

THE HISTORIES OF THE MORRIS IN BRITAIN

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Edited by Michael Heaney

A Different Sort of Revival: The Life and Times of the Manley

Morris Dancers

Derek Schofield

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Contents

Introduction 1

The History of History

John Forrest

How to Read *The History of Morris Dancing* 7

Morris at Court

Anne Daye

Morris and Masque at the Jacobean Court 19

Jennifer Thorp

Rank Outsider or Outsider of Rank: Mr Isaac's Dance 'The Morris' 33

The Morris Dark Ages

Jameson Wooders

'Time to Ring some Changes': Bell Ringing and the Decline of
Morris Dancing in the Earlier Eighteenth Century 47

Michael Heaney

Morris Dancers in the Political and Civic Process 73

Peter Bearon

Coconut Dances in Lancashire, Mallorca, Provence and on the
Nineteenth-century Stage 87

The Early Revival

Katie Palmer Heathman

'I Ring for the General Dance': Morris and Englishness in the Work of Conrad Noel 115

Matt Simons

'Pilgrimages to Holy Places': the Travelling Morrice, 1924–1939 133

Roy Fenton

'Destruction not Inscription': How a Pioneering Revival Side Developed 151

Elaine Bradtke

Morris Tunes Collected by James Madison Carpenter 161

The Later Revival

Sue Allan

Merrie England, May Day and More: Morris Dances in Cumbria in the Early Twentieth Century 179

Derek Schofield

A Different Sort of Revival: The Life and Times of the Manley Morris Dancers 203

Sean Goddard and Ed Bassford

Consequences of Bringing North-west Morris to the South-east of England: The Chanctonbury Ring Effect 215

Robert Dunlop

Morris Dancing at Kirtlington Lamb Ale: Heyday, Decline and Revival 251

Women in Morris

Sally Wearing

What to Dance? What to Wear? The Repertoire and Costume of
Morris Women in the 1970s 267

Val Parker

The Women's Morris Federation – from Start to Finish 279

Lucy Wright

This Girl Can Morris Dance: Girls' Carnival Morris Dancing and
the Politics of Participation 295

Material Culture

Chloe Metcalfe

Why do Morris Dancers Wear White? 315

David Petts

Materializing Morris Dancing: Tangible Aspects of an Intangible
Heritage 331

Derek Schofield

A Different Sort of Revival: The Life and Times of the Manley Morris Dancers

It's 1934 and you want to start a morris team. What do you do? Where and how do you recruit dancers? What do you dance? How do you dance? How do you learn? Who teaches you? Where do you find a musician? How do you organize it? Where do you dance?

In twenty-first century Britain, these might seem like ridiculous questions; but perhaps not in 1934, the year that the Morris Ring, and the Manley Morris Dancers were founded. After the Ring was established with the six original members, Walter Abson wrote, 'Morris Men at Chelmsford, St Albans, Bovingdon, Clifton, Liverpool and Wargrave formed themselves into clubs, and these [. . .] applied for association in the Ring.'¹

To answer some of my questions, the English Folk Dance (and Song) Society (EFD(S)S – the name changed in 1932) was central to the process of recruitment and teaching. Branches of the Society throughout the country held classes in country dancing, morris and sword, many of them taught by branch teachers, mainly women. Out of those classes grew morris sides: the key words in the above quote 'formed themselves into clubs' indicate this sort of transition from class to club. The word 'class' is an indication of the discipline required and the inevitable assessment through examination. Dancers could achieve the coveted silver badge, indicating that they had achieved proficiency. Such examinations required standardization of movement, of style.² Unlike Mary Neal's *Espérance Club*, Cecil Sharp's

¹ Walter Abson, *The First Logbook of The Morris Ring* (n.pl.: The Morris Ring, 1991), pp. 4-5. Representatives of five clubs met at Thaxted on 2 June 1934: Cambridge, East Surrey, Greensleeves, Letchworth and Thaxted. Oxford was missing from the meeting.

² For Oxford University Morris Men, see Roy Judge, 'The Ancient Men: OUMM and its Background', revised and produced in chronological form by Ian Hall and Gerard Robinson (1993) <<https://oxforduniversitymorris.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/oummhist.pdf>> [accessed 11 October 2017], For Cambridge Morris Men see John Jenner, 'The Travelling Morrice and the Cambridge Morris Men: History and Influences During the Twentieth Century' (2004), <<http://tradcap.com/archive/histtrav.pdf>> [accessed 2 November 2017]. For Manchester Morris Men, see Derek Schofield, 'Eighty Years of Manchester Morris', *English Dance & Song*, 72.2 (2010), 20-21, 23.

EFDS rarely, if ever, used traditional morris and sword dancers to teach revival dancers, and Neal only used them until her dancers were proficient.³

The repertoire was, of course, drawn from Cecil Sharp's books.⁴ They were all Cotswold morris and sword dances. The examinations required dancers to know a variety of dances from several village morris traditions, and this contributed to revival morris dancers knowing a variety of village styles, rather than the traditional practice of just knowing your own village style. Over time, individual morris clubs developed their own style, but for a long time – and still – it is possible for a dancer to move from team to team and fit in. Musicians, mostly classically trained, played the piano (which did not make the peripatetic nature of morris dancing outdoors later on very easy) or violin.

In terms of organization, the role of the Cambridge Morris Men and the establishment of the Morris Ring had an important influence on the way morris clubs were set up. The meeting in October 1924 which established what became the Cambridge Morris Men elected a president and secretary, soon changed to 'squire' and 'bagman'.⁵ Traditionally, the term 'squire' was an alternative title for the fool, and although the fool was often the leader of the dancers, the revival practice of separating the two roles and then making the squire the leader did not follow traditional precedent.⁶ The term 'bagman' appears to have been invented by Cambridge Morris Men.⁷

Further searches of the records of the very early morris clubs would, I am sure, reveal that they adopted the terms squire and bagman based on Cambridge's usage. When the Morris Ring was founded

³ See for example, Roy Judge, 'Mary Neal and the Espérance Morris', *Folk Music Journal*, 5.5 (1989), 545-591; and Derek Schofield, booklet enclosed with the CD *Absolutely Classic: The Music of William Kimber*, (London: EFDSS, 1999).

⁴ Cecil J Sharp and Herbert C. MacIlwaine, (George Butterworth), *The Morris Book*, 2nd ed., 5 parts (London: Novello, 1912-24); Cecil J. Sharp, *The Sword Dances of Northern England*, 3 parts (London: Novello, 1911-13).

⁵ Jenner, p. 11.

⁶ Keith Chandler, "*Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles*": *The Social History of Morris Dancing in the English South Midlands 1660-1900* (London: Folklore Society, 1993), pp. 4, 68-71.

⁷ I am grateful to Michael Higgins who suggested that the term may be derived from the Bible; Judas 'had the bag' for the disciples (John, 12:6).

with its squire and bagman, it set the clear precedent for other teams to follow. John Jenner has written that Cambridge Morris Men's first 'feast' was held in April 1925, and the first use of the term 'ale' (as an event) was in December 1926.⁸

Morris dancing was not confined to Cambridge academics, but Cambridge Morris Men, followed by the Morris Ring, did establish a prototype of what a morris club could be – something to aspire to.

The morris dancing style common to Lancashire and Cheshire was ignored by Cecil Sharp, with the industrial setting of the dances and their context not fitting into Sharp's theories. It was down to his amanuensis, Maud Karpeles, to collect the dance generally known as Royton in 1928, published as *The Lancashire Morris Dance* in 1930.⁹ In the preface, she thanks Lees Kershaw, who was the concertina player, James Coleman (the conductor) and dancers Bob McDermott and his brother.

These individuals danced, before 1912, in two separate, but related, groups of dancers, one led by Jimmy Coleman and the other by the McDermott family. Michael Higgins has shown that in about 1909 to 1911 there were four related groups of dancers in the area: Mick Coleman's Failsworth Morris Dancers, Jimmy Coleman's team with Kershaw on concertina, McDermott's team (with 6 brothers: Bob, Frank, Peter, William, John and Jim McDermott and a nephew Frank, Jim's son), and Jimmy Cheetham's team. By 1912, and occasionally after the war, there was one team, Royton Central Morris Dancers with Colemans, Kershaw and McDermotts and a great deal of internal rivalry, distrust and disagreement.¹⁰

Bob McDermott, born in 1891, was one of six brothers, all of whom danced at one time or another. Bob maintained that he had been a centre dancer as a seven-year-old in 1898, and was dancing at the front of the set at 16, in 1907. Whether he became the conductor of

⁸ Jenner, p. 11; Personal correspondence from John Jenner, 17 February 2017.

⁹ Maud Karpeles, *The Lancashire Morris Dance, containing a description of the Royton Morris Dance* (London: Novello for the English Folk Dance Society, [1930]).

¹⁰ Michael Higgins, "'A Properly Conducted Morris Dance': The Role of Jimmy Cheetham Before the Great War in Oldham and Royton, Lancashire", *Traditional Dance*, 4 (1986), 73-103.

the McDermott team is disputed, but he was the main teacher of the team.

The newly-revived Royton Morris Dancers appeared at the EFDS Royal Albert Hall festival in January 1930, with Coleman, Kershaw and McDermott and all the old rivalries. On a single occasion, the three men came to London to teach EFDS dancers.¹¹

Meanwhile, country dancing had been taking place at the village hall in Manley, Cheshire, since January 1929, taught by Dorothea Haworth who became interested in folk dancing while at Oxford University. The Haworth family had moved to the village after the First World War when Dorothea's father, Alfred, a yarn agent in the cotton industry, had a change in career and went into farming. Certainly not a gentleman farmer, he was very hands-on, and similarly became an enthusiastic folk dancer. Dorothea would receive invitations for her dancers to give displays, but she had a very different and enlightened approach compared with the folk-dance revival of the time. First, she believed that the country dances were for pleasure, not for display. Second, she decided that teaching her dancers morris or sword dances from the south Midlands, Yorkshire and the North-east made little geographical sense in Cheshire. Looking around for a more local alternative, she was put in touch with Bob McDermott.¹²

Bob McDermott was invited to travel to Manley to teach the dance. The Haworth family were, it has to be said, wealthy, and no doubt made it worth his while to travel by train from Oldham to Manchester and then to Mouldsworth, the next village to Manley, and then by car to the Haworth family home for dinner before going to Manley

¹¹ See Maud Karpeles, letters to and from Lees Kershaw and Robert McDermott, London, Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, MK/5/96-101 <<https://www.vwml.org/record/MK/5/96>>, <<https://www.vwml.org/record/MK/5/97>>, <<https://www.vwml.org/record/MK/5/98>>, <<https://www.vwml.org/record/MK/5/99>>, <<https://www.vwml.org/record/MK/5/100>>, <<https://www.vwml.org/record/MK/5/101>> [accessed 13 November 2017].

¹² Published accounts covering the history of the Manley Morris Dancers include Leslie Haworth, 'Notes on Some Recent Morris Dance History', *English Dance and Song*, 20.5 (1956), 158-59; Leslie Howarth [sc. Haworth], 'The Manley Morris Dancers', *Ethnic*, 1.4 (1959), 16-19; Dorothea Haworth, 'The Manley Morris', *English Dance and Song*, 34.4 (1972), 129-30; Derek Schofield, 'Concertina Caleb', *English Dance and Song*, 46.2 (1984), 2-6; Derek Schofield, 'Manley Morris Dancers, Founded 1934, The Story So Far...', *The Morris Ring Autumn Circular* (September 1984), [12]; Derek Schofield, 'Golden Jubilee of the Manley Morris Dancers', *Buzz* [folk magazine of the Manchester and Cheshire Districts of the EFDSS], 9 (1984), 7-8. A more detailed history of the dance team is currently being prepared.

Village Hall to teach the assembled young men of the village. This working-class cotton operative was not given dinner in the kitchen with the staff, but dined with the family. When Bob brought a concertina player, George Shannon, to Manley, George found the experience of dining with the family and being waited on by maids somewhat unnerving.¹³ By way of contrast, Nibs Matthews recalled that when William Kimber was invited by folk dancer Beryl Frere to teach Nibs and his fellow Bishop's Stortford Morris Men in 1939, he was given lodgings with the Frere family chauffeur.¹⁴

In contrast to what happened elsewhere, Bob McDermott did not teach until the basic dance was known, and then was no longer needed. Neither was he an additional source to learning the dance from the book, which has never featured as a reference for the dancing in Manley. He continued his regular visits until his death in 1962, and this appears to have been a unique experience in the English folk-dance revival. Bob was the leader, or conductor of the dance at Manley; his role was critical to the success of the performance.

There are two reasons why his role was critical. First, as Karpeles noted in 1930, 'The number and selection of the figures would depend upon the conductor'.¹⁵ The dance at Royton comprised a variety of figures and steps which could then be 'called' by the conductor in a variety of orders. In a procession, for example, the dance could be advanced at a fair pace, or slowed down if the procession itself slowed, or stationary figures could be called if the procession stopped, or if there was a large crowd to be entertained. This practice continued when Bob led the Manley team, whether they were dancing in a procession or in a static display.¹⁶

Second, with a great variety of figures, Bob taught – as might be expected – the easiest figures first, and then progressed to the more difficult ones. Looking at the figures in the book now, all the figures

¹³ [Alan Ward], 'Fred Kilroy: Lancashire Concertina Player: Part 2', *Traditional Music*, 3 (1976), 5-10.

¹⁴ Derek Schofield, 'Nibs Matthews – 50 Years a Dancer', *English Dance & Song*, 47.3 (1985), 2-6.

¹⁵ Karpeles, *The Lancashire Morris Dance*, p. 15.

¹⁶ The Manley Morris Dancers are featured in a YouTube film, *Manley Morris* (1989) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBi2LN0LnNQ>> (accessed 30 October 2017). The conductor, Graham Rathbone, can be heard 'calling' the figures.

published were taught by Bob at Manley, although one of them was done differently, and with a different title. However, additional figures not in the book were also taught by Bob in the 1930s. In my conversations with Dorothea Haworth in the 1980s, it was not clear to her whether these additional figures had been danced in Royton, at least by the McDermott team, or whether Bob made them up himself. Certainly, new figures were made up during Bob's time as conductor and teacher, and after his death.

Aged only 42 in 1934, Bob was willing and able, and was delighted to have his own outlet with the Manley team rather than compromise and argument with the Royton team. He was also canny in having new figures to introduce, thus making his continuing presence vital.

In the first year of practices, Alfred Haworth overheard one of his employees, Caleb Walker, playing his grandfather's anglo concertina, and Caleb was quickly pressed into service. Bob played the concertina himself, and George Shannon played for the first few public displays, and they were able to teach Caleb the tunes and style.¹⁷ There was therefore no need to consider using alternative instruments. When asked for his opinion of a piano accordion for accompaniment, Bob replied, 'I wouldn't put one on my shoulder, they are not as sweet has [*sic*] a concertina.'¹⁸ Concertinas continued to be used as musical accompaniment throughout the life of the team, following the practice at Royton.

Alfred Haworth, Dorothea's father, danced with the team in the 1930s, as did her brother Leslie, and Leslie and Dorothea took on much of the team's administration through until the mid 1960s, when Leslie retired, and his son Colin became involved. Before the war, the team's kit was confined to clogs, long white socks, breeches, white shirts, red and blue sashes and yellow cummerbunds. After the war, the team completed the kit, with the addition of hats, beads, arm ribbons and ribbon on the breeches (Figure 1). In those early days, all the dancers lived in Manley and some of them were employed on the Haworth farm; after the war, with changing farming practices

¹⁷ Schofield, 'Concertina Caleb'.

¹⁸ Bob McDermott, letter from to Dorothea Haworth, 17 October 1938, Manley Morris Dancers Archive.

and employment opportunities, recruits were found in neighbouring villages, especially Kelsall. It was not until the 1970s that any of the recruits outside the Haworth family had any separate or previous involvement in the folk-dance or -song revival.



Figure 1: Manley Morris Dancers, Royal Albert Hall, London, 1953. Far left: Caleb Walker. Two front dancers: Leslie Haworth (left) and Arthur Webb (right) with Bob McDermott in between. (Manley Morris Dancers Archives).

As previously mentioned, revival morris teams danced a variety of dances from different Cotswold village traditions. Manchester Morris Men were the second team, after Manley, to dance North-west dances, but Manchester included them alongside their Cotswold and sword repertoire. Their first dance was Godley Hill, but then they treated the North-west dances like the Cotswold dances, and added different 'village traditions' to their repertoire – such as Mossley, Oldham and Colne. This practice was adopted by other teams in the 1960s: Leyland, Garstang, Colne Royal, Preston Royal, Gorton, Saddleworth and all the rest.¹⁹ This would appear to have been different

¹⁹ Schofield 2010; Derek Schofield, 'Which Past? The Influences of Tradition and Revival on the North-west Morris' in *Morris: The Legacy of the Past: Proceedings of a One-day Conference on Morris Dancing Held on Saturday April 20th 1996* (London : The Morris Federation, The Morris Ring & Open Morris, 1996), 94-109.

from traditional practice, where dance groups would dance just their own dance, perhaps changing or altering this every few years. Of course, the revival teams were different from the traditional ones: they probably danced more frequently, with teams and individual dancers performing for a longer number of years than the old teams. They needed variety, to keep the interest of spectators and dancers alike. Manley only ever did the one dance, with variety coming from an increasing number of figures, and the calling of the figures in a different order on each occasion.

Leslie and Dorothea Haworth must have been aware of the Morris Ring in the 1930s, but there was no contact until after the war, and even then, the influence was minimal. There was no squire or bagman at Manley – the roles were conductor, secretary and treasurer. There were no feasts in Manley and no ales. Manley was reactive rather than proactive when it came to dance opportunities, generally waiting for invitations to dance. There were no weekly evening tours of pubs, and they only started to invite other teams for dance weekends in the late 1970s, to reciprocate invitations from other teams. There was closer contact with the English Folk Dance and Song Society and both Douglas Kennedy and Maud Karpeles visited Manley in the 1930s to see the team dance.

In summary, in the Manley Morris Dancers I believe there was a different approach to the morris revival from that that derived from the standard Cambridge/Morris Ring style.

First, there was a rejection of the established way of doing things in terms of repertoire – no Cotswold morris or sword dances. Second, there was a rejection of teaching from the book.

Third, the ‘authentic’ dancer was the source of knowledge, teaching and leadership, not just for a brief period of training, but for 28 years until his death. Direct experience rather than mediated through the work of a collector. Fourth, the organizational trappings of the morris revival – squire, bagman, feast, ale, midweek tours of pubs in the summer – were never adopted at Manley. Fifth, Manley danced one dance, with more and more figures. Whilst seen as following traditional practice, this had its disadvantages, with new dancers having to learn a large number of figures before they could dance out, although the conductor would always select figures that reflected the

experience and ability of the dancers. Sixth, calling the figures in any order, as determined by the conductor, followed traditional practice. How widespread this was within traditional teams in Lancashire and Cheshire is not clear.

All these features no doubt contributed to Leslie Haworth's assertion, at the Manchester Morris Ring Meeting in 1955, that, like Bampton, Abingdon and Headington Quarry, Manley Morris should have an asterisk next to their name in the list of morris clubs in the new Morris Ring publication, denoting traditional, as opposed to revival teams. In a letter from the Squire of the Morris Ring, Donald Cassels, to Leslie Haworth, Cassels wrote, 'I am afraid your manner of expressing, at the Manchester Feast, your claim to tradition rather hurt some people's feelings (on behalf of the Ring). I do not refer to myself, for I am not the type that takes offence, but I thought I should mention the matter because you will probably be as sorry about it as I am myself'.²⁰ Cassels also wrote in the same letter, 'We are having a reprint of the brochure, from which all asterisks are being omitted, and after a good look at the Constitution I feel that it is no function of the Ring's to define the word "traditional" or settle claims to that distinction. In the long run it must be a matter for general opinion, gradually sorted out in the bar and other conversational sites.'²¹

In an earlier letter to Donald Cassels, Leslie Haworth had expressed his surprise that Cassels had described Manley as performing 'the same dance' as Royton in his report of the Manchester Ring Meeting in *English Dance and Song* magazine.²² Leslie's letter included a description of the origins of the dance back in Royton, as well as the circumstances of how the team started in Manley. Cassels encouraged Leslie to turn the contents of the letter into an article in the Morris Ring section of *English Dance and Song*, for which Leslie con-

²⁰ Donald Cassels letter to Leslie Haworth, 21 December 1955. Original letter in the Manley Morris Dancers' Archives.

²¹ Arthur Peck, *The Morris Dances of England: The Coming-of-Age of the Morris Ring 1934-1955* (n.pl.: The Morris Ring, [1955]). This publication went through various editions, but this appears to have been the first. The copy in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library has asterisks next to the three teams mentioned. A copy of the first edition in the author's personal collection does not.

²² Leslie Haworth, letter to Donald Cassels, 9 November 1955. The original letter is in the Manley Morris Dancers' Archives because Cassels returned it to Leslie to aid writing the subsequent article. D.K.C. [Donald Cassels], 'The Morris Ring', *English Dance and Song*, 20.2 (1955), 48-49.

sulted Mr A.D. Ogden, the town clerk for Royton, and Jimmy Coleman.²³ Here Leslie emphasised the Manley team's pedigree in terms of the dance's origins, Bob McDermott's long involvement and the features of the Manley team. These aspects were covered again in Leslie's article about the team in *Ethnic* magazine, in Dorothea Haworth's 1972 article in *English Dance and Song*, in team publicity and, indeed, in my own writings about the team, especially at the time of the fiftieth anniversary in 1984.

Some of us in the team in the 1980s liked to think that we were 'traditional' rather than 'revival', but this was a mixture of tongue-in-cheek with a dash of arrogance. But it has to be seen alongside the morris scene at the time, especially in the general clamour to establish traditional credentials. For example, dance teams in Winster and Eynsham started up again, each one producing booklets which emphasised their links with the past and the encouragement and endorsement of former members of the traditional team.²⁴ Other teams meticulously reconstructed dances from Sharp's field notes to restart village traditions. In the North-west, new teams emerged having apparently collected dances in their communities, though there was a good degree of invention involved. With the re-introduction of the rushcart processions in Saddleworth, Gorton, Rochdale and so on, there was a determined attempt to put a northern stamp on their dancing and to establish a link to the traditions of the past.²⁵ Alongside all of this, the Manley team was also keen to emphasise *its* traditional credentials.

Amongst the morris and sword teams with whom Manley enjoyed reciprocal dance weekends in the 1980s were several which had traditional credentials, including Bampton Traditional Morris Dancers, Abingdon Traditional Morris Dancers, Winster Morris Dancers, Eynsham Morris, Loftus Sword Dancers and High Spen Blue Diamonds rapper team. The affinity between these groups and Manley

²³ Haworth, 'Notes on Some Recent Morris Dance History.'

²⁴ Ian Russell, *Winsters Morris Dancers* (Winsters: Winsters Morris Dancers, 1979); *Eynsham Morris* (Eynsham: Eynsham Morris, 1983).

²⁵ See Schofield, 'Which Past?.'

was based on the teams' 'own dance' repertoire, longevity, community base, social background and friendship networks.

Can the Manley Morris Dancers be Regarded as Traditional or Revival?

'How can a team started in 1934 be traditional?' I was once asked. The Britannia Coconut Dancers from Bacup started in the early 1920s, and the rapper team High Spen Blue Diamonds started in 1926, both based on earlier teams, and both are regarded as 'traditional'. In the 1980s, there was some debate about what constituted 'traditional' and 'revival' in morris dancing, with Cindy Sughrue, John Forrest, Tony Barrand and others examining such matters as aesthetics, motivation and continuity, as well as infrastructure, the learning process, context and change.²⁶ The absence of a continuing debate on the subject perhaps illustrates the changing focus of the morris-dance scene.

The involvement of Bob McDermott, even in a new geographical location, would have been sufficient for Manley to have met the criteria for inclusion in the 1960 index of traditional ceremonial dance, compiled by E.C. Cawte, Alex Helm and others, but the fact that the team was instigated through 'antiquarian interest or the folk dance revival' kept Manley out of the listing.²⁷ Interestingly, though, Headington Quarry Morris Dancers would not have been dancing on Box-

²⁶ Cynthia M. Sughrue, 'Some Thoughts on the "Tradition" versus "Revival" Debate', in *Traditional Dance*, 5/6 (1988), 184-90; John Forrest, 'Here We Come A-Fossiling', *Dance Research Journal*, 17.1 (1985), 27-34; Anthony G. Barrand, 'Comments on John Forrest's "Here We Come A-Fossiling"', *Dance Research Journal*, 17.1 (1985), 34-39. For a more recent commentary on the debate see Theresa Jill Buckland, 'Being Traditional: Authentic Selves and Others in Researching Late-Twentieth-Century Northwest English Morris Dancing', in *Dancing from Past to Present: Nation, Culture, Identities*, ed. Theresa Jill Buckland (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 199-227. As an ethnochoreologist with a knowledge of anthropological theory, Buckland writes (p. 218), 'I could no longer justify, as in my previous research, valorizing one group of dancers over another as traditional.'

²⁷ E.C. Cawte, Alex Helm, R.J. Marriott and N. Peacock, 'A Geographical Index of the Ceremonial Dance in Great Britain', *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, 9.1 (1960), 1-41 (p.3). See also E.C. Cawte, Alex Helm and N. Peacock, *English Ritual Drama: A Geographical Index* (London: The Folk-Lore Society, 1967), pp. 15-16.

ing Day 1899 had it not been for the 'antiquarian interest' of Percy Manning in restarting the team.

Sadly, the Manley Morris Dancers stopped performing in the early twenty-first century. Whether they were a traditional or revival team is perhaps no longer relevant. But they were certainly different.

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