

THE HISTORIES OF THE MORRIS IN BRITAIN

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Edited by Michael Heaney

'Time to Ring some Changes'

Jameson Wooders

pp. 47-71



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

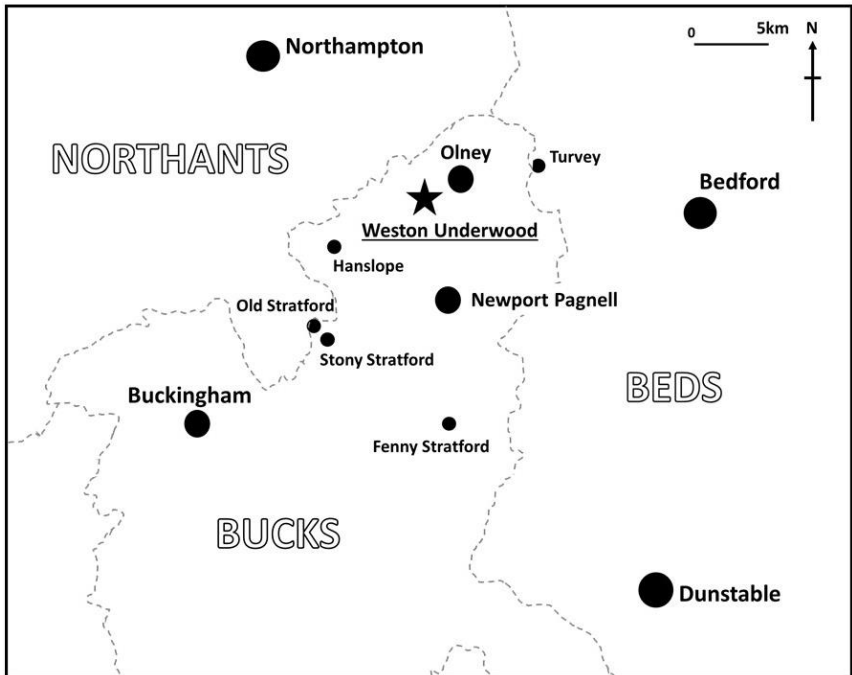


Figure 1: Places mentioned in the text

The decline of popular recreation between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries is usually seen as the result of social and economic changes driven from above, with the lower sorts of people perceived as helpless victims in the face of attacks upon their leisure time from the demands of industry, enclosure, the rise of gentility and evangelical religion.¹ This paper, based on preliminary research using early eighteenth-century household accounts of the Throckmorton family of Weston Underwood in Buckinghamshire, argues that the lower sorts actually had more agency than that with which they have pre-

¹ See, for example, Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 89-157.

viously been credited. Rather than seeing the decline of popular recreation as resulting from the withdrawal of customary benevolence from above, there was in fact a mutual renegotiation of the customary contract in favour of some traditional activities at the expense of others.

The parish of Weston Underwood lies between Olney in Buckinghamshire and Northampton, so it is just outside the South Midlands region most commonly associated with morris dancing at a slightly later date (Figure 1).² During the earlier eighteenth century, the manor there was held by Robert, 3rd Baronet Throckmorton (born 10 January 1662, died 8 March 1720/21), and his eponymous son the 4th Baronet Throckmorton (born 21 August 1702, died 8 December 1791).³ Nothing now survives of the Throckmorton manor house except a pair of stone gate-posts and a small seventeenth-century building crowned by a clock.⁴

Two Throckmorton account books survive at the Berkshire Record Office.⁵ Volume I covers the years 1698 to 1733. The disbursements up to 1718 include payments for clothes, food, farm stock and entertainments at local fairs. After 1718 the accounts are in a more illiterate hand and deal mainly with farm work and purchases.⁶ Volume II covers 1731 to 1745, with the accounts after 1739 again being written in a different hand from those before this date. Disbursements include wages, local taxation, purchases of livestock and various items for house and garden.⁷

It is, of course, entirely possible that the trends explored here might be attributed to the predominant concerns of the various stewards

² See Keith Chandler, *Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles: The Social History of Morris Dancing in the English South Midlands 1660–1900* (London: Folklore Society, 1993), and Keith Chandler, *Morris Dancing in the English South Midlands, 1660–1900: A Chronological Gazetteer* (London: Folklore Society, 1993).

³ 'Person page – 14658', *The Peerage* <<http://www.thepeerage.com/p14658.htm#i146572>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

⁴ 'Parishes: Weston Underwood', in *A History of the County of Buckingham: Volume 4*, ed. William Page (London: Victoria County History, 1927), pp. 497–502.

⁵ Manorial documents and papers of Buckland and other estates of the Throckmorton family, including bailiffs' or stewards' accounts for the Throckmorton family estates in Weston Underwood, Buckinghamshire, 1698–1748. Reading, Berkshire Record Office [BRO], D/Ewe.

⁶ BRO, D/EWe A1.

⁷ BRO, D/EWe A2.

maintaining the accounts at different times, but certain kinds of disbursement occur consistently throughout the records suggesting this is not the case.

The account books show that the Throckmorton family patronized a variety of local customary activities, including morris dancing (Table 1).

Table 1: Payments to Morris Dancers in the Throckmorton Household Accounts, 1698-1745 (Source: Reading, Berkshire Record Office [BRO], D/EWe)

16 June 1701	By ye order to ye Morris Dancers	2s 6d
27 December 1701	To the Morris dancers	2s 6d
1 January 1704/05	To a morris dancer from Stratford	1s

Morris dancers performed at Christmas and New Year as well as in the summer. A solo dancer was paid 1s in 1705 compared to the 2s 6d paid for the teams in 1701: the dancer came from 'Stratford', probably nearby Stony Stratford, Old Stratford or Fenny Stratford, but possibly Stratford-upon-Avon given that the Throckmorton family also held Coughton Court in Warwickshire.⁸ Perhaps the local dancers had already stopped and someone had to be brought from elsewhere; certainly there are no further references to morris dancing at Weston Underwood after 1705.

Morris dancing occurred alongside other customary activities: the dancer from Stratford on 1 January 1704/05 may have been accompanied by mummers (Table 2).

Table 2: Payments to Mummers and 'Maskareders' in the Throckmorton Household Accounts, 1698-1745 (Source: Reading, Berkshire Record Office [BRO], D/EWe)

1 January 1701/02	To the Maskaredors from Newport	5s
1 January 1704/05	To ye mumers at Xmas	2s

⁸'Person page - 14658'.

Whether the ‘Maskaredors’ (presumably from nearby Newport Pagnell) performed mumming or another entertainment is unclear, but they too appeared at New Year. References to mummers and ‘maskaredors’ also cease after 1705.

Morris dancing and mumming were clearly closely connected and, even if not performed by the same participants here, other studies have emphasised individual involvement in multiple customary activities. The author’s own previous research at Brightwalton in Berkshire showed that morris dancers in a mid-eighteenth century village also constituted the church band, choir and bell ringers.⁹ At Castleton in Derbyshire the ringers paraded with their garland and also performed a morris dance.¹⁰ Keith Chandler noted connections between morris dancing, bell-ringing and the church band in the nineteenth-century diaries of Richard Heritage of Marsh Gibbon in Buckinghamshire.¹¹ At Adderbury in Oxfordshire members of the Walton family also belonged to both the morris dancers and the church bell ringers.¹² At Sherborne in Gloucestershire it was said that ‘a lot of those morris dancers were in with the mummers’.¹³ Even into the twentieth century, William Nathan ‘Jingy’ Wells of Bampton was also associated with the local mummers, whilst William Kimber was a member of the Headington Quarry mummers and handbell ringers.¹⁴ Chandler suggests such men were ‘important bearers of multiple forms of cultural tradition within their immediate peer groups and localities’.¹⁵ These examples warn against studying customary activities aside from the wider societies in which they operated: by seeing different customary activities as inter-related aspects of the same

⁹ Jameson Wooders, “‘With Snail Shells instead of Bells’: Music, Morris Dancing, and the ‘Mid-dling Sort’ of People in Eighteenth-Century Berkshire”, *Folk Music Journal*, 10.5 (2015), 550–74.

¹⁰ Bob Bushaway, *By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700-1880* (London: Junction Books, 1982), p. 57.

¹¹ Keith Chandler, ‘Popular Culture in Microcosm: The Manuscript Diaries of Richard Heritage of Marsh Gibbon, Buckinghamshire’, *Folk Music Journal*, 9.1 (2006), 5–55.

¹² Chandler, “*Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles*”, p. 170.

¹³ Noman Pitts, a relative of Thomas Pitts, cited in Chandler, “*Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles*”, pp. 2, 19.

¹⁴ Chandler, *Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles*, p. 17.

¹⁵ Chandler, *Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles*, p. 19.

overall culture, it is possible to gain greater insights into the development of each.¹⁶

Table 3: Payments to Wassailers in the Throckmorton Household Accounts, 1698-1745 (Source: Reading, Berkshire Record Office [BRO], D/EWe)

30 November 1698	To two poor Soulgers and a vessell Cup	1s
12 December 1699	To a vesseller	6d
10 December 1702	To the Wassalers	6d
18 December 1702	To the Waselers & boys	1s
4 February 1703/04	To two waselers	6d
1 January 1704/05	To Wasselers at times	9d
28 November 1705	To 2 Wasellers	6d
31 December 1705	To ye wassellers	6d
14 December 1708	To Wassellers at 2 times	6d
16 December 1709	To 2 fiddlers from Hanslope & to Wassillers	1s
2 January 1710/11	To Wassalers	6d
31 December 1711	To Wassellers & to the poor this month	2s 6d
27 December 1712	To ye poor this month, & to the Wassellers	2s 6d
25 November 1713	To Wasselers	6d
28 December 1714	To ye poor, Wassellers & Madwoman this month	2s 6d
26 December 1715	To ye poor & to Wasellers fiddlers & c this month	4s

Other entries in the Throckmorton accounts further reveal the local customary calendar. The morris dancers and mummers in January 1704/05 were accompanied by wassailers. Indeed, there are fre-

¹⁶ Keith Chandler stresses that 'the isolation of any subject from the numerous other factors in operation in the work/leisure pattern of the society within which it functioned may dangerously distort the actual historical reality'. Chandler, *Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles*, p. 1.

quent payments to wassailers in the accounts (Table 3). Up to 1709 the records usually mention wassailers only; thereafter those in receipt of payments also include fiddlers and the poor. In December 1709, 1s was paid to wassailers and two fiddlers from nearby Hanslope. In December 1715, 4s were to be shared between wassailers, fiddlers and the poor, whilst in 1714 those in receipt also included a mad woman. Payments to wassailers, with or without others, cease after 1715.

Table 4: Payments to Fiddlers in the Throckmorton Household Accounts, 1698-1745 (Source: Reading, Berkshire Record Office [BRO], D/EWe)

10 December 1702	To ye fiddlers at 2 times	1s
25 January 1702/03	More to him [Will Morrill] for fiddle strings for James Sturdy	1s 3d
28 December 1703	To Olney fiddlers by my Masters order	1s
May 1704	To a blind fiddler	1s
15 June 1704	For 2 fiddlers	1s
24 March 1704/05	For fidle strings for James	2s 6d
4 February 1705/06	To a Fidler by my Ladys order	1s
22 December 1707	To ye fiddlers of Olney	4s
31 March 1708	To 2 fidlers p my Mastrs order	1s
9 June 1708	To 2 fiddlers from Bedford	1s
14 December 1708	To 2 fidlers	6d
17 December 1708	To 2 fidlers by my Ladys ordr	1s
14 December 1709	To two Fiddlers from Turvey and a Blind fiddler	1s 6d
28 November 1712	To 2 ffiddlers	1s
12 January 1719/20	To the poor and fidlers this Xmas &c	3s
16 June 1743	To three Fidlers of Northampton for ye Ball	£1 11s 6d

The accounts contain further payments to fiddlers at Christmastide, though performances also occurred during spring and early summer

(Table 4). Visiting fiddlers came from Olney, Bedford and Turvey. Payments largely cease around 1720, though three fiddlers from Northampton were paid the considerable sum of £1 11 shillings 6 pence to play for a ball in 1743.

Other references to musical entertainments occur throughout the accounts (Table 5). Musicians came from Northampton, Olney, Huntingdon, Dunstable, Bedford, Hanslope, Turvey and 'out of Warwickshire', as well as from London in May 1707 and 'ye Waites from Cambridge' in October 1711. Some must have been summoned, whilst others turned up more speculatively.¹⁷ Entries include a woman 'playing of ye musick 3 nights' in September 1713, 'the musick ye Feast Day' in December 1701 and 'ye Musick dineing ye Tenants' in December 1709. The annual parish feast was an important holiday for the common people and, as here, might be arranged by the gentry for their workers.¹⁸ Whatever the occasion, payments to musicians largely cease around 1720.

The Throckmorton accounts also record May Day celebrations (Table 6). The usual payment was 2 shillings 6 pence, although just 1 shilling was given to the Mayers in 1706; perhaps the steward was reluctant to pay anything at all but grudgingly gave a reduced amount 'by my Mastrs order'. Payments to Mayers were frequent until 1716, but occur more sporadically after 1720. A reference to Rogationtide processioning in 1726 may be associated with Maying customs.¹⁹

Finally, the Throckmorton accounts contain numerous payments for the ringing of bells (Table 7).

¹⁷ c.f. Christopher Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 144.

¹⁸ Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, pp. 16–19, 59–64.

¹⁹ Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, pp. 58–59; Bushaway, *By Rite*, p. 100.

Table 5: Payments to Musicians in the Throckmorton Household Accounts, 1698-1745 (Source: Reading, Berkshire Record Office [BRO], D/EWe)

28 December 1698	To the Trumpeters	2s
24 March 1698/99	To a drummer	1s
10 February 1698/99	To Museick	1s
12 April 1699	To the Museick at Northampton	5s
3 May 1699	To Museick	1s
14 August 1699	To Mr Sherwood what he gave to Olney Museick	2s
20 November 1699	To the Museick Come out of warwickshire	1s
27 November 1699	To the Museick of Huntingdon	2s 6d
6 December 1699	To Museick	1s
Imp January 1699/1700	To two Drummers	2s
8 January 1699/1700	To a drummer	1s
8 January 1699/1700	To Museick	1s
26 January 1699/1700	To Museick out of warwickshire	1s
19 December 1701	To three Drumers	2s 6d
18 August 1701	To Olney musick	2s 6d
15 December 1701	To Olney musick	2s 6d
31 December 1701	To the musick ye Feast Day	2s 6d
6 January 1701/02	To A Drumer from Newport	1s
3 March 1701/02	To Dunstable Musick	2s
Imp April 1702	To Bedford musicke	2s
3 August 1702	To Olney musick	2s 6d
24 August 1702	To Dunstable Musick	3d
20 December 1703	To Bedford Drumers	2s
28 December 1703	To a Dromer from Newport	1s
17 May 1703	To Olney musick	5s

Table 5 (continued)

16 August 1703	To Olney musick	2s 6d
19 April 1704	To the Musick	2s 6d
23 December 1705	To Musick by My Ladys order	2s
11 August 1706	To Olney Musick	3s
20 December 1706	To Musick p ordr	1s
10 May 1707	To Musick from London p ordr	2s 6d
22 September 1707	To Dunstable Musick p my Mastrs order	4s
16 April 1708	To 3 Droomers p my Mastrs or- der	2s 6d
16 April 1708	To Mr Chapman which he gave 2 Dromers p my Ladys ordr	2s 6d
November 1708	To a Dromer at Coughton	2s 6d
31 December 1709	To ye Musick dineing ye Ten- ants	7s 6d
7 December 1709	To ye musick from Bedford	2s
11 April 1710	To two Drumers	1s
23 October 1710	To Musick by My Ladys order	2s
31 December 1711	To ye Militia Drumer his Xmas box	1s
19 November 1711	To Hanslupp musick p ordr	1s
24 October 1711	To ye Waites from Cambridge	5s
9 September 1712	To ye Musick at Dunstable	5s
9 September 1712	To Northampton Musick	10s
September 1713	To a woman playing of ye mu- sick 3 nights	7s 6d
25 November 1713	To Bedford Musick p my Ladys ordr	2s 6d
25 November 1713	To Northton and Handslopp Musick	3s 6d
18 December 1714	To Musick p ordr	2s

Table 5 (continued)

18 December 1714	To Turvey Musick p ordr	2s
26 December 1715	To a Drumer	1s
1 April 1716	To Musick by my Ladys order	1s
17 May 1716	To ye Musick	2s
20 August 1716	To Northton Musick p order	2s
December 1718	To a Drumer	1s
11 June 1720	To Northampton Musick	10s

Table 6: Payments to Mayers and Processioning in the Throckmorton Household Accounts, 1698-1745 (Source: Reading, Berkshire Record Office [BRO], D/EWe)

Imp May 1699	To the Mayers	2s 6d
29 April 1702	To the Mayers	2s 6d
Imprimis May 1705	To the Mayers	2s 6d
May 1706	To ye Mayers by my Mastrs order	1s
May 1707	To the boys for a May Bush	2s 6d
Impris May 1708	To ye boys for a May Bush	2s 6d
Impris May 1710	To the Mayers	2s 6d
2 May 1711	To the May Bush boys	2s 6d
May 1712	To ye boys for a May Bush	2s 6d
May 1713	To ye boys for a May Bush	2s 6d
May 1714	To ye boys for a May Bush	2s 6d
May 1715	To ye Boys for a May Bush	2s 6d
May 1716	To ye boys for a May Bush	2s 6d
18 April 1721	Gave the bwayes on mayee for thare boosh	2s 6d
1726	Spent when we went a Posseshining	6s
24 April 1732	Gave for the maiboosh	2s 6d

Table 7: Payments to Bell Ringers in the Throckmorton Household Accounts, 1698-1745 (Source: Reading, Berkshire Record Office [BRO], D/EWe)

16 December 1698	To the Ringers upon my Litle master birth day	5s
26 December 1698	To the Ringers	2s 6d
7 December 1699	To the Ringers being my Little Master berth day	5s
26 December 1699	To the Ringers of Weston	2s 6d
29 December 1701	To the Ringers	2s 6d
17 August 1702	To the Ringers	5d
7 December 1702	To the Ringers	2s 6d
18 December 1702	To the Ringers	2s 6d
28 September 1703	To ye Ringers	5s
May 1704	To ye Ringers at Coughton	5s
29 September 1704	To the Ringers	2s 6d
7 December 1705	To ye Ringers by order	2s 6d
22 July 1706	To the Ringers	2s 6d
7 December 1706	To ye Ringers on Esq George's Birthday	2s 6d
26 December 1706	To ye Ringers	2s 6d
Imprimis October 1706	To the Ringers at Weston	5s
January 1707/08	To ye Ringers there Xmas box	5s
November 1708	To ye Ringers at Weston	2s 6d
9 December 1708	To ye Ringers on Mr Throckmorton's birth day	2s 6d
26 December 1708	To ye Ringers there Xmas box	2s 6d
26 September 1709	To ye Ringers when Mrs Throckmorton came home	5s
30 September 1709	To ye Ringers by order	2s 6d
15 October 1709	To ye Ringers at Buckland	5s
November 1709	To ye Ringers at Wollhampton	5s

Table 7 (continued)

November 1709	To ye Ringers at Weston	5s
24 December 1709	To ye Ringers there Xmas box	2s 6d
2 January 1710/11	To ye Ringers there Xmas box & p Esqr George Birthday	5s
10 November 1711	To ye Ringers p ordr	2s 6d
7 December 1711	To ye Ringers on Mr Throck- mortons Birthday	5s
26 December 1711	To ye Ringers there Xmas box	5s
9 September 1712	To Olney Ringers	10s
27 December 1712	To ye Ringers there Xmas box	5s
12 September 1713	To ye Ringers & Clarke at Som- erton	7s 6d
23 December 1713	To ye Ringers there Xmas box	5s
22 April 1714	To ye Ringers when my Mastr came from London	5s
22 April 1714	To ye Ringers p my Mastr ordr	5s
26 December 1715	To ye Ringers there Xmas box	5s
13 September 1716	To ye Ringers when Mr Throckmorton came home	5s
19 June 1717	To ye Ringers	5s
28 December 1719	To ye Ringgers	5s
21 May 1722	Gave the Ringars on my mastars burth day	5s
26 December 1733	To ye Ringers on St Stephen	5s
9 January 1733/34	To ye Ringers on Master Throckmortons birth day	5s
23 July 1734	To ye Ringers when my master came from Paris	7s 6d
21 August 1735	To ye Ringers on my masters birthday	7s 6d
26 December 1739	To Weston ringers on St Ste- phen's day	5s

Table 7 (continued)

6 January 1739/40	To ye ringers on Miss Ann's birth day ye 4th of Jany	10s 6d
10 April 1740	To ye Ringers on Mrs Throckmorton's birth day	5s
1 October 1740	To given to Weston Ringers by your Order	10s 6d
1 October 1740	Ditto to Oulney Ringers	10s 6d
28 December 1740	To ye ringers on St Stephen's day	5s
26 December 1741	To Weston ringers on St Stephen's day	5s
3 January 1742/43	To ye Ringers on St Stephen's day	5s

Christmastide was an important occasion for bell-ringing, but ringers also celebrated family birthdays: payments were made 'To the Ringers upon my Litle master birth day' on 16 December 1698; 'To ye Ringers on Esq George's Birthday' on 7 December 1706; 'To ye ringers on Miss Ann's birth day ye 4th of Jany' in 1739/40; and 'To ye Ringers on Mrs Throckmorton's birth day' on 10 April 1740.

Bells also celebrated homecomings, including payments 'To ye Ringers when Mrs Throckmorton came home' on 26 September 1709, 'To ye Ringers when my Mastr came from London' on 22nd April 1714, and 'To ye Ringers when my master came from Paris' on 23 July 1734. Bells also welcomed the Throckmorton entourage as it toured their Berkshire estates at Buckland and Woolhampton in October and November 1709, and as it returned to Weston Underwood later that month. Another payment 'To ye Ringers at Coughton' in May 1704 presumably celebrated a visit to the family's main seat.

The account books thus show that the Throckmorton family was fully engaged with the traditional customary economy at the start of the eighteenth century: morris dancing, mumming, wassailing, maying, music and bell-ringing were all patronized by an English gentry fami-

ly (Figure 2). By the mid-eighteenth century, however, perhaps accelerated by the death of Sir Robert, 3rd Baronet Throckmorton, in 1721, the situation had changed. Payments for morris dancers, mummers, wassailers, mayers and musicians had all largely ceased, with only payments to ringers continuing (albeit after a short break) into the 1730s and 1740s. (The considerable sum paid to three fiddlers from Northampton in June 1743 has already been noted, but this was for the specific occasion of a ball and must, therefore, be regarded as exceptional.)

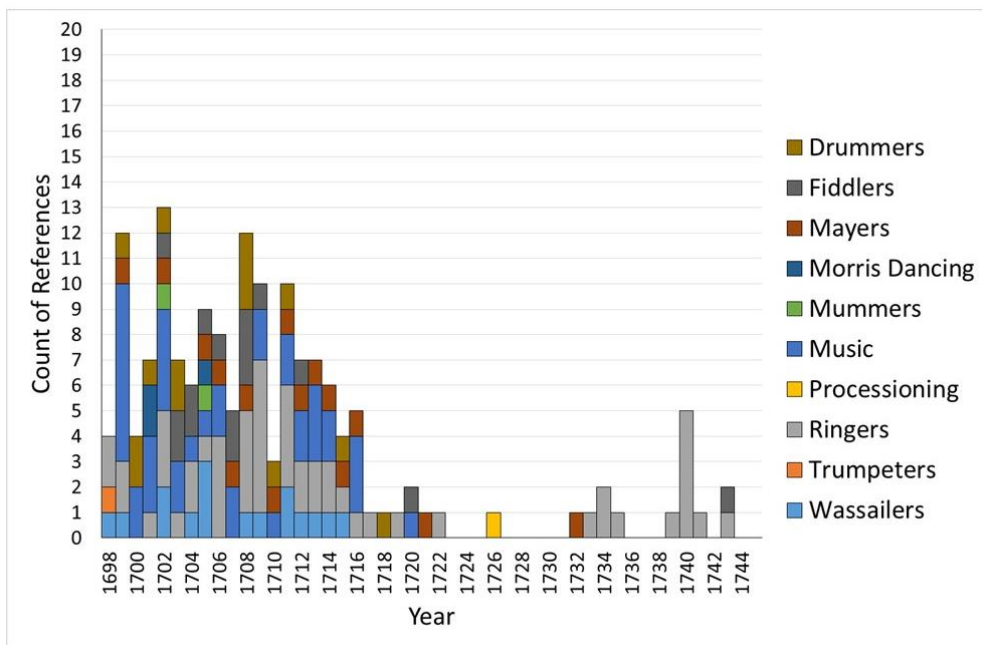


Figure 2: Incidences of payments to customary performers in the Throckmorton Household Accounts (Source: BRO, D/EWe)

This indicates a radical change in the relationship between parishioners and gentry. The increased separation between polite and plebeian cultures is revealed, not by the removal of elite patronage from customary activities altogether, but by its focus on bell-ringing. Whereas morris dancing, mumming, wassailing and music-making generally depended upon patrons and performers occupying the same physical space, this was not necessary with the ringing of

church bells. Rather than welcome the lower sorts into their own houses at festive times such as May Day and Christmas, the Throckmortons effectively paid for the parishioners to keep their distance – both actual and social – by restricting their customary activities to other locations such as the parish church. The gentry’s focus on bell ringing as a means of maintaining at least some form of customary relationship with the parishioners is further revealed by the amounts paid: the total budget spent in 1740, for example, compared very favourably to that provided earlier but, rather than being divided between several different customary groups, it was paid wholly to bell ringers (Figure 3).

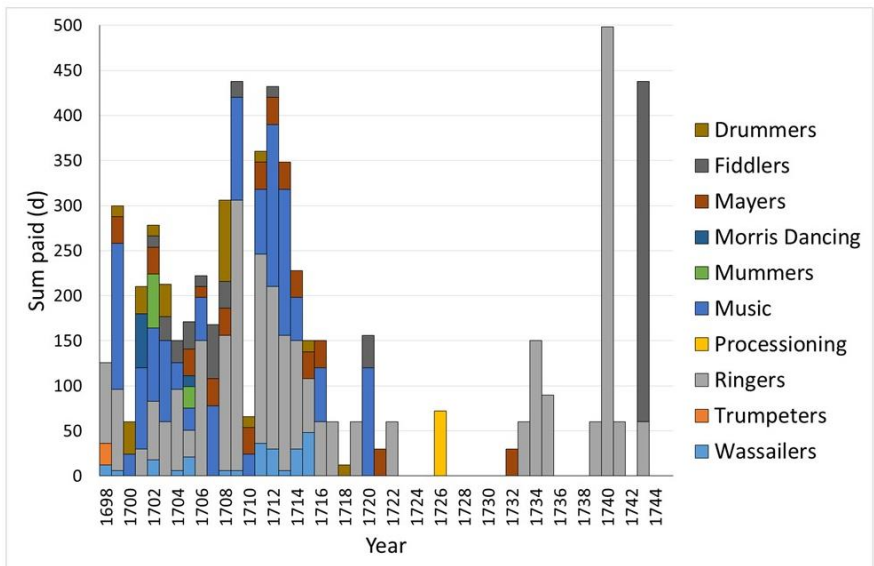


Figure 3: Sums of money paid to customary performers in the Throckmorton Household Accounts (Source: BRO, D/EWe)

Of course, the cessation of payments for many customary activities in the accounts does not necessarily mean that performances stopped altogether, only that they ceased to be patronized by the Throckmorton family: they too may have continued in other contexts away from the country house.²⁰ However, the withdrawal of a vital source of patronage must inevitably have affected the pursuance of these ac-

²⁰ Emma Griffin, for instance, has emphasised the importance of the village green as a venue where popular recreations might take place; Emma Griffin, *England's Revelry: A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes, 1660-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 197-199.

tivities. John Forrest suggests that, without the support of the gentry, few if any morris teams in the first half of the eighteenth century could have survived.²¹

What prompted this change? Studies of early modern England have demonstrated how living standards improved drastically at this time.²² Lorna Weatherill's study using probate inventories belonging mainly to the lesser gentry, professions, merchants, farmers and craftsmen showed that the range and quantity of their household goods increased substantially between 1675 and 1725.²³ Peter Earle's study of 'middling' Londoners similarly showed how their homes were transformed in the same period.²⁴ Matthew Johnson asserts that houses underwent a process of 'closure' in which they became more comfortable, more private and exclusive, and less open to the community and traditional outdoor culture.²⁵ Johnson's idea of 'closure' might be particularly relevant to the present study since Weston Underwood manor had been improved during this period by Robert, 3rd Baronet Throckmorton.²⁶

As the parishioners were increasingly kept away, the accounts from the 1740s show an increase in music-making within the home, often of the latest fashionable pieces, with less reliance on traditional performers brought in from outside (Table 8).²⁷ Christopher Marsh

²¹ John Forrest, *The History of Morris Dancing, 1458-1750* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1999), p. 332.

²² For example, Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclotting of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984); Mark Overton, Jane Whittle, Darron Dean, and Andrew Hann, *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600-1750* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).

²³ Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660-1760*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1996).

²⁴ Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730* (London: Methuen, 1989).

²⁵ Johnson relates these changes to wider issues such as enclosure of the landscape, class polarization and cultural centralization, the increase in literacy, and the break-up of the pre-industrial community. Matthew Johnson, *Housing Culture: Traditional Architecture in an English Landscape* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1993), p. x; Matthew Johnson, *An Archaeology of Capitalism* (Oxford: John Wiley, 1996), pp. 79-80; Matthew Johnson, 'Rethinking Houses, Rethinking Transitions: Of Vernacular Architecture, Ordinary People and Everyday Culture', in *The Age of Transition: The Archaeology of English Culture 1400-1600*, ed. By D. Gaimster and P. Stamper (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1997), pp. 150-152.

²⁶ 'Parishes: Weston Underwood.'

²⁷ cf. Johnson, *Archaeology of Capitalism*, pp. 169-170. A later account book for the Throckmorton family, held at the Warwickshire Record Office, and detailing expenses mostly at Bath be-

notes how the cultured amateur – 'a creature of the indoors' – did not mix with street music.²⁸

Table 8: Payments for 'Fashionable' Music in the Throckmorton Household Accounts, 1698-1745 (Source: Reading, Berkshire Record Office [BRO], D/EWe)

November 1709	To Mr Morriss Tuneing ye Harpsicall	10s
28 May 1740	To Handel's Organ Concertos	10s 6d
28 May 1740	To Geminrani's Solos	£1 5s
2 June 1740	To Handel's Overtures	£1 16s
2 June 1740	To Dtto's Grand Concertos	£1 11s 6d
2 June 1740	To Hasse's trios	9s
28 May 1740	To Porpora's Trios	15s
12 September 1740	To Handel's 36 Overtures for ye Harpsicord	18s
18 September 1740	To a new piece for ye German flute	5s 6d
20 September 1740	To a cover for ye fiddle case	1s 6d
6 November 1740	To Hasse's Solos	3s 6d
18 April 1741	To porge of a Harpsicord	1s
4 May 1741	To Mrs Chilcot for hire of a harpsicord	7s 6d
19 May 1741	To musick paper	3s

In effect, from the 1720s onwards, morris dancers and other customary performers were paid to stay away. In a contemporary letter, Lady Fermanagh of Claydon House (Buckinghamshire) complained of the 'abundance of rabble and the worst sort of company' that ar-

tween 1753 and 1756, continues this pattern, with no additional payments to customary activities. Small account book entitled: 'Great Accounts ...from... 1753 to ... 1756 ...', containing household accounts, mostly at Bath, of Sir Robert Throckmorton, later entered in a 'Great Account Book', Warwick, Warwickshire Record Office (WRO), CR 1998/LCB/41.

²⁸ Marsh, *Music and Society*, p. 84.

rived at Whitsuntide and stated that she ‘can’t help giving the Morris money when they come, for they tell me everybody doing it is the best way to send them going’.²⁹

Interest in the kinds of customary patronage that had once been widespread was waning. John Forrest has argued that, by the eighteenth century, morris performances were shifting from the incorporative to the transactional due to a distancing in the relationship between farmers and workers as agriculture became more commercialized.³⁰ Customary performers effectively became wage labourers, hiring out their services to the lord of the manor as required, and remunerated by the steward for their ‘work’ according to their worth. Customary activities became inter-changeable. Whereas villagers were once paid to morris dance in the homes of the gentry, now they were paid to stay away, ringing bells at the parish church. Their ‘labour’ done, parishioners took their ‘wages’ to spend elsewhere (perhaps to the village pub), rather than drinking with the squire.³¹

Emma Griffin has emphasised how ‘all popular recreations were dependent upon the consent of those in the local community who exercised control over the spaces in which they were performed, and thus how vulnerable they were to any shifts in opinion regarding the value of popular recreation that they might have’.³² Popular culture was not simply the preserve of the lower sorts: this group alone did not have the power to determine all elements of the form, location, and timing of their recreations. Popular culture was the product of on-going negotiations between different sections of society, negotiations which were sometimes harmonious, sometimes acrimonious, always complex.³³

Such developments have been seen as one-sided, initiated by the gentry at the expense of the lower sorts. Villagers themselves, how-

²⁹ Cited in John Cutting, *History and the Morris Dance: A Look at Morris Dancing from its Earliest Days until 1850* (Alton: Dance Books Ltd, 2005), p. 7. See also Michael Heaney, ‘Morris Dancers in the Political and Civic Process’, in this volume.

³⁰ Forrest, *History of Morris Dancing*, pp. 348-349; Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, p. 163.

³¹ Forrest, *History of Morris Dancing*, pp. 349-350.

³² Griffin, *England’s Revelry*, p. 20.

³³ Griffin, *England’s Revelry*, pp. 166, 254.

ever, may not have shared these feelings, for the commutation of payment in kind for payment in cash provoked few recorded disturbances.³⁴ Morris dancers in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were not necessarily the labouring poor that they were to become later. At Salisbury in Wiltshire up to 1800, the Wyndham (then Arundell) family included payments to morris dancers (as well as to drummers, trumpeters and to the bell ringers at St Thomas's church) amongst their Christmas boxes for local tradesmen rather than amongst those to the poor, who were listed on a separate schedule.³⁵ At Brightwalton in Berkshire too, the morris dancers came from the 'middling' sort – yeomen, tradesmen and craftsmen – important local families, holders of public office and often of long-standing in their parishes. They saw themselves as the natural representatives of their home community, and colluded with the gentry in the enclosure of the parish. They were not overly concerned with the preservation of traditional culture when they thought they themselves might profit.³⁶

Furthermore, the gentry did not withdraw their support altogether but continued to patronize the parishioners via bell ringing. 'News of early modern politics', suggests Christopher Marsh, 'flew through the air on sonic waves generated by church bells'.³⁷ Ringing at this time was not necessarily associated with religion – other than that the parish church merely provided the bell tower.³⁸ Later Tudor and Stuart monarchs had instituted a new cycle of celebrations and bell ringers were also paid by the churchwardens to commemorate royal birthdays, anniversaries of coronations, military victories, royal marriages, and so forth.³⁹ Together with the round of aristocratic birth-

³⁴ Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 345.

³⁵ Arundell of Wardour Castle – List of Christmas gifts to the poor, to servants and prisoners by the Wyndham then Arundell family at Salisbury, Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon Archives, 2667/23/5, including payments to Morris dancers, 1744-1769, 1795-1797.

³⁶ Wooders, "With Snail Shells instead of Bells", pp. 563-569.

³⁷ Marsh, *Music and Society*, pp. 481-482.

³⁸ John Harrison, *Bells and Bellringing* (Oxford: Shire, 2016), pp. 35-36.

³⁹ Forrest, *History of Morris Dancing*, p. 326; Griffin, *England's Revelry*, pp. 37-39; Bushaway, *By Rite*, p. 50; Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 259-260; David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National*

days and home-comings, ringing may thus have afforded a more consistent flow of income than seasonal morris dance performances in any case.

Morris dancing too might be used to celebrate local politics.⁴⁰ It was not uncommon during the eighteenth century for sets of morris dancers to be hired to provide spectacle and entertainment during political rallies. In 1722, during a visit to Abingdon by its MP, 'the Morrice-Dancers and several young Maids dress'd in White with Garlands of Flowers, met them at the Foot of the Bridge, and went before them thro' the Town, to the House of Clement Sexton, Esq; the late Mayor; all the Bells in the Town ringing; where all the Company were handsomely and splendidly entertain'd at Dinner'.⁴¹ In 1740/41 the Duke of Buckingham paid two morris teams to perform in several local villages in connection with his political campaign. In 1774 another side was paid to entertain on one candidate's behalf during the election at Marlow, while another was sponsored by the Duke of Buckingham to dance in a procession from Wootton Underwood to Aylesbury during the same election year.⁴² Morris dancers too honoured a royal visit to Stowe House, Buckinghamshire, in 1805, and celebrated the coming of age of successive eldest sons in 1797, 1818 and 1844.⁴³

The art of change ringing also grew from such local and national celebrations. Bell ringers developed patterns and disciplined combinations.⁴⁴ Like morris dancing, this required teamwork as well as physical effort. By the seventeenth century, recreational ringing was already loud enough for one German visitor to note that the English were 'vastly fond of great noises that fill the air, such as firing of cannon, drums, and the ringing of bells, so that in London it is common for a number of them that have got a glass in their heads to go up in-

Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabeth and Stuart England (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1989).

⁴⁰ Michael Heaney, 'Morris Dancers in the Political and Civic Process', in this volume.

⁴¹ Abingdon, Oct. 11', *Daily Post*, 13 October 1722, p.1; see also Forrest, *History of Morris Dancing*, pp. 328-330.

⁴² Chandler, *Morris Dancing in the English South Midlands*, p. 46.

⁴³ Chandler, "Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles", p. 200.

⁴⁴ Harrison, *Bells and Bellringing*, pp. 35-36; Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, p. 70.

to some belfry, and ring the bells for hours together, for the sake of exercise'.⁴⁵

'The people are so fond of this amusement', wrote another observer, 'that they form societies amongst themselves for carrying it out'.⁴⁶ Ringers formed a tight-knit group and, like morris dancers, were an important customary presence in the local community. Indeed, bell ringing must have satisfied many of the same personal motivations for the performers as other customary activities.⁴⁷ Christopher Marsh suggests ringers enjoyed 'a sense of fellowship that was warm, masculine and competitive'.⁴⁸ Ringers worked together, but they also pulled against each other.⁴⁹ Local youths regularly competed over who could ring the longest or the loudest, and often placed bets upon the outcome. Whilst there must inevitably have been occasional confrontations, internal tensions within the group were probably 'dissolved in alcohol', as they adjourned from the belfry to the alehouse.⁵⁰

Ringling societies often had elaborate codes of conduct. Those at Tong in Shropshire dating from 1694, stated: ⁵¹

*If that to Ring you doe come here,
you must Ring well with hand and eare.
keep stroak of time and goe not out,
or else you forfeit out of doubt.
Our law is so concluded here;
for every fault a jugg of beer,
if that you Ring with Spurr or Hat,
a jugg of beer must pay for that.
If that you take a Rope in hand;
these forfeits you must not withstand,*

⁴⁵ Christopher Marsh, "'At it ding dong": Recreation and Religion in the English Belfry, 1580-1640', in *Worship and the Parish Church in Early Modern Britain*, ed. by Natalie Mears and Alec Ryrie (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 155; Marsh, *Music and Society*, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, p. 44.

⁴⁷ Bushaway, *By Rite* pp. 48-57.

⁴⁸ Marsh, *Music and Society*, p. 491-93.

⁴⁹ Harrison, *Bells and Bellringing*, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁰ Marsh, *Music and Society*, p. 493.

⁵¹ Harrison, *Bells and Bellringing*, p. 27.

*or if that you a Bell overthrow,
 it must cost Sixpence ere you goe.
 If in this place you sweare or curse;
 Six pence to pay pull out your purse:
 come pay the Clerk it is his fee;
 for one that swears shall not goe free.
 These Laws are old, and are not new;
 therefore the Clerk must have his due.
 George Harison*

Similar rules applied to novice morris dancers, such as those at Bicester Kings End in 1790 where dancers were subject to fines of 5 shillings should they ‘flinch from their proposed plases if the[y] are able to sarve them’.⁵² There may have been beer and banter aplenty but etiquette still had to be observed.⁵³

Ringng contests were sponsored by local innkeepers.⁵⁴ On 7 August 1744, the *Gloucester Journal* carried a notice that six hats were to be rung for at Melksham, following dinner at the White Hart:⁵⁵

*This is to give Notice to all Gentlemen RINGERS, THAT there
 are to be Rung for, on the Eighth of October next, at
 Melksham in the County of Wilts, Six HATS, with Silver But-
 tons and Loops, Value 10s. 6d. each Hat: Every Sett to ring a
 Peal of half an Hour. The Bells shall be high enough to set;
 and the Preference in Performance determin’d by three skill-
 ful Men of that Profession, their Names unknown. Any Sett is
 welcome to try the Bells on any Day they think proper; and
 all the Sets that ring, are to dine at the White-Hart in
 Melksham aforesaid.*

The same publication gave notice of a morris dance competition at the Swan in Coln St Aldwyn near Fairford in Gloucestershire just a few weeks earlier on 1 May 1744: ‘Likewise, on the Morrow, there

⁵² Chandler, “Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles”, p. 122.

⁵³ Marsh, *Music and Society*, p. 494.

⁵⁴ Harrison, *Bells and Bellringing*, pp. 30-31.

⁵⁵ Cited in Cyril Wratten, *Order and Disorder in the Eighteenth Century: Newspaper Extracts about Church Bells and Bellringing* (The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, 2010), p. 70.

will be six exceeding good KNOTS to be Morrice-danc'd for, Free Gift, and Six Pairs of Gloves to be Bowl'd for at Nine-Pins'.⁵⁶ A local newspaper notice for a fair at Towcester, Northamptonshire, in 1766 further drew attention to contests for bell ringing, morris dancing, and a match at singlesticks.⁵⁷

Like morris dancers who travelled to London following the hay harvest, ringers too might journey from home. In June 1770 'the Sherwood Company of Change-Ringers in Nottingham (who generally go to spend two or three Holidays in the Country at Whitsuntide) went this Year to amuse themselves upon the melodious Peal of eight Bells at Burton-upon-Trent, in Staffordshire, but were greatly disappointed in finding the Bells in very bad Order'.⁵⁸

Ringng tours and competitions provided opportunities to impress the opposite sex. In 1630 at Staunton (Nottinghamshire), a group of young women crowded into the belfry to watch the young men in action. Unfortunately, on this occasion one of the women became tangled in a bell-rope and was seriously hurt.⁵⁹

Fuelled by a potent mixture of testosterone and alcohol, bell-ringing could prove addictive and ringers occasionally found it difficult to stop.⁶⁰ In his youth, John Bunyan had found 'much delight' in ringing but by the 1640s he considered it vanity. Bunyan had married, suggesting that he perceived bell-ringing as a young man's pastime, inappropriate for a more sober and settled individual. Bunyan struggled to adhere to his decision, however: in the months that followed, he often went to the belfry to watch the young men ringing. His yearning endured until he imagined the bells and steeple crashing down upon him as a punishment for his vain and worldly desires.⁶¹

Bell-ringing had nonetheless once been considered an acceptable recreation for gentlemen.⁶² *The School of Recreation, or the Gentleman's Tutor: to those most ingenious exercises of hunting, racing,*

⁵⁶ Cited in Chandler, *Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles*, p. 89.

⁵⁷ Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, p. 24.

⁵⁸ Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, p. 44.

⁵⁹ Marsh, "At it ding dong", pp. 159-160; Marsh, *Music and Society*, pp. 488-489.

⁶⁰ Marsh, *Music and Society*, p. 486.

⁶¹ Marsh, "At it ding dong", pp. 156-159; Marsh, *Music and Society*, p. 486.

⁶² Marsh, *Music and Society*, p. 484; Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, p. 70.

hawking, riding, cock-fighting, fowling, fishing, shooting, bowling, tennis, ringing and billiards, published in 1684, describes ringing as: 'highly esteemed, for its excellent Harmony of Musick it affords the ear, for its Mathematical Invention delighting the Mind, and for the Violence of its Exercise bringing Health to the Body, causing it to transpire plentifully, and by Sweats dissipate and expel those Fuliginous thick Vapours, which Idleness, Effeminacy, and Delicacy subject men to'.⁶³

An earlier Throckmorton account book held at the Warwickshire Record Office reveals that throughout his teenage years during the 1650s Sir Francis, 2nd Baronet Throckmorton, regularly paid the clerk a few pennies for access to ring the bells.⁶⁴ This is reminiscent of the cavaliers carousing with morris dancers as social equals at Witney Wakes in May 1646.⁶⁵ Gentlemen might be distinguished from commoners, but ringing and dancing suggested the existence of certain bonds that tied them together: they enabled each group to escape, at least temporarily, into the world of the other.⁶⁶

To conclude, morris dancing and bell-ringing constituted just two of several different customary activities patronized by the gentry at the turn of the eighteenth century. Morris dancing and ringing were performed by the same sorts of people and fulfilled the same motivations, and might in fact be regarded as interchangeable. They both played their part in local and national celebrations, and provided a sense of belonging, status and reward for the performers.⁶⁷ Aristocratic participation was not unknown, so customary performers re-

⁶³ Harrison, *Bells and Bellringing*, pp. 24-25.

⁶⁴ E.A.B. Barnard, *A Seventeenth Century Country Gentleman (Sir Francis Throckmorton, 1640-80)* (Cambridge: W. Heffer, 1944), p. 21; Account book inscribed 'James Smith', containing accounts of James Smith for money received from Thomas Sheldon and disbursed in personal expenses for Sir Francis Throckmorton, his master, part of the time at Cambridge, Warwick, Warwickshire Record Office (WRO CR 1998/LCB/39); Account book of the receipts and disbursements of Francis Reeve for Sir Francis Throckmorton, Baronet, relating to Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Buckinghamshire. Disbursements are mainly on the estate, but include some household and personal expenses of his master. [tall, narrow folio, 2 gatherings detached] (WRO CR 1998/LCB/26).

⁶⁵ Forrest, *History of Morris Dancing*, pp. 349-350.

⁶⁶ Marsh, *Music and Society*, pp. 58, 389.

⁶⁷ Chandler, "Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles", pp. 3, 95, 195, 204; Marsh, *Music and Society*, p. 349; Griffin, *England's Revelry*, p. 27.

garded themselves as intermediaries between the country house and the wider community.

As society became more commercialized and houses more private, the later Throckmorton accounts show increased separation between polite and plebeian culture as the family patronized activities that might only be performed at a distance. In this context, morris dancers switched to bell-ringing: the performers would have been paid regardless, whilst the apparently addictive nature of ringing no doubt provided some compensation for the withdrawal of opportunities to engage in other customary practices.

Of course, at this stage these conclusions must remain speculative based, as they are, upon a very limited dataset, and it is entirely possible that the limited evidence presented here has been stretched too far. But they do at least provide a working hypothesis that might be tested through further research.⁶⁸ No doubt a far more nuanced picture will emerge in due course. Our conclusions here do not explain, for instance, why morris continued in some areas – there were still a number of gentlemen, such as the Cartwrights at Aynho, the Duttons at Sherborne and the Temple/Grenvilles at Stowe, who, for various reasons, continued to support traditional practices into the later eighteenth century and beyond⁶⁹ – but they may help to explain what happened in the areas where morris vanished between 1650 and 1750. John Forrest has previously highlighted the shift in locations of morris performance from East Anglia to the south Midlands following the English Civil War.⁷⁰ Morris dancers may not have disappeared from these areas altogether; they may simply have rung different kinds of bells.

⁶⁸ The author's research is currently continuing.

⁶⁹ Forrest, *History of Morris Dancing*, pp. 328-329; Chandler, "Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles", p. 47; Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, pp. 158-166; Account Book labelled 'Dayly Receipts and Payments ... beginning ao 1708', Gloucester: Gloucestershire Archives (GA), Dutton Family Papers, D/678/148b; Account Book labelled 'Book of what I laid out for James Dutton Esq begun the 23 Octbr 1775', GA, D/678/FAM/96d. Account Book kept for Thomas Cartwright by Joshua Burton, October 1691-1722, Northampton: Northamptonshire Archives (NA), Cartwright Papers, ML 1306; Account Book bearing the legend on the cover: 'Josh Burton. Begun July 1722 ended [illegible word] 1735, NA, ML 1307.

⁷⁰ Forrest, *History of Morris Dancing*, pp. 35-46.