the JMO, it sadly proved impossible for the OM hosted JMO Day of Dance to go ahead, as the council were not happy to have teams performing in anything other than minimal facepaint. The JMO took the decision that it wouldn't be fair to attending teams to impose a restriction that differed from our own facepaint guidelines, and this meant that the decision was taken not to go ahead with the DoD. We will be discussing this in more detail at the OM AGM.

A huge highlight of the year was attending a Living Heritage reception at the House of Lords on Wednesday 21st January, alongside Pauline Woods-Wilson (President of the Morris Federation) and Emma Melville (Squire of the Morris Ring). I was delighted to represent OM and the JMO, and we were all very pleased to see lots of familiar morris faces in a slideshow that accompanied the presentation there.

On Monday 20th April, I was also extremely honoured to attend a St George's Day Reception at No 10 Downing St, having been invited by the DCMS folks who are running the Living Heritage Project. Alongside many cultural and community representatives, I enjoyed scones and Pimms and listened to a short speech from then Prime Minister Keir Starmer, stressing the importance of community unity.

The process of compiling, consulting about and finalising the JMO's Living Heritage Inventory submissions made up a large part of my work for OM and the JMO this year, and as I write the submissions are in a hopefully fairly final stage of the review process. The constraints of the submission paperwork and small word counts made this exercise a huge challenge, but I'm proud of how the community worked together to produce a great result, and I look forward to our listings taking their place on the Inventory. Emma Melville recently presented a very successful paper to the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library Conference about our process in compiling the listings, and noted that the DCMS folks had held up the JMO as a great example of a community working well together throughout the process.

My thanks are due to the JMO Committee, and our ICH panel, whose companionship as we've navigated the Living Heritage project has been invaluable as ever. And thanks too to my fab OM team who have been a delight as always, new Treasurer Anne-Marie has settled in well and it's been great to show her the ropes.

It just remains to wish all in Open Morris happy dancing over the winter, and look forward to seeing you all somewhere soon!

Jen Cox
Chair
Open Morris

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