

THE HISTORIES OF THE MORRIS IN BRITAIN

Papers from a conference held at Cecil Sharp House, London,
25 - 26 March 2017, organized in partnership by Historical
Dance Society with English Folk Dance and Song Society and
The Morris Ring, The Morris Federation and Open Morris.

Edited by Michael Heaney

Introduction

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pp. 1-3



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english folk dance
and song society



**English Folk Dance and Song Society & Historical Dance Society
London 2018**

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ISBN 978-0-85418-218-3 (EFDSS)

ISBN 978-0-9540988-3-4 (HDS)

Website for this book: www.vwml.org/hom

Cover picture: Smith, W.A., ca. 1908. The Ilmington morris dancers [photograph]. Photograph collection, acc. 465. London: Vaughan Williams Memorial Library.

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Introduction

In 2016 the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) and the Historical Dance Society (HDS), with the support of the three morris-dance organizations (The Morris Ring, The Morris Federation and Open Morris) agreed to organize a conference on 'The Histories of Morris'. Use of the plural was deliberate: we felt that there were many strands of historical research into the morris dance, whose paths did not always cross, and that it would be useful to bring them together so that each might illumine the others.

The Conference Committee consisted of two representatives from the HDS –Peter Barnard (Chair) and Anne Daye (Director of Education and Research); two from the EFDSS – Katy Spicer (Chief Executive and Artistic Director) and Laura Smyth (Library and Archives Director); and two active researchers in the field, Theresa Buckland and Michael Heaney.

The call for papers went out in June 2016 and received a good response. Eighteen presentations and three posters were accepted for the conference, which was held at Cecil Sharp House in London, headquarters of the EFDSS, on 25-26 March 2017. All but one presentation and one poster are represented in this volume.

The event was also enlivened by performances from Hammersmith Morris and Innocent Hare Morris during the intervals, and some of the presentations themselves included live demonstrations from the group lightningtree.

The divisions in this volume reflect the different strands represented in sessions at the conference. A look at 'The History of History' is an appropriate place to start, given the importance of John Forrest's book for the early period of morris history, and its crucial reliance on evidence and data to reach conclusions. The 'Morris at Court' section looks at the earliest period. Anne Daye focuses on the morris dance presented as an antimasque to the Jacobean court masque *Pan's Anniversary*. Its unusual presentation as a friendly and successful competition with the court dancers is indicative of the appreciation of morris dancing by King James, the royal family and the court. Jennifer Thorp looks at Francis Isaac's 'The Morris', advertised as 'a new

Dance for 1716', for which we have a full notation, revealing its antecedents in the high-class ballroom.

Moving from the earliest history to the 'dark ages' of the eighteenth century, Jameson Wooders and Michael Heaney each investigate morris dances and dancers in their wider social milieu, and their reception (or disavowal) in a variety of social and civic contexts. Peter Bearon sheds light on the origins of that most mysterious of dances, the coconut dance, revealing most unexpected connections.

The revival is itself now part of history – there are few alive whose memories stretch beyond 1930. Katie Palmer Heathman looks at what might be termed – in more senses than one – the spiritual home of the revival and the role of Conrad Noel, his beliefs and their embodiment in Thaxted church. Matt Simons's contribution on the Travelling Morrice describes the first steps to take morris dancing beyond Sharp and the English Folk Dance Society, and examines their motivation in trying to reconnect the morris with identities of place and belonging. The Travelling Morrice was in many ways atypical, but Roy Fenton describes the life of an almost archetypal morris team from the 1920s, still going strong, Greensleeves Morris Men. This section concludes with Elaine Bradtke's review of James Madison Carpenter's work with Cotswold morris fiddlers, bringing out the nuances in their playing and the distinctiveness of their styles.

The first contribution in the section on 'The Later Revival' does in fact cover much the same period, but extends into the middle of the twentieth century: Sue Allan explores the complex development of morris dancing in Cumbria, and her work in reviving the dances in the latter part of the century. Derek Schofield's 'A Different Sort of Revival' looks at the transplantation of the Royton dance to rural Cheshire while remaining very faithful to the traditional form of the dance. Sean Goddard and the late Ed Bassford look at the transplantation of North-west morris into a Cotswold morris side, and the issues faced by modern teams who dance in a variety of different styles. Finally, Robert Dunlop takes a long view on the Kirtlington Morris and its Lamb Ale, from the earliest records through to its revival in the 1970s and continuation to the present.

Although the heated discussions of the 1970s and 80s about the role of women in morris dancing are now behind us, there were real issues at the time, some but not all arising from male antagonism: how to devise suitable apparel, matched to specific dancing styles seen as not too invasive of men's morris. Sally Wearing discusses these specific issues, while Val Parker looks at how women's teams organized themselves in the face of male indifference or hostility, and then loosened the gender restrictions as teams became more confident of their place in morris. Lucy Wright, on the other hand, examines a quintessentially female form of the dance, carnival morris, whose origins she shows to be much more complex than the received wisdom of a direct development from the male North-west morris.

The final section looks at the material appurtenances of the dance. Chloe Metcalfe takes apart the origin myths of the wearing of white by teams dancing Cotswold morris, and looks at current pragmatic drivers of the choice of clothing. David Petts considers the relics of morris dancing to be found in museums, the tangible manifestations of our intangible heritage. They are surprisingly few, and divided into a few nineteenth-century objects, and modern regalia from the second half of the twentieth century, found primarily in local collections.

The conference stimulated lively debate and a fruitful exchange of ideas and expertise, and we hope that this volume captures some of that and makes the contributions available to a much wider audience than those who came and enjoyed the two days of discussion and performance.

Michael Heaney

January 2018