

The Morris Federation



Newsletter
Autumn 1999

Important Information

TO ALL BAG(WOMEN), SECRETARIES AND SUCHLIKE

One of the common complaints we get from the average Morris dancer in the street is that they know nothing about the Federation and what it is doing. Some don't even know if their side belongs. This usually turns out to be because the person in 'their club who received the MF communication doesn't pass any of it on.

PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE don't be guilty of this. There is no excuse now that we have included a **SUMMARY SHEET**. You can photocopy this and distribute it to all your members. This can save you the time and hassle of verbally telling everyone what is in the Newsletter. However it is not a substitute for handing the Newsletter around or making it available during practice. Remember **DON'T KEEP THE INFORMATION TO YOURSELF**.

MEMBERS' MANUAL

All members of the Federation should have a copy of the MF Members' Manual. This contains a lot of material that members may need to refer to from time to time. If you have misplaced the free copy sent to you when you joined, a replacement (or additional copies) can be purchased from the MF Secretary at the cost of 3.50 (+ 50p p&p) each. Cheques payable to The Morris Federation, please.

ADVERTISING

The Morris Federation will distribute enclosures with the Newsletter or other eirculars and items of advertising relevant to commercial products. A fee is charged to the advertiser for this service. However, this should not be taken to mean that The Morris Federation necessarily endorses the product.

Enquiries concerning any form of advertising through the Morris Federation should be addressed to the Newsletter Editor.

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Presidents' Prologue

I was at Sidmouth again this year. Featured on Monday evening at the Arena was "Flashback" - a fictionalised account of Kimber and Sharp meeting in 1899, and a look at the progress of Morris over the past 100 years. The dancing from all the teams involved was spectacular. It was put together by Sue Swift and Jim Woodland, and put the Morris into a show format that was also interesting to a non Morris audience- perhaps it has the seeds of a "River Morris". Hopefully there will be some reviews for the next edition of the Newsletter.

Otherwise the dancing at Sidmouth was its usual wide variety of styles and standards- but having got this bee in my bonnet about footwork, and differentiating styles, I'm feeling that I am seeing less and less evidence of this. And that increasingly there is an Amorphous Morris step that is creeping in, and becoming the style that people do because "that's what everyone else does!". I suppose that I would challenge particularly Cotswold teams to demonstrate that they do distinguish between one dance tradition and another in their footwork - do you belong to a team that maintains that distinction? If so- how do you manage the difference between 2,3, 4 or more traditions. Send in your comments- or will we be celebrating the Amorphous Morris in another hundred years?

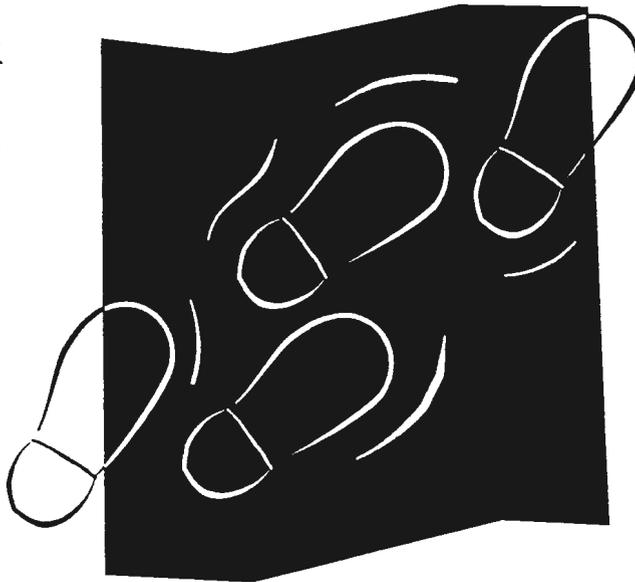
And now something unpleasant, but which I feel needs to be said. I would remind all members

that the committee are unpaid volunteers, that they do this work in their own time, that they also have their own lives and may not be in when you ring them. They do this work from their own homes. They do not work from offices. They do not have personal assistants or secretaries to take messages. What they do have is long suffering husbands, wives and partners who try to do their best to make sense of this Morris stuff, and to be as helpful as possible. So that impatience, sarcasm and abuse is totally inappropriate and is not appreciated. 'Nuff said.

And finally, (and more positively) there are three candidates for president! Going into the Millennium has obviously created a surge of interest in developing the role of the Morris and the Morris Federation. Exciting times- don't forget to send in your voting slips- your vote counts!

Dance Well and Prosper.

Janet Dowling



Editorial

Here is the pre AGM edition of the Newsletter, and every effort has been made to distribute it before the event this year. Delays inevitably occur at this holiday time of year, but here's hoping.

Lots of contributions from you the members again this time, which is great. Don't forget that you can write in about any event, no matter how big or small, even if you have not organised it, so keep the articles rolling in.

If you have submitted something which has not appeared in this issue, please don't worry, it will be published, but it may have been received after the copy date. For information, here are the copy dates for the forthcoming editions:

Winter:	copy date	12th November
Spring:	copy date	10th February

In this edition: **Presidents Prologue:** Janet Dowling reviews dancing at Sidmouth, and the voluntary running of the Federation.

General: Beth Neill considers the AGM, and a reminder to keep the photos coming for the year book.

Financial Services Rachel Pinkney has reminders about procedure when ordering from the shop and about Public Liability Insurance, together with a thought about etiquette.

Archive Lynne Rogers still advertises the Archive Officers post, and tells us about the latest acquisitions to the archive.

Events There are two workshops taking place in November, both on 21st. The first, is the Westmorland Clog workshop to be held near

Kendal, hosted by Westmorland Step & Garland Dancers, and taught by Chris Coe, The second is a Border Workshop hosted by Oyster Morris, taking place in Faversham, and taught by John Lewis.

Kesteven Morris in France : Marion Ellis writes about the teams award winning visit to Is-soire's 13th International Folkdance Festival.

Rainbow Morris Day of Dance: Jo Buck gives here account of this years day of dance.

Scarborough Fayre: Jenny Howard of Bedfordshire Lace and Louise Giddens of Panaggerty Morris both write about this event, which despite the weather drew lots of interest, and was obviously enjoyed by all.

"Its nice to see Morris back in the Village"- a letter from Bob Crosby.

Merrydowners, Cultural Ambassadors- Barry Simper tells the story.

Morris and the Dome: an update from Janet Dowling on your response to last issues request for teams to dance at the Millennium Dome.

Next stop is the AGM, which will be important as we elect some new officers to the committee, and enjoy some good dancing. So, see you all there.....

Please don't forget to note my change of address, I can also now be reached on E-mail at the following address:

judi@morrisfed.connectfree.co.uk

Jude Barrett

General

Not so much to say this time – mainly because with a bit of luck, you should all have received my bumper bundle at the end of July – please do take the time to go through it, especially to discuss the candidates for committee posts within your team and decide on how you want to vote. Send in proxy votes or better still, send a representative to the AGM even if they can't attend the whole weekend. It seems too obvious to state it, but here goes.....the committee is **elected by those of the membership who vote**. So - the people who form the future committee will be there on the basis of your choice.

I must admit I am looking forward to handing on the role of Secretary my family are looking forward to it even more! At the AGM I will look back on what has happened in the years I have been on the committee - one thing I haven't seen is anyone come and go. But there have been changes – moving with the times and so on. Who would have dreamed of the level of communication that now takes place via the Internet when I took over in 1993? I speak as one of the non-converted, but maybe once I get some time.....!

Keep the team photos rolling in – I will be carrying on with the yearbook till I have it finished – hopefully very soon into the new year. It's going to be interesting seeing it take shape – I certainly am seeing what some teams look like for the first time!

See you at the AGM

Beth Neill

Financial Services



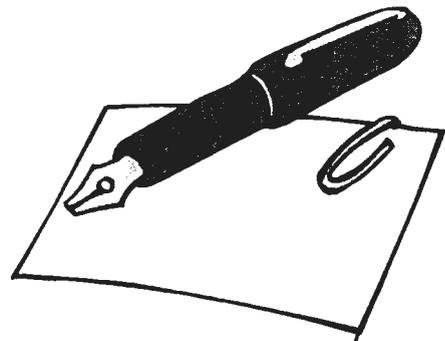
- a) I cannot accept orders without payment, cheque with order or no goods.
- b) Public Liability Insurance only covers Morris Federation sides, not visitors.



Something that has been on my mind, nothing to do with Finance, is, how many of you bother to reply to invites to days of dance, etc., not festival fliers? I feel at the moment there is a lack of courtesy in this area, surely one should reply not only when in the affirmative, but also when in the negative. I know it is sometimes difficult to get a side to come to a decision immediately, but a late reply is better than none.

Cheers,

Rachel





Morris Federation Archive Officer

The position of Archive Officer may not at first sight be the most active or exciting - but take a closer look...

Every item in the archive is of interest - things like copies of Australian Morris Ring newsletters, side history records (did your team really wear that kit 15 years ago?), Federation committee records (find out exactly what the committee does do). It also contains almost every book containing a reference to Morris dancing (even some Terry Pratchett books) - great reading for those long winter nights.

Read on to find out just what being the Archive Officer involves.

- **Day to day running of the Morris Federation Archive.**

Accessioning & filing, renewing subscriptions, purchasing new items.

- **Database**

A small number of the items in the archive have been indexed and the information is currently held on index cards. The aim is to get this information onto a database so that it is more accessible and useful and then to index the rest of the archive. Indexing is currently carried out by volunteers who form the MF archive group.

- **Running the MF Archive Group**

This group consists of Federation members with an interest in the archive. It meets on an adhoc basis primarily to discuss matters associated with indexing.

- **Liasing with other Morris archivists**
representing MF at archive related events e.g. Archive workshops; liasing with the Morris Ring archivist and personal collectors as required.

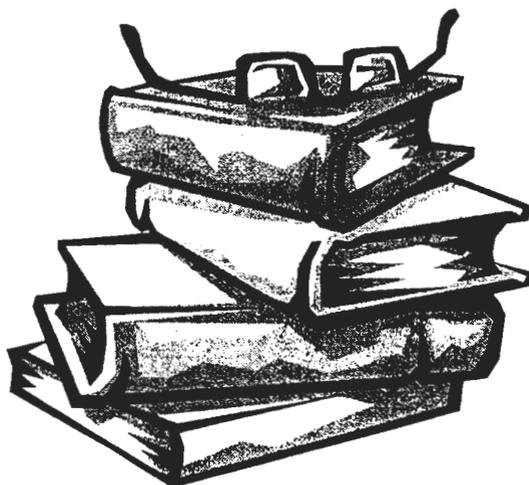
- **Dealing with enquiries**

These range from MF members wanting copies of old side history records to the general public wanting details about the history of Morris dancing.

- **Attending MF Committee meetings and the AGM**

There are four committee meetings a year held at various locations over the country and the AGM in September.

It may be possible to arrange for storage of some of the less frequently used material, so if the only thing putting you off standing for this position is the problem of storage - don't worry !



KESTEVEN MORRIS IN FRANCE JULY 1999 ISSOIRE'S 13th INTER- NATIONAL FOLKDACE FESTIVAL

cool Rum Punch which went down very nicely, thank you.

After the Grand Procession on Saturday, with Teams from 15 countries, as far flung as China, India and Turkey, and as near as Holland, we drank champagne and danced impromptu fandangos with everyone. For us it had been part family holiday (ever had a holiday where you've shared a dormitory with 33 people?) part hard work. The children carried the banners. Our musicians played tirelessly in the sunshine, and well into the night.



Then finally at midnight on Sunday we were called on to the stage to receive the Bronze Award judged on the following criteria.: the atmosphere created by the group, the desire to share the tradition, the warmth and liveliness of the music. the presentation of the dances, the involvement of the public.

Who beat us to it? The Teams from the Ukraine and Portugal, both of which spend a large part of every summer travelling from Festival to Festival, subsidised by government grants We were sponsored by Sleaford Round Table for which we are very grateful.

We felt highly delighted to be up on stage among the prize winners too.

Marion Ellis Kesteven Morris .



"No, no, impossible! 'I promise you we have won a prize," John Parry, the Joker in our Pack, could not make us believe him. Most of our Team, including the Squire, Lee Sinclair, had already left for home or holiday elsewhere and there remained only 7 of us for the final procession at 11 p.m. on Sunday night.

"You must go in kit." "But it's already packed."
"Unpack it."

We had just finished a gruelling but excellent week dancing at the Festival. The temperature reached 30°C on the first afternoon, but then fortunately for us, became unseasonably cool.

"Cold fish, the English?" asked the local paper 'La Montagne', "Kesteven Morris wiped out this old adage in half an hour when they warmed up the cool evening atmosphere with their performance. More than the Bourbonnais (French), the Germans or the Roumanians."

The Women's Team danced North West, Cotswold and our own dances Lincwold. The Men's Team danced Cotswold and wowed everyone continually with the Rapper.

We received Three Cheers at the end of our Ceilidh spot at the Soiree Cabaret after midnight, and warm thanks after our Rapper and Dance Worksop.

At the Old People's Home we were treated to a

Morris Federation

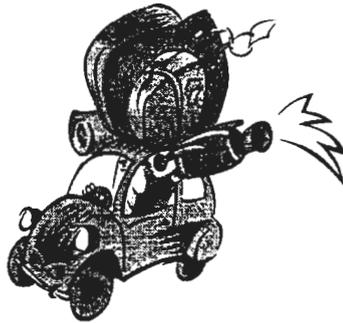
Noticeboard

Workshops

There are two workshop booking forms included in this issue, both for 21st November 1999. They are the Westmorland Clog workshop to be held near Kendal and Border Morris workshop in Faversham, please return these forms to Jethro Anderson (Events Officer) by 31st October.

Newsletter Editor Change of Address

From 3rd July 1999, please note change of address:



Jude Barrett,
10, Howard Mansions,
Forest Road,
Walthamstow,
London E17 4NA
Tel: 0181 509 0562

Archive Recent Acquisitions

Truculent Rustics :
Molly Dancing in East Anglia before 1940 by Elaine Bradtke

Absolutely Classic : **The music of William Kimber**

An enhanced CD which provides 32 tracks of music and reminiscences when used as a standard CD but which can also be used as a CD-ROM in your PC to provide archival film and other interesting information. It is accompanied by a 64 page booklet containing a full biography of William Kimber and many photographs.

Scarborough Fayre Morris Dance Festival May 1999

This event was organised by Yorkshire Coast on the Spring Bank Holiday Weekend, with attendance by teams from all over the world and was billed as the Millennium Morris Ale. It was originally intended to be a week long event, but funding problems meant that it was cut down to a three day event. Two correspondents give their impressions

Janet Dowling

Louise Giddens: Panhaggerty Ladies Morris

"If you can't dance, And you can't sing, You can join the Morris Ring" was one of the offerings I heard at Scarborough. Happily the other teams I saw at the festival were able to dance without gratuitously offending others and with the good humour we associate with Morris. There's always one isn't there!

Scarborough festival seems to have taken the mantle of Whitby to become the dancer's festival in this area. Starting as a small event in 1987 it has grown to accommodate about forty teams this year. Masterminded by Yorkshire Coast Morris and particularly, until his death, by Gordon Crowther the festival runs apparently seamlessly, offering a variety of dance venues and ceilidhs at a very reasonable cost.

Having danced for years with Panhaggerty Ladies Morris I began to feel "all danced out", so I am taking a season off. I did though become team "gopher" for the weekend. In the spirit of

audience participation Panhaggerty drag some poor unsuspecting male into the centre of their set whilst dancing "The Rose" giving him a sedate kiss on the cheek at the end of the dance. Due to the innate shyness of the British male our prey has to be stalked and approached with some care before they can employ the "run away and hide" tactic.



In my capacity as gopher I had selected our victim, and started chatting to him and his partner. The first aim is to rid the man of any encumbrances, camera, backpack or children, for instance, so they cannot use them as an excuse. Whilst endeavouring to part my man from his camera I realised that his wife was asking some pertinent questions about the side. Eventually having confessed my true purpose she said she was sure the husband of the President of the Morris Federation would be only too happy to oblige. Oh the shame! Yes we are a Federation side, and no I hadn't recognised Janet (I blame those pictures on the newsletter, she's much better looking in person).

Saturday evening saw my husband make a heroic gesture when he had his beard shaved off to raise funds for "Africa and Asia venture" a scheme that sends students abroad to teach in third world countries. Twenty three years ago when his chin disappeared into the fuzz it was

a solitary creature, but it seems to have doubled whilst hirsute. My dancing at the ceilidh was hopeless because I kept forgetting what my partner looked like..

On Sunday, encouraged by the rain and the hail, I stayed on the campsite. In the shower block (beautifully clean with very hot water) I was chatting to a lady and Morris came up in conversation. Thinking she would be sick of sharing her holiday with a load of dancers, I started to apologise for any disturbance. Instead I found she had enjoyed herself, enjoyed going to dances, and was frustrated that she had seen no information on how to join a side. Coincidentally Panhaggerty are her local side, so names and addresses were immediately exchanged.

So what have I discovered by not dancing? That it is important to communicate with your audience. That some comments can offend. That you never know who's watching. That the fun and pleasure of dancing is conveyed to our audience and makes them want to do it too, so get out your information and catch them when they're hooked.



SODDEN IN SCARBOROUGH
A Personal view-
Jenny Howard -
Bedfordshire Lace

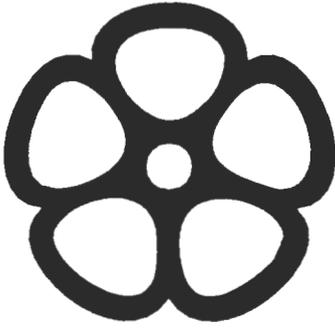
Queen Victoria is said to have put down some courtier fussing about the weather with the words, "If it rains, my lord Duke, We shall Get Wet". Well, at Scarborough Fayre, it did, and in true British fashion, we followed Her Majesty's example. I say 'British fashion', but this is unfair to the overseas teams, who no doubt are used to coping with funny foreign weather of their own. Misty City and Hole In The Bog, for example, must both be accustomed to damp, and as for the Alaskans...! It was

particularly interesting to see how tattercoats have evolved to cope with the Australian climate (very sparse tatters, but extra long and in lurid sparkly fabrics on gaudy backgrounds, with no sleeves - and, presumably, pockets in front).



Anyway, what happened? Well, I missed the 'informal workshops' on Thursday afternoon, but in the evening, there was a jolly good ceilidh and we all started on The Quiz - one of those number-and-initials ones. (I am still wondering what 4000 was, so if anyone ever found out...) On Friday we all set off on Tours. Ours was a trip on the North York Moors Railway, which was rather long, but dead scenic. It offered plentiful occasions for cultural exchange, including the, to me, mind-boggling discovery that one of the Alaskans and I had heard of each other. I also now know lots about salmon and a few thing about bears that I don't think I believe.

Our destination, Goathland, was picturesque and only slightly soggy. We started off at a pub, dancing until wet and hunger drove us indoors, where we ordered Stotties, just to find out what they were! When it cleared up, we did a spot up the road, this time to more of an audience - including, I hear, a lady who likes to put visiting sides in their place by informing them that her son is The Real Thing. Back on the train to Grosmont to find a wedding party on the platform, who clamoured to have Morris dancers included in the photos. Well, you know how shy and retiring we all aren't, so that



was arranged to everyone's satisfaction, and then there was even time for a bit of a dance.

After tea, a talk from Roy Dommett, who, without blackboard, OHP or computerised

presentation gizmo, poured out a stream of little-known facts about Morris to a room full of rowdy, voluble Morris people sitting transfixed like rabbits in headlights. If we hadn't all got homes to go to, we'd probably be there still, since there doesn't seem to be any limit to Roy's knowledge. However, there was just time to catch a bit of the evening's ceilidh before it was time to assemble, the weather having cleared, for the torchlight procession. No dancing as such, but a massed scratch band, flaming torches and a small but enthusiastic fool provided an unexpected spectacle for those Scarboroughers out in the street.

After that there was a presentation to the Scragenz regulars of a set of fleecy bellpads to mark their 10th anniversary (Editors Note - Scragenz is the name given in Open Morris to the collection of odd dancers without a full team, that turn up to Morris events. They have a repertoire of dances, which allow lone dancers an opportunity to join in the dancing.), and then an International Ale hosted by overseas teams; but since nobody had told them what was expected of them, Scragenz organised some massed scratch Morris and everyone had fun anyway.

Our Saturday Tour took in some quaint back streets of Old Scarborough where we danced mostly to ourselves, but in sunshine and with splendid views. The lunch break was noted for the helpful restaurant that offered our vegetarian plain boiled vegetables, with gravy ("We could pour vegetable soup over them if you'd rather"); and some members of the party found the silly

hat shop. Then we had to rush to catch our boat trip, at which point I went to sleep; but I am assured by others that the rest of the party danced on board, putting in the performance of a lifetime to an admiring audience of fellow-passengers.

In the evening there was again plenty to do for those with the stamina, but for me the only place to be was wherever Sid Kipper was on: his moving tale of the sinking of the "Pathetic" brought tears to eyes of all present. His spot at the ceilidh was preceded by the arcane ritual of the presentation to Brazenose of the Gordon Crowther Memorial trophy, during which nobody mentioned what the award was for, nor even who Mr Crowther was! (Editors Note: Gordon Crowther was a member of Yorkshire Coast Morris, who had been instrumental in arranging the many Scarborough Fayres. He died, unexpectedly last year). There were then exciting nocturnal outings planned (stars & dawn chorus) but if they took place, they did so without me.

Sunday started off fairish for the dancing on the sea front, but it didn't stay dry for long - and neither did we, as we all found suitably refreshing refuges. The rain got worse and worse as the time for the Grand Procession drew near and it became increasingly obvious that it wasn't going to be viable. Buses were arranged to transfer the whole caboodle to the other end, where the Mayor gave a speech anyway and indoor dancing took place. Of course, while this was happening, the sky cleared and by the time of the massed Dorset 4-Hand Finale the sun was blazing and the streets were steaming. Those that could stay danced on in the Suncourt, but the rest of us had only time for fond farewells and final photos before heading home, damp but delighted.

Editors Note: If you are organising a festival or weekend of dance, why not ask someone to write it up for the newsletter- feedback from our members is that you want to hear more on this sort of report.



ANSTEY MORRISMEN

“Its nice to see Morris back in the village....”

I was having a drink with Harry, the local garage owner, the other Wednesday at Seagrave when we were dancing out there. Chip off the Old, a Ladies side from Derby ,were dancing out with our team, Anstey Morris Men.

“Its nice to see the Morris back in the village!”, he exclaimed, being alcoholically relaxed at the time. ”I remember when I was a kid the Morris danced here. We used to think it was great, it stuck in my mind.”

Some youngsters thought they were being a bit naughty, sitting by the side of the road giggling at us. Harry said “I bet they will remember tonight- like I did when I was a kid.”

Most of the crowd that watch us at Seagrave are locals, and have taken to turning out when we dance there on Boxing day and in the Summer. The landlord always gives us a pint and some sandwiches.

I went to a ceilidh in the village last Thursday with my wife. A little girl came up to us with her mum and said “are you one of the Morris men?”. I said “Yes, did you see us?”. “Yes!”. I asked “Did you like us?” She said “ I thought the ladies were better!” Of course I had to agree with her.

It is nice to see the Morris back in the villages, to enjoy a good rapport with ordinary locals, and be welcome in the village anytime, as young Bob. Just because we have danced there.

Enjoy your dancing, and all the best.

Bob Crosby

Anstey Morris Men.

RAINBOW MORRIS

DANCING IN THE NORTH WEST TRADITION

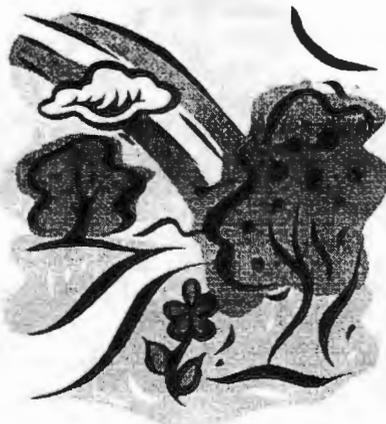
1999 DAY OF DANCE

Bradford festival has been described as "the largest community based celebration of the arts in the UK." It is certainly alive and kicking and seems to get better each year. Over the course of its 3 weeks' duration, it manages to involve most elements of this racially rich community, with theatre, music, song, dance, p~, exhibitions and talks, while the weekend-long Mela is a vibrant example of (mainly) Asian culture.

However, one element we felt was missing was some indigenous English dance, so this year we tried to remedy this deficiency by organising our Day of Dance as part of the Street Festival on July 1&. When we approached the festival organisers with our ideas, we were welcomed with interest and enthusiasm, and every help in arranging the day, including some very grand committee rooms in City Hall as a base for the day, plus free parking!

In the run-up to the day, we did very well as far as publicity was concerned: lots of mentions in the local press; pictures and info. in the festival brochure; an interview on local radio. On the day itself, we were even featured in The Guardian's Events Guide!

Rainbow Morris is a 10 year old, female, North West side based in Shipley, but with members coming from all over the area, including a few who need visas to come from Leeds. For our day



we had 8 visiting teams: Panhagerty Ladies from Darlington; Ossy Cloggers and Clogology from Oswaldtwistle. Briggate from Leeds; Blacksheep from Barnard Castle- Newburgh Morris from Lancashire; Acorn Morris from York; Clever Clogs from Buxton. Chorlton Green from Manchester. Dance spots in and around the city centre were interspersed with other street performers, so that when we

weren't dancing we could be entertained by the likes of The Chippolatas, Honky Trash, The Peace Artistes, Samande Jugglers and The Invisible Men.

"What a difference a day made " was perfectly illustrated by the glorious weather: after several dance-outs being washed-out this year, we were blessed with a cloudless, blue sky and blazing sun all day. Far too hot for dancing, really, but it brought the people out in droves. Centenary Square, outside City Hall, with food and beer tents, stalls, a fun fair, and a performance marquee, was transformed into Cafd Bradford. It definitely had a continental feel as people ate and drank in the sunshine as they watched the performances: African drummers and dancers; Irish dancers; The Klaus Heinmann Big Band; The Chittagong Drummers, and many more.

We had 3 separate dance spots at different venues during the day, and then all the teams

came together for an hour in the Square, each performing a showcase dance, followed by a mass Mona's Delight and Plymouth Reel, despite the heat exhaustion and sore feet! There were probably around 100 dancers altogether, and with all the different kits and colours was quite a spectacular sight. We got a very enthusiastic reception from the crowd, and some very positive comments about the place of Morris as part of the Festival.

It was certainly a day with a difference and we are hoping to repeat the exercise next year with more teams taking part. Anyone interested? If only we could also have a repeat of the weather

**Jo Buck
Rainbow Morris**



**There is no Morris in the
Media article this month,
but please continue to
send sightings to Janet
Dowling for inclusion in
the next issue.**

Morris & the Dome

Thanks to everyone who has responded with offers of dates – the response exceeded my expectations. At the time of writing, I had filled nearly every date, with only August still free, but I still have another 20 offers from teams to enter into the data base. Nearly 80 teams responded.

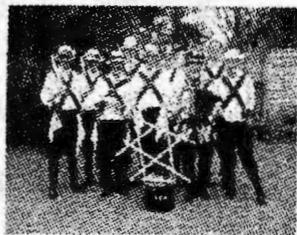
If you haven't already sent me dates, its probably too late. So sorry, particularly to those teams who were quick off the mark to send the 'interested but can't give dates yet' form. Initially I was inundated with North West sides and Appalachian or step teams, but a few Border and Cotswold teams came out of the woodwork. Only two Rapper sides, no Molly or Longsword.

I haven't confirmed dates yet, as I have to submit the programme to the Dome– there may now be a problem with numbers for each date, (too many), so I may either have to restrict team numbers or reduce the number of teams, and I don't want to get teams' hopes up, only to have to withdraw them. In any case I will feedback as soon as possible.

The full list will be on the web site from January.

Again, many thanks for such as fantastic response.

Janet Dowling



CULTURAL AMBASSADORS HARROW / DOUAI TOWN TWINNING 20th ANNIVERSARY

It was with a sense of pride and anticipation that The Merrydown Morris team assembled, in our new embroidered team shirts, outside the Church Hail in North Harrow. For we, the Merrydowners, had been specially chosen by the good burghers of Harrow as cultural ambassadors to represent Harrow in this major international cultural festival. That, and the troupe of clowns previously invited by Harrow had dropped out and we were available at short notice.

This culture fest, also known as the 20th anniversary of the twinning of Harrow with the town of Douai in northern France, was seen by the Merrydowners as a most excellent way of disseminating the Morris tradition into areas previously bereft of the pleasure. Plus the offer of free accommodation and food for the weekend, and the chance to stock up on the duty-free, was too good to miss.

After the joys of the M25, the channel ferry, and the N42, we arrived in Douai, a town situated, as your geography teacher will tell you, in the industrial heartland of the Flanders plain. Douai is a town which has had its allegiance forcibly and frequently changed between France and Belgium, and whose historic local industry, coalmining, has recently declined to the point on non-existence. Nonetheless, a charming town, with old and picturesque bits and a nice river running through it, and exceptionally hospitable citizens.

We were accommodated in the student quarters of the Ecole des Mines, and fed in the student canteen. The number one priority, however, was to find a convenient base in the town: this turned out to be the Le Minck pub, soon to be known, in our best Inspector Cloouseau accent, as Le Minkey. including our French piece de resistance, .

Saturday, and we joined the Harrow Scottish Pipe and Drums Band (another native Harrow cultural tradition - we had bagpipes in Harrow centuries before the Scots misappropriated them) for an impromptu session at a neighbourhood disabled persons centre, before forming up into parade mode and being joined by our escort of armed and moustachioed French police.

Imagine, if you will, the scene: French police blowing whistles, waving batons and stopping the traffic, followed by the Pipe and drum band in full highland regalia and kilts (at slow march - they're all getting on a bit), and then the Merrydowners in Bells, baldricks, and flowered hats carrying hankies, sticks and metal swords (very warlike), and followed by yet more police. The good French citizens of Douai were gobsmacked, to say the least!

After marching (is this permitted in the rules of Morris? Should we not have shambled, instead?), yes, marching in step to our allotted venue we set up and started our performance to a modest and sceptical crowd of spectators. The fact that the temperature was above 30 degrees C, and the venue doubled as the bus terminus may have had some bearing-on the matter. Nonetheless we performed the Merrydowners calling-on song, then into our dances; Over the Hills, Shepherds Hey, Black Joke, Lad's a' Buncham, Rakes of Harrow, Beaux of London, Bromsborough Heath, Beansetting, Flamborough with wooden swords, our new metal sword dance Hemsley 2, and others, giving our small audience real value for money.

Our Police escort really appreciated our ef-

forts, and after our two sets they were rewarded with Merrydowners badges, which they proudly wore (until teased by their fellow officers back at the police station). They even rustled up paddywagon to transport our equipment and our venue. Said musician, , who will remain nameless to protect his family ; is now the subject of blackmail we even have the photos Dennis). This could have something to do with defacing Le Minkey the previous evening.

On marching to our next venue, we were invited to refresh ourselves at a passing tavern, which was not permitted to serve beer at that hour because of the local licensing laws. However, cider (at 8% abv) was permitted. Vive le code Napoleon! We were, needless to say, still being escorted by our diligent French police escort, who took it upon themselves to act as unofficial Cider tasters, in case any nefarious organisation tried to poison us. We thanked monsieur le patron with an impromptu display outside his establishment, including our French piece de resistance, previously danced to Cock o' the North, now danced to Au Pres de ma Blonde.

After a shower and a change of shirt we assembled again for the centrepiece of the Twinning festivities - the Merrydowners performing at the Hotel de Ville, with an incidental banquet going on around us. Speeches from the French Mayor of Douai, who spoke in English so that the English visitors could understand him, and from the Mayor of Harrow, who also spoke in English so that the French could understand her. Also attending were the British consul from Lille, whose name sounded suspiciously like Cariton-Brown, and members of the various town twinning groups, both French and English, who had organised everything to make our visit so enjoyable, and all our thanks to them.

The Banquet. Two hundred people sat in the extraordinary, baroque banqueting hall of the Hotel de Ville, with a raised stage at one end, marble columns and a gilded ceiling. First on, after the aperitifs, were the pipes and drums: the champagne improving their colourature, phrasing, timbre, and fingering, they sounded like angels. Then followed

the rush for the Buffet meal, accompanied by most spectacular black clouds, lightning, thunder, and sheets of rain.

Then to the high point of the evening; the performance, on stage, of the Merrydowners. Starting with the Merrydowners song, and straight into our allotted three dances, all perfectly together, in step, and in time with the music. So we quit while we were ahead, and sat down to thunderous applause and dessert, followed by the pipe band's second set and the speeches. Each of the Mayors was preceded by their national anthems played on trumpet, electric keyboard, electric bass guitar, and drums, a sound somewhat at odds with the genial harmony with the genial harmony with which les Douais and the Harrovians had been interacting thus far ,

The evening (now early morning) was pleasurably finished -Off in the Le Minkey ~ quelle surprise - before returning to our accommodation: in one case totally flooded, with wet clothes and bedding due to a window left wide open.

Sunday, after a quiet breakfast, into the minibus and, with a stop at St. Omer for a final French meal, on to the ferry and back around the M25 at a crawl: the great British antidote to a hugely enjoyable French weekend. A weekend during which the Merrydowners upheld the honour of Harrow, and the best and finest traditions of Morris; overindulging, joking, making a spectacle of ourselves, making friends with all and sundry, and enjoying ourselves hugely, and returning with a fund of stories.

We plan more trips away from our home circuit of local fetes, dance outs, charity events, and performances for Harrow Arts. If you'd like to be part of this exciting, internationally renowned troupe of cultural ambassadors, as musician or performer (full training given in both cases), please do contact us;. Contact Battery. Simper on 0208 868 5378

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Contributions on disk or in hard copy are welcome. Hand-written **MUST** be legible. **ALL CONTRIBUTIONS MUST REACH THE EDITOR BY THE COPY DATE**

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The Morris Federation 1999

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