

An Introduction to Morris Dancing



History of Morris Dance



- Morris dancing is a form of choreographed English folk dance accompanied by musicians. There are many different styles.
- It has been around in England since before the Gunpowder Plot and The Spanish Armada.
- By the Elizabethan times it was already considered to be an ancient dance.
- Females were not allowed to dance until the early 1970's.
- French 'Morisque' ('the dance') → Flemish 'morisich' → English 'moryssh' then 'moris' then 'morris'

Origins

There is little historical information about the origins of morris dancing, but several theories. These include:

- It evolved from the springtime rituals of the Druids.
- It comes from the Moresca court dance from Italy.
- It was brought to England by crusaders after the Moorish conquests.
- We do know that it dates back to the 16th century at least where the accounts for several churches listed the purchase of Morris bells and costumes.





Decline & Revival

Decline

- 17th century Puritans denounced dancing and other festivities which could have lead to the demise of morris dancing.
- A loss of support from the Gentry.
- Changing attitudes.
- Migration.
- The growth of other leisure pursuits.

Decline & Revival

Revival

- When Charles II returned from exile, on his route back to London, he was greeted by many morris dancers.
- In 1887 Queen Victoria demanded morris dancers at her Golden Jubilee celebrations.



- Will Kemp, the Johnny Depp of 1598/1600 took a wager to dance from London to Norwich during Lent, when the roads were particularly bad. This was called the Nine Daies Wonder. Large numbers of spectators turned out to cheer him on and check his progress.
- Big revival in 1889 when lots of dancers performed outside the house of Cecil Sharp.

Kemps nine daies vvonder.

Performed in a daunce from
London to Norwich.

*Containing the pleasure, paines and kinde entertainment
of William Kemp betwene London and that City
in his late Morrice.*

*Wherein is somewhat set downe worth note; to reprooue
the flanders speed of him: many things merry,
nothing hurtfull,*

Written by himselfe to satisfie his friends.



LONDON
Printed by E. A. for Nicholas Ling, and are to be
solde at his shop at the west doore of Saint
Pauls Church. 1600.

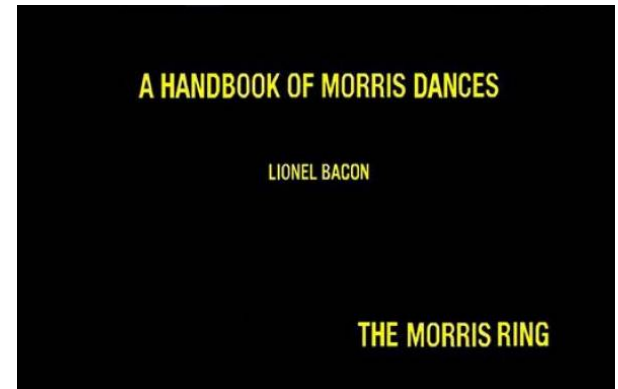
- Cecil Sharp is probably the most important figure in the morris world. He went around the country watching dancers in many towns and villages and documented their moves, characteristics and music. It is thanks to this that various traditions can still be carried on today. They were published in the “The Morris Book” and Lionel Bacon’s 1974 aide memoir to this, “The Handbook of Morris Dancing” aka “The Black Book” – the ‘Bible’ of Cotswold morris dances.



Cecil Sharp House



Cecil Sharp



The Black Book

Morris Dance Styles

1. Border
2. Cotswold
3. North West
4. Molly
5. Rapper
6. Longsword

Morris Dance Styles

Border

- Originates from the Welsh borders.
- Black Faces.
- Brightly coloured clothes/tatter jackets/decorated top hats.
- Sets from 3-as many that will.
- Sticks.
- Many musicians.
- Single stepping.



Black Pig Border

Morris Dance Styles

Cotswold

- Traditionally all white with baldricks across the chest.
- Various traditions named after the area of the Cotswolds they originate from.
- Bell pads.
- Dance in sets of 6 or 8. Solo, or double jigs.
- Hankies, sticks and hand clapping.
- Double stepping, some single stepping and some variations.
Other moves include galleys, slows, huckle backs, capers.



Lady Bay Revellers

Morris Dance Styles

North West

- Wear Clogs, as they would once have done all day in the workplace where it originates from in Lancashire and Cheshire.
- Quite military with a 'conductor' at the front of the set giving instructions and using a whistle.
- Use batons, large reels, hankies, garlands.
- Single steps, kicks, polka steps.



Sergeant Musgraves Dance

Morris Dance Styles

Molly

- Originates from East Anglia.
- No props, or occasional brooms.
- Big boots.
- Bright, often mis-matched clothes.
- Black faces.
- Traditional to dance on Plough Monday.
- High knees stomping single steps and raised arms.



Ouse Washes Molly

Morris Dance Styles

Rapper & Longsword

- Use swords (flat flexible steel) and dance in sets of 5.
- Tend to be either all male, or all female sides.
- Rapper originates from the Northumberland and has very fast stepping.
- Longsword originates from Yorkshire.
- The earliest written records of Longsword are from the 15th century, although the dances are thought to have been passed down from pre-christian times, possibly brought to this country by pagan Vikings.
- Swords end up interlocked into a star for display and crowd cheers.
- White shirts are the norm, with breeches and a sash.



Sullivan's Sword



Stone Monkey
(Rapper)