

MORRIS DANCES IN ENGLAND

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England, as well as many other countries, owes much to the work of a gentleman called Mr. Cecil Sharp. Cecil Sharp was very interested in collecting English Folk Songs and tunes, and whilst staying at Stanfield Cottage, Headington Quarry, near Oxford, in 1899 on Boxing Day morning, he was looking through the window and saw a company of men, dressed in white, crossing the snow-covered lawn. These turned out to be the Headington Quarry Morris Dancers. They were dancing at this time of the year because they were hard up and out of work because the snow had snowed them in for many weeks, and they had no jobs to go to. These men were stonemasons and worked in the local stone quarries. They told Cecil Sharp afterwards that the season they should be dancing was in the Spring, basically, Whitsun, but as they were short of money, they decided they would come out and see if they could earn a copper or two. So they came to Stanfield Cottage, where they danced the following dances: the first tune he heard was Laudnum Bunches, then he saw Bean Setting, Constant Billy, Blue Eyed Stranger and Rigs of Marlow.

After they had finished dancing, Sharp called over their musician, who turned out to be a Mr. William Kimber. William Kimber the younger was the concertina player for the team at this time. Sharp questioned him very closely and took down many details on what he was told, also the other six dances. Kimber's father was also a dancer and Morris musician, and it was from him that the young William had learnt the tunes and his dancing. Sharp noted the tunes from young William and then played them on the piano, much to William's amazement. William had never heard such a thing, and he found it quite amazing that somebody could take down the notes of the tune and play it back almost immediately. As they were going, Sharp said to young William "We may meet again some time", and this they did, many times afterwards, Kimber becoming one of Sharp's most knowledgeable informants on the Morris dance. Also from young William Sharp collected some country dance tunes and dances as well. Sharp described this as the turning point of his life.

It has often been said that through this chance meeting, England was very lucky, because at this time there were very few Morris sides dancing as complete sides in England. There were a few other sides, Bampton-in-the-Bush, Chipping Camden, and Abingdon, from all of which Sharp noted their dances and tunes on different occasions, and from different types of dances.

In 1911 Cecil Sharp founded the English Folk Dance Society with the help of Helen and Maud Karpeles. The English Folk Song Society was founded in 1898, the first society of its kind in the world. In 1932 the English Folk Song Society and the English Folk Dance Society amalgamated and became the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

William Kimber was 27 years of age when Sharp first met him. He was born on 8th September 1872, and he died in his 90th year, 62 years, to the day, on Boxing Day morning in 1961, after his first meeting with Cecil Sharp. During all this time he had kept up a very close friendship with Cecil Sharp and helped him with the notations and stance and other information on the Morris dancing.

By 1914 Sharp had published a dozen books covering over 100 Morris dances and 25 sword. Many of these dances would have been lost if it had not been for Cecil Sharp, because as he met his informants and went on to question them about the Morris, because the Morris was in decline, Sharp learnt more of the Morris and gave a rebirth to it in many ways, because many of the dancers that Sharp spoke to then went on to continue their dancing, or reform their side.

Sharp collected many other dances from different parts of the country. The first “traditions”, as they later became called, were the Cotswold Morris dances — these were the ones he got from Kimber, and the afore-mentioned sides, Headington Quarry, Bampton-in-the-Bush, Chipping Camden and Abingdon. These teams, like many others, take their names from the village where they come from. Other teams from which Sharp collected information were Fieldtown, Longborough, Bledington, Bucknell, Sherborne, Ilmington Eynsham and Brackley, to name but a few.

One of our earliest records of a team that still dances Morris dancing is of Abingdon. The report comes from Richmond in 1783: “Abingdon carry around with them a large set of horns on a pole with the date 1700 on it”. Historians tell us that these horns were probably older and so you know that Abingdon Morris Side has been in existence for many years.

The Ilmington Morris dancers we first have information on mostly come from a Mr. George Arthur, who came to Ilmington in 1804. We don’t know where he came from, or where he learnt his dancing. He was a master mason, the same as William Kimber, and he raised a side, all of whom were stonemasons working under him. Arthur was foreman and pipe and tabor player, and ran the side from 1804 till he retired sometime in the 1840s. His son Tom Arthur took over the side till it disbanded in 1854.

1854 was also the time the Cotswold Games came to an end, held on Drovers Hill near Weston-sub-Edge. The Games and the Morris went hand in hand, as it used to in many places.

Ilmington had a short revival from 1865-1867 with Joseph Johnson, who had been a Morris dancer under Tom Arthur. Joseph Johnson had come into the

side by marrying one of the Arthur family daughters, and had become the foreman. Michael Johnson, Joseph's son, joined the Morris at this time, and it was from him that Cecil Sharp got a lot of the Ilmington information. In 1887 the side re-formed, with only a few of the original dancers, as most of the others had died. Some new men came into the side, one of whom was George Arthur's grandson. At this time the dancers changed from the Ilmington Tradition that Cecil Sharp had first noted from the Johnsons, as Ilmington used to have "galleys" but when Sharp collected more information from Michael Johnson, they had not. Michael Johnson became foreman. Sam Bennett, who had become a well-known dancer and informant on the dance, was in the side, but it was uncertain how, or just when, he came into it. Sam Bennett learnt the tunes from James Arthur, who had become the pipe and tabor player. It seems that Michael Johnson did not get on well with Sam Bennett. Bennett was a far too different kind of man from him. Bennett was the biggest small farmer in the district and owned several orchards, and employed a large number of the local population at harvest and fruit-picking time. He was also the village carrier for a time in the 1920s and he even ran a small bus fleet. He was therefore considered a powerful man in Ilmington and because of this he got his way with the Morris. So Michael Johnson and the older dancers withdrew, and Mr. Bennett started a boy's side. Though Sam Bennett had learnt from the older men, it is said that some changes did creep in. He was not the best man to learn from, nothing would do but the men must learn his way, and this in the tradition accounts for the variations in the Ilmington style. Ilmington has two dances, however, which are said to be very old: "Maid of the Mill" or the "Willow Tree", variations of the same dance. The dances are performed with linked handkerchieves. The dancers link handkerchieves in pairs. Each pair knot together two handkerchieves folded diagonally. Throughout the dance, the handkerchieves should be held taut at head height.

Many folklorists say that the sword dances of England are the oldest, and other handkerchief dances prove it, as the dances have the same figures as are found in the sword dances and the dancers had lost the swords and how to make the lock and so did the best they could remember with handkerchieves. Myself, I am not sure about this, as the sword dances we have are very old, like some of our Morris, and have never suffered a break in their tradition long enough for men to forget the technique of making the "Lock" and there would always have been someone available to make sure men knew how to link the swords together.

Our informant for the Ilmington dances was a Mr. Taylor, and most of the information he gave to collectors was in 1912. Taylor also knew some Bledington and Longborough dances. When Taylor was 74 he walked 14 miles to Ilmington and danced jigs and Morris for 3 hours and said he could have danced all night. He then walked his 14 miles home. In 1929 Taylor was still very sprightly. He was about 94 years old, very deaf and with an injured eye, but he could still dance, and bragged about the number of jigs and dances he knew. His memory was best on jigs, and he taught the travelling Morris men: the travelling Morris men were a set of Morris dancers put together by Cecil Sharp who went round diffe-

rent parts of the Cotswolds dancing the dances that Sharp had taught them from his collections, to see if they could find other Morris dancers and collect more dances and to make sure they were doing the dances correctly. To the travelling Morris men Taylor taught two set dances, Highland Mary and Swaggering Boney, despite all attempts to stop him. He danced parts of 3 jigs (Jockey to the Fair, Princess Royal and Highland Mary). He had danced with the Oddington Morris men for 22 years. Oddington last danced as a side in 1888. Charles Taylor died on 31st December 1929, aged 93 or 94.

Bampton-in-the-Bush, near Witney in Oxfordshire, is a living tradition of Morris. Sharp published accounts of what William Junkey Wells had taught him on 24th August 1909 before he had seen Bampton dance as a side. Sharp first saw Bampton dance as a side in 1912. There were men in the side with many years of dancing behind them, and this has mostly been the case even up to the present time. 8 or 10 years of age is not considered too young to start dancing. Before World War I there were regular supervised practices in which the style, stance and straightness of bearing (chest out, head up, chin in) were taught. Cecil Sharp tried to instill this into the revival Morris after the War, but Bampton took up a crouching stance, more earthy or animal. However, the dances do not change very much, nor the steps nor the movements. Today there are three sides dancing in Bampton. Wells said to Sharp that the dances used to be played much slower on the whistle and dub which is sometimes referred to as the pipe and tabor. It was very beautiful and you could grasp every movement and step. Wells himself played the fiddle. In Bampton, like many other sides, once the fiddle came in and took over from the pipe and tabor, many of the older men found it very difficult to dance and said that the dances were changing so much that they refused to dance, only a few of them remaining to teach the younger sides. Later still the accordeon came in, and before that the concertina, all of which are played in different sides to this day.

Bampton's dancing is supposed to be very light. It was said that a dancer would dance so light that an old woman could place her hand under his feet whilst he was dancing and not be hurt.

Cecil Sharp died on Midsummer's Eve 1924. In 1930 the English Folk Dance and Song Society purchased some land in London and had a building built in honour of Cecil Sharp. This is known as Cecil Sharp House, and it is in this building that many of the notes and collections that Sharp made on dances and songs, as well as the Morris, are housed. Other collectors too have their work stored there. You will also find records, books, swords, and all other things connected with Morris dancing country dancing and folk song, many of which can be purchased, and you can hear recordings of some of the old collections and see notes.

After Cecil Sharp died, Douglas Kennedy took over in Sharp's place. Kennedy was in the team that Sharp had formed for Morris men as well as country dancing and Douglas Kennedy in his researches puts the Morris as far back as neolithic times in England.

In the past the Morris men in the Cotswolds usually wore white trousers and white shirts, with straw hats with ribbons attached and decorated with wild flowers. Sometimes, if they couldn't get wild flowers, they put different coloured rosettes on their hats in place of the flowers. In later times, at the time Cecil Sharp started to collect dances, lots of the sides that he saw had gone over to wearing top hats with rosettes on, sometimes putting the wild flowers on to those. On their feet they usually wore black shoes, or black boots, and again, about the time Sharp saw some of the dancing, white boots had become fashion, and so some of the sides wore white boots.

Today, however, many of the revivalist sides, which dance the Cotswold Morris, have gone over to wearing black breeches and white stockings, or coloured socks and they wear different types of baldrics. These are not braces, but crossed bands with rosettes on them, or a badge depicting where their club comes from — the local coat of arms in many cases, or sometimes the pub sign from where they meet. These same men may even wear an over garment, a jacket or tabard with emblems or badges attached. Also the ribbons have become shorter on the hats, and in place of wild flowers (which in England are in a decline) many men wear artificial flowers, either plastic or made with silk.

The Cotswold dances, as in the past, usually had six dancers and a Fool as well as their musicians. Some had different types of animals, usually hobby horses, and as well as the Fool they had a Man/Woman. They called the leader of the side the Foreman or the Squire, and the man that collects all the money and takes all the notes and sends out information, like a general secretary, is referred to as the Bagman, and these two titles have come from the *old* types of Morris dancers and from sides that used these names in the past.

In the past, too, the Fool was sometimes dressed as a clown, and he was sometimes a Squire or Foreman, and he had to be the best dancer. The Fool also used to carry a broom, or if it wasn't him, the Man/Woman would carry a broom and this was said by many people to sweep away the stones from where the men were dancing in roadways and farm ways and also to sweep away the evil and to keep back the crowd so that the men could come and perform. In the past as well, the extra characters did not take too much part in the dance because the Dance was the main thing and the characters were there to help collect money, which they hoped the spectators would give. For this purpose the hat was often passed around, and with this they sometimes carried a long sword with a cake impaled on it, and this was then sold to the crowd for small sums of money. This was said to be very lucky. It was often stated that if young girls purchased a piece of this lucky cake and put it under their pillows, they would dream of the man they were going to marry, and of their future life. Many people also kept these pieces of cake as lucky charms, because in the past the Morris was considered to be a thing of good luck, and the men today do say that when they come they bring good luck with them, and that they would have good weather.

The main place in England for the Sword Dance is Yorkshire. Sword Dances also feature characters along with the dancers, namely the Fool and the Man/Woman, who is sometimes Known as the Betsy. There are usually six dancers although there can be up to 8 dancers for some parts of the dance, but in some cases there are 8 dancers throughout. The swords are either long metal swords, up to 3 ft. in length, with a rigid handle on one end. These are not sharp. In some traditions they have a small hole cut in the tip of the blade, through which ribbons are threaded, and when they do their processional dances from one part of the town or village to the next, they carry these swords with the ribbons upon them. In some cases they leave the ribbons attached, and the men hold the ribbons throughout the dance, while taking their own handle in the other hand, hence this is called a hilt and point ring — each man is linked to the next man by holding his own sword in his right hand and his neighbour's in the left. There is one tradition, however, where this is done the opposite way around — and this is at Flamborough Head.— where the men hold their own swords in their left hand.

Most of the sword dances again come from areas where there are quarries. One or two, however, are on the coast, and were danced by the fishermen, wearing their jerseys or a fisherman's type of smock. In some of these cases they use long wooden swords and these swords are said to represent the implements used in mending the nets, for pushing the weaves through the different strings to repair them. In the past many of these sides, too, wore white trousers and black boots and sometimes they wore baldrics, while at other times they had different rosettes pinned to them, except for the dancers from the coast who might wear fisherman's jerseys or smocks. However, at Hansworth, near Sheffield, this team has been in existence for many years, and they say that their dance does not really come from Hansworth but from the next village along, Woodhouse. These men are usually 8 in number for their dance, and they wear a military type of costume, black with white criss-cross braid over it, with black trousers, and they wear long black gaiters with black boots, and on their heads they wear a red skull cap.

In Grenoside they wear long white trousers with clogs on their feet. These are wooden soled shoes, not like the Dutch clogs, but with leather uppers and usually lace-up ties to keep them on. Their jackets are a variety of colours, basically red and green, and their Captain wears a foxes head on his head as his hat, which, when he gets decapitated at the end of the dance, is knocked off. This is one of the dances where the life and resurrection theme comes into it. In most of the dances somebody is supposed to be killed at the end of the dance, by having the swords placed over his head when they have been locked together, or linked in the shape that is often referred to as a "nut", though basically in long sword dancing they are referred to as the "Lock". The English Folk Dance and Song Society has taken this as its emblem, the six locked swords being its badge. This lock was then placed over the dancer's or a spectator's head towards the end of the dance and when the swords were drawn, he was supposed to have been killed, falling to the ground.

There used to be plays based on these long sword dances, which we call Mummings Plays, or Dance Plays. These were long stories with various characters, but basically the meaning was that they were killing off the Winter ready for the rebirth of the Spring. I expect you will hear more about this from Mrs. Armstrong in her lectures to do with folk lore, so I will not say much about it at this time.

In one or two of these dances, when the swords are locked together, they are passed from man to man, over his head, and this is said to be the sun in the heavens. Some people maintain this is an old form of sun worship.

Long sword dances used to be performed at Christmas time, and during the first two or three weeks of the New Year, and some of the sword dancers were known as Plough Stots, because they used to take a plough with them as they went from place to place to do their dance. The main day for this was Plough Monday — that is, the first Monday after Twelfth Day. They would drape the plough with greenery and ribbons. It was said that if people would not give generously to them when they performed their dance, they would drive their plough through their garden, or across their footpath. The dancers were usually accompanied by quite a company of extra characters in the way of Toms and Betties and Men/Women; this was to help with the collecting.

As well as the dances already mentioned from Hansworth, Grenoside and Flamborough Head, there are dances from Flamborough, North Skelton, Haxby, Askham Richard, Ampleforth, Sleights and Eskdale, to name but a few. The Long-sword dance we hope to show you whilst we are in your country comes from Sleights, this is a small agricultural village in the North Riding of Yorkshire, about three miles inland from Whitby. I have chosen this dance as it has 5 figures, with a stop between each figure, this is perhaps not much more than a slight pause, and each figure ends with the lock being tied in a different way. This dance was chosen because it is the only dance known to exist that shows the locked formed in so many different ways. Most of the other dances only have the lock tied once or twice, but the different types of locks which come into this Sleights Dance also come into other types of long-sword dances, but they are not all shown in the same dance.

Sleights Sword Dance, like many of the long sword dances, has a song to accompany it. The dancers usually come on, sing the verses of the song and then commence their dancing. In the past, men that did the Morris and the long sword usually only stuck to their own traditions, and in the case of the sword dancers, they only knew the one sword dance, so to swell out the dancing they used to sing a few verses of one of the popular songs of the time, or some of the old folk tunes, between the figures of the sword dance, though to the men who sung them they were not “folk” tunes, just old songs which they had learnt from their fathers and their grandfathers before them.

Most of the long sword dances in England have lost their plays and some have lost their songs as well. We are very pleased that some of the long plays are still

in existence and one or two of the songs have survived as well. Today, however, when the men come out to perform the dances, they are rather shy, or self-conscious and reluctant to sing the songs, and also the public would rather watch the dances, and call out in so many words that they should “get on with it”, rather than hear the song or see the play first. In some cases, when the person has been “killed” in the dance, the public are not even interested in the “coming back to life again” — unless, of course, they happen to be folklorists, or more knowledgeable on these matters. Hence, unfortunately, many men omit these very essential parts from their dance.

Another type of dance, coming from a different place, in England is the short sword dance, or, better known as the rapper sword dance. The rapper is an implement about 20 inches long, with a swivel handle at one end and a fixed handle at the other. There has been much research into this type of dancing, and into the implement. Many people would say that it is like the old type of implement used by farriers and grooms to scrape the sweat from the horses, which could be drawn along. Others would say it was like a shaping knife used by carpenters in boat building or in shaping mine props, since this dance is usually associated with coal miners. It is true that most of the rapper sword dances we know do come from coal mining areas.

The rapper sword dance team usually comprise an odd number of dancers, 5, 7, or 9, and again they have accompanying them a Fool or a Man/Woman, or a Betsy and a Tommy. The names vary in different parts, and sometimes in different eras when you see the same side out. With this type of dancing there is more ‘stepping’ of a different type to that of the long sword dancing, although Grenoside, wearing their clogs, get very near to the rapper dancing, since with their clogs they can tap out different rhythms either to fit in with the music, or without music.

We have rapper dancing from North Walbottle, Winlaton, Earsdon, Swalwell, Newbiggin, Walbottle and High Spen to name but a few. These again, like the long sword dance and the Cotswold Morris dances, are named after villages. These dances, too, have plays, and songs which accompany them. The songs, again, are quite long and are usually what we call “calling on” songs, and tell the names of different characters taking part. But as in the Morris and long sword dances, you are not really supposed to know the name of the performer himself, and so they have fictitious names. The calling-on song for the rapper dance which we will be doing, which is the Newbiggin dance, we will be singing two verses of the song, and the song itself tells of different historical characters who did many brave deeds in England. Today, however, as sometimes in the past, you usually only get two verses, the first verse to introduce the dance, goes like this:

“Good people give ear to my story;
I’ve called here to see you by chance,
And I’ve brought you five lads blithe and bonny.
Intending to give you a dance.

O England is our habitation,
 The place we were all born and bred.
 There's not finer lads in the nation,
 And none are so gallantly led.

And at that we do a phrase of stepping, and then stop. Then we sing the last verse of the song:

“O now you see my five actors,
 The only five actors so bold,
 And they bear as good a character
 As ever did stand upon earth.
 And if they're as good as their sires,
 Their deeds are deserving record:
 So, lads, all the company desires
 To see how you handle your swords.

And then we break into the dance, as in the past. This dance, as in the long sword dances, goes round clockwise, sunwise. With our Morris dances also, before each dance begins, one should always walk round clockwise and then into formation, and at the end of the dance one should walk round once again. However, this is one of the points that many sides in England today leave out. But it has been stressed time and time again to different collectors that the walking round in this direction is all part of the dance.

The rapper is a very flexible sword, so flexible that you can bend it in half and almost tie it into a figure of eight. It is therefore considered quite a dangerous dance to do, as if a man lets go of one of the handles, the sword tends to fly up and hit somebody else in the face. It has even been seen on different occasions when a piece of this sword has broken off and gone flying down a hall sticking firmly into a piece of wood, and being very hard to remove. The dancers too often get cuts themselves during this type of dancing, either on the knuckles or the nose or forehead or chin, and these are often referred to as ‘rapper kisses’, because the cut is usually like a pair of lips, cutting quite deep and turning back, revealing the red of the inside of the skin showing through like lips.

English sword dancing must not be confused at all with Scottish long sword dancing, as in the English sword dancing the swords are held in the hand throughout the dance, whereas in Scottish sword dancing they lay the swords down in a cross formation on the ground and dance over them. The nearest English equivalent to this is the Bacca Pipes. These are long “Churchwarden” pipes, made out of clay, which are laid down in the same manner as the Scottish sword dance and danced over in a very similar way, but with far heavier shoes on, usually working boots of some sort.

Another dance we have which is very similar to the Scottish sword dance is our Broom Dance. Most of our Broom Dances begin with broom laying on the ground, and then starting at the tip of the handle, dancing over the broom, down to the head and around it and across in various patterns.

In both the Bacca Pipes Jig and the broom dance, it is very easy to tell if the dancer accidentally touches the obstacle with his boot: the Bacca Pipes are so fragile that a dancer has only to touch them lightly with his boot and they will break, since they are made of very soft clay; in the Broom Dance, because the handle is not quite touching the ground because of the head, it moves very easily and can easily be seen to move, more easily than somebody lightly touching a Scottish sword with very light shoes on.

Regarding the rapper sword dances, however, it is said that there is no known source of any dances which are quite like the sword dances of Northern England, as the swords themselves are very flexible and the dances are performed at a quick tempo throughout their duration. On the other hand, parallels to the English long sword dances can be readily found in different countries throughout Europe which are similar in construction to the English.

The counties of Lancashire and Cheshire in England have their own type of Morris dance, these dances belong more to the towns than to the country. The Lancashire and Cheshire Morris dancers mostly wore clogs, and their costumes are very bright. The main reason for this is that most of the dancers at one time or another had strong connections with the weaving industry. For instance, the men, instead of using handkerchieves, carried slings made of untwisted cotton rope, which were sometimes referred to as 'mollies'. Another feature of their costume is their sashes, which they wore instead of baldrics. Sometimes one side of the team would wear the sash across their right shoulder, and the opposite side wore it across their left shoulder. Different teams had different colours: some teams might wear a red sash across one shoulder and a blue sash across the other; alternatively perhaps one side of the team would wear a red sash, and the other side a blue sash. The music is also different, in that the main instruments used here are the concertina and drum. The men also wear breeches and long coloured stockings. Their team usually comprises ten men, and their Captain controls and calls out the figures, often with the use of a whistle. Many men in the past, as today, also wear round their necks a number of rows of beads and also in some cases lace frills.

In the past many of these men used to accompany the rush carts in. The rush carts used to bring in new crops of rushes from the outlying areas to the church and there are pictures in existence depicting hundreds of Morris men bringing in enormous carts piled as high as one could see, decorated up to go to the church. These rushes were used to strew on the church floor before we had wooden or concrete floors as used today. It was quite a ceremony with the old rushes being taken out and burnt, and the new ones being brought in. There were many different ways of decorating the rush carts; some of the men would add pieces of rushes to their very flowery hats, which were covered in flowers right over the top as well as round the sides.

The next nearest type of Morris we have to this is found in the Peak District. This is often referred to as Derbyshire Morris. They have up to 16 dancers in a set, and the dances are very much like English country dancing. There are few

processional dances which are used to get dancers from one place to another. The tunes are mostly reels, and the construction of the dances is similar to English country dance. Some of the dances have in fact been taken over and danced as country dances by men and women, but in the past Derbyshire Morris men often referred to one side as the "ladies' side" and the other as the "men's side" of the team. One of the best known dances from the area is called "Winsters Galop" and this used to be a traditional men's dance, but for many years now the English Folk Dance and Song Society have published it and taught it as a country dance for mixed couples.

There are several processional dances from Derbyshire, some of the better known ones are called the Tideswell Processional and the Winsters Processional. These have similar tunes to some of the Cotswold tunes, and at one time there were songs accompanying them. Most of these songs have very little meaning to us today, and people do not know really whether they had a true significance in the past or not. One of the simplest songs that goes to this particular tune is:

'Thou don't know and I don't care
 What there is in Bradda.
 Old cow's head and a piece of bread
 And a pudding baked in a lantern.
 a Fayberry loaf and an Oakum pie,
 What there is in Bradda,
 A bit for me and a bit for thee
 And a bit for the Morris dancer.'

And obviously while they were singing this they used to go round with the hat and make a collection. This was done by their Fools or their Betties, kings or queens which they often called their men, while the dancers were preparing to dance off, and then the characters of the side, as the men processed along the road, would collect money until they got to a certain spot and then they would do the dance in a stationary formation.

Also from this part of the country come the Bacup and Britannia Coconut Dancers. This in itself is a very misleading name because they do not use pieces of coconut as some people think. The men black their faces, and wear a black type of jersey, black breeches, white stockings, black shoes, but the most important thing to remember is that round their waist they wear a red and white striped skirt, or apron. On their waist they wear a wooden pad strapped to a belt and on each knee the same, and on parts of their arms there are these wooden pieces strapped.

These are said to be the pieces from the weaving looms and parts of the shuttles. The patterns and rhythms which the dancers knock out with these wooden pieces are said to be a form of 'speaking', and when the people used to work in the cotton industry on the heavy, noisy looms, the workers often could not hear what their neighbours were saying because of the noise, so they used to knock out a rhythm which was different from the normal hum of the machine being used.

These Morris men have still maintained the old tradition of a “Whipper-In” — this is a man that, instead of having a broom, has a long coachman’s whip, and as he goes along the road, he makes a cracking sound with this whip, and whips it about, some people say to clear away the evil spirits, and also to clear away for the dancers. It also makes a loud noise, so that people when they come to watch keep well back to let the dancers process along. This whip can be heard from quite a distance. When they process along, this team have for many years uses one of the local village bands. The bands are sometimes spread out over 3/4 of a mile, mostly about 1/2 a mile, but it has even been known that the men are a mile apart. The dancers, usually 8 in number, process along in two columns of four, for one part, and then stop — one side stops and does a little dance on the spot, knocking out these complicated rhythms to each other, and performing a few other Morris-like movements, in a semi-crouched position, while the other four continue dancing down the road for some considerable distance. They can still hear the music, as I mentioned, as it is spread over some considerable distance. Then the four that processed down the road, they stop, and they start doing their dancing while the four that were dancing start to process up to the other group, overtake them and continue down the road until they are ready to stop. This goes on until they get to a prearranged point for dancing, and here both groups stop and perform a different type of Morris dance, some dances using garlands which incorporate red white and blues flowers. These colour flowers are used in many Morris traditions, and the red flowers are said to be the poppy, the blue the cornflower, and the white the rose, although sometimes instead of poppies, red roses are used. Artificial flowers are used these days because the cornflower in England, with its bright royal blue colour, has become almost extinct in some places. It became quite hard to obtain as the towns grew bigger and further away from the countryside, so artificial flowers have been used for a number of years. At one time, too this side used to use concertinas.

People think that this is a foreign dance to England, as these men black their faces, but they black their face in a guise, as some of the Cotswold Morris men used to do, and a few places elsewhere, and even the miners, because it was always considered very unlucky to know who was dancing in a team and also you were supposed to be an identical spirit. Ashes have been used from the earth, because all these dances are supposed to have some fertility meaning as well. No doubt you will be hearing more of this from Mrs. Armstrong.

At the present time there are two teams in England who dance what is known as the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance. Abbots Bromley themselves have the horns kept in their church all the year round, and they are said to be reindeer horns. These have been tested and found to be of great antiquity. The church took over this particular dance and saved it really, during the Reformation period. Every year this dance is performed, on the first Monday after the first Sunday in September. The men brownish trousers with green oak leaves printed on them, green stockings up to the knee, black shoes. They wear a heavy brown shirt and a waistcoat, and on their heads a beret. There are six men who carry horns, three white horns and three black. After that you will see the hobby hor-

se in the line-up, opposite him there is a man with a bow and arrow. As the two sides come together, you will find the blacks on one side, the whites on the other, then on the side of the white is the hobby horse, and siding with the blacks the man with the bow and arrow. As they go forward and back, the man with the bow and arrow, pretends to release the arrow from its bow but what he is supposed to be doing is killing the hobby horse. This again is the form of life and death — the new life, the summer coming in after the winter. Then either side of these two dancers you have the Man/Woman and the Boy with the triangle. In the past this dance used to take three days to complete its rounds. They used to begin very early in the morning from the village and set out in one direction and the two boys used to go along in front of the dancers, opening the farm gates to that the men could proceed into each farm. Then one boy would remain in position while the musician let the dancers up to the front of the house where they would play their tunes and do their dance. The dance has a serpentine effect, and is partly processional and partly a stationery dance. At the farm they would be given money, and most welcomed and given food and drink — the drink being one of the main things of the day, as in many other traditional Morris dances. In the past this dance would be performed at every single farm, but nowadays many new farmers have come into the area and taken over some of the older farms and don't believe in the luck of the dance, but many of the old farms insist that these men come, come what may, it doesn't matter what the weather is like, the men dance throughout the day. Today the ritual only takes one day, starting very early in the morning at first light. If you go to the church you will see the men have the horns passed down to them by their parson, the horns are blessed, and then the men line up outside, the man with the melodeon in front, ready to lead the team away. They are very soon out of the village and into the new part, which has many new houses. Even there they are quite welcomed by people. People who have not seen them before are amazed that this thing goes on right under their noses — some people are unlucky enough to miss seeing them for a number of years, and just hear about it, but every year without fail the men do this dance. It is quite impressive to see them from a distance as they go across the fields often you can only see the antlers that are carried by the men when they go down a dip, and it looks like a whole herd of reindeer going along. At about dinner time they reach the local hall, which is called Blithfield Hall, which has a famous herd of Bagot goats. These goats are the only ones of their kind in existence, and in case anything goes wrong with them, a few have been taken to Chester Zoo where they are kept, so if one lot gets some illness and dies out, there are still the others. The men cross over the moated bridge to the local manor, and there in front of the manor, on the old battlements, they dance their ancient dance, after which they go in and have a meal with the lord and lady of the manor. Then they come out and dance again on the battlements, with people standing around the moat watching. After this they resume their procession through the different farm houses and they even stop at some small cottages to dance. It is quite impressive to see them dancing in a farmyard with the horses and other farm animals looking on.

In the afternoon they come to the busier part of the town, and to my mind the dance is performed too many times these days just for the benefit of the general

public, rather than processing steadily down the route with coming together movements, the serpentine and the figures of eight.

The figure of eight is found in many dances throughout England. All types of English dances have got them in one form or another. We refer to them often as “hey”. This is the old symbol of eternity, because there is no end to what we call the figure of eight. These Reindeer Men have got the same. The white three men turn off into a loop, and then cross through the black horned men in a similar manner, hence when they have made their two loops you will find that there is a complete figure of eight.

As the day progresses, these men finish up at the local inn at about eight o’clock, but every now and again they will come out and do their dance till it is time to be thrown out of the pub — the pub, which is the local inn, has an extended closing time on that particular date. As elsewhere in England, when the Morris is performed for special occasions, special licences enable the local hostelties to stay open.

Earlier on I mentioned that Scottish long sword dances were not like the English, since they place their swords on the ground whereas Englishmen hold theirs. However, in Papa Stour, in the Shetlands which is an island off the west coast of Scotland, they have a long sword dance. There the men number seven and these men have names, as some of the men did in the past in English sword dances. They represent Saint George, Saint James, Saint Denis, Saint David, Saint Patrick, Saint Anthony and Saint Andrew. The men wear dark trousers and white shirts with a sash across the right shoulder to the waist, in the colour of the saint they represent, each saint having a different colour.

The dance then proceeds very much along the lines of the English long sword dance, and I will now say a bit more about this. In The Papa Stour dance, the same as our own, the men dance round clockwise, sunwise, as I have already mentioned, but I mention it again as it is most important. Then No. 1, who is the leader, often starts the figures. In most of the dances this is, in one way or another, what we call “going over your neighbour’s sword”. This means he steps over the sword, in one way or another, of the man who is beside him. After that, there are the tunnel and arch figures where pairs of men often go forward to meet another two, and go over or under the swords, and on reaching the end of the tunnel you turn and go a different way, hence there is very little difference between the Papa Stour dance and the English long sword. I mention this just for the folklorist among you, to show that the long sword dances found in Scotland are different from those found in England, with the exception of this one dance from Papa Stour in the Shetlands which closely resembles the English long sword dance.

In Thaxted, which is in Essex, there is a Ring Meeting held each year. This is a gathering of Morris men from different clubs from all over England and these days even including some clubs from friends abroad, and it is held every year over a weekend at the end of May and beginning of June. The men arrive on the

Friday night, find where they are going to stay, either at an inn, or camping, or in village halls, other Morris Men's floors, etc. After that they adjourn to the village inns, where they sing dance late into the night, because, as I have already mentioned, there is an extension of licensing hours at the inns for special occasions. The following morning the teams of Morris men are formed into groups — 3 or 4 complete dancing sides to each group — and are taken in some 6 or more coaches out into the surrounding villages, where they dance on village greens and at country inns for the rest of the day, until they return to Thaxted in the late afternoon, where they have a tea, and then perform a display for the public at the local Guildhall, where Morris has been danced for many years. The displays continues until about 8 p.m. when the dancers adjourn to the local church hall for a feast and ale, as was the custom many years ago when Morris men used to get together.

After they have eaten there will be a few songs and a few speeches and then the men come out again to dance, and it is at this time that the Thaxted men dance the other Horn Dance. The tune they use is the one that Sharp collected when he was collecting the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance. However, there is a big difference between the two Horn Dances, although they are both supposed to have come from the same source. The men of Thaxted wear very old types of clothes which have been passed down to them for many years, and there is more feeling of antiquity in this dance, it is danced a lot slower and they only use the one air, the one that Cecil Sharp collected when he collected the dance, whereas at Abbots Bromley, their player plays the melodeon and he plays any tune that comes into his head, the latest pop song, or old folk songs, or dance tunes, anything that basically fits in with the mood and timing of the dance. The Abbots Bromley horn dance is danced more or less at a run throughout, whereas the men in Thaxted dance it more or less as Sharp noted it.

During this time there are many hundreds of people in Thaxted who have come to see this dance, and you can hear a pin drop. All the cars stop while the dance is taking place, as we take up the whole of the road. We dance to the music of a lone fiddle, and gradually dance off into the night, whereupon the Morris clubs are then free to disperse to the local inns in the town and dance their own dances till the early hours of the morning.

The following morning being Sunday, the men meet at the Vicarage (a lot of the visiting men camp on the village lawn). The horns are taken from the church, with many candles, banners, crosses and these are taken to the church. The procession is led by the Vicar, followed by the choirboys carrying incense and myrrh, and then come other dignitaries from the church, then the Morris musicians followed by the Morris men — at this time there are usually 200 — 300 Morris men taking part in this procession. The men dance up to the church, and into the church, where they take their seats inside. During the service one team of Morris men are invited to perform a dance in the aisle of the church, as used to be the custom in the past. Many churches in England frown upon this, but there are one or two churches where this custom is kept alive. Also during the service, during a particular hymn, all the congregation leave the church by

one door, led by the Vicar, and circle completely round the church and back in at another door.

The Thaxted dancers themselves are not a traditional side, they have been dancing as a side for 70 years, and in fact this year celebrates their 70th anniversary. They do have close connections with many of the traditional sides. Chambers, who was one of the collectors with Sharp, danced with Bampton for a time and collected their dances, and he later became a curate at Thaxted church and passed on some of the dances he had learnt to the Thaxted side. You may also know of the Rev. Conrad Noel, an English Parson, who was known for his support in favour of the working people on the land; he stood up against authority to protect the rights and interests of the local farmers and working people at the time Morris dancing was being started in Thaxted. After him, his son-in-law, who we know as Father Jack, kept the Morris going into recent times when he was forced to retire through ill health, having dedicated his whole life to the Morris, and he passed away only last year.

Although the Thaxted morris men are a revivalist side, they have their roots in Molly dancing. These are dances that used to be seen in East Anglia — the Eastern side of England. “Molly” is said to be derived from the word Morris. Again they had similar numbers, but sometimes 8 instead of 6, and again they blacked their faces, and their dances were similar to the Cotswold Morris. Often their dances were associated with the plough and they also went out on Plough Monday as well as Whitsun time.

One of the first meetings held in Thaxted involving outside clubs was held in 1927. This was seven years before the foundation of the Morris Ring. On this occasion Thaxted invited several other teams to come and dance with them, and this meeting continued annually for a few years, when they decided to get together and form an Association, which they called the Morris Ring — “Ring” because most Morris dances have a circle movement, a continuous movement without an end, and they therefore decided to call the foundation of clubs the Morris Ring. This was in 1934, and the following six clubs became the founder members of the Ring: Thaxted, Cambridge, East Surrey, Greensleeves from London, Letchworth (from Hertfordshire) and Oxford University. They elected a Squire and a Bagman, the first Squire being Alec Hunter, who was the leader of Thaxted Morris men. The Squire of the Morris Ring today is elected every two years, likewise the Bagman, but so as not to lose continuity, their terms of office do not quite coincide, as the Squire retires one year and the Bagman the following year, although both are liable to be re-elected if they so wish for a further two-year period. Today, it is quite an honour to be elected Squire or Bagman of the Morris Ring because these men attend Morris dance meetings all over the country, and there are some 100 or more meetings taking place during the year. Thaxted, however, is the only place where a Ring Meeting is held every year, although there are two other large meetings in other parts of England, but these meetings are seldom held in the same place twice as there are nowadays so many teams in the Morris ring wishing to host a Ring Meeting.

At the present time there are over 200 clubs in the Morris Ring. When a club becomes a member of the Morris Ring, it is usually presented with a staff of office, which is a white stick about 20 inches long with a red stripe spiralling round and round down its length, rather as the old English maypoles, or like the type of barber's pole that was common in Europe at one time, this is the team's badge of office, and when they go to different Ring Meetings and the men attend church, the staffs of office are presented at the altar by the Squires of the sides and blessed. Morris has a strong link with the church in many places, and when clubs meet at a Ring Meeting they usually attend church on the Sunday morning. If there are different denominations present amongst the Morris men, the men will usually dance up to the door of the church where the main service is taking place, and then slip away to their own church, returning later to join their team again.

The Morris Ring today is the custodian of the different types of Morris dancing, with the financial support of subscriptions and funds raised during the Morris Ring meetings. Sometimes the collections taken at Morris Ring meetings are barely enough to enable the Morris Ring to continue its working of collecting and preserving the Morris dances. The Morris men themselves have to pay quite a large sum of money to attend a Morris Ring meeting, as the costs are high for accommodation, food, hire of a hall, for the feast and coaches for transport, plus administration and publicity. When the teams are dancing for the public, collections are usually taken, and quite a lot of this money goes to charity. In the areas where sword dances are performed, particularly in Yorkshire and also in parts of East Anglia where a few dances were found connected with the Molly dancers, this money used to go to the church, at one time, to maintain a candle. This candle was kept alight from the beginning of one year until the following year, where more monies were received from the dancers. These men before they went out dancing were given a blessing by the church. But at Ring Meetings, most of the money collected is put towards the preservation of Morris dancing in England and the research into as yet undiscovered dances, as dances are still coming to light in old manuscripts, and from conversations with elderly people in outlying parts of the country where people may be less in touch with modern life and they still remember dances performed in their area in the past.

We are still learning new facts about the way Morris was danced in the past. It seems that the Morris sticks used to be coloured, either red at one end and blue at the other, or divided into three stripes, red, white and blue, or in some cases it used to be orange and red, and in others orange and blue. These seem to be the only colours used that we have heard about so far. Today, one would be very lucky to find a side that used coloured sticks, good sticks not being as plentiful as they were in the past, since many areas of woodland have been cut down and given over to agriculture or office blocks. A good Morris stick should be made from the wood of the ash or hazel, though sometimes willow, oak or holly may be used. Colouring Morris sticks is not as easy as it sounds, since if you paint sticks with commercial paint, after use for a very short while the paint will flake off, so one wonders if in fact in the past they had some means of dyeing the sticks to get the required effect.

When the men are performing a dance, it is customary for the Squire or Foreman to call out the names of the figures. Most of our dances are ‘set’ dances, which means that there are set or traditional ways in which the dance should be performed, with its set number of figures in the correct sequence. However, even though most of the men will know these figures, the Squire or Foreman will still call them out. The terms used are ones of direction or pattern of movement, and sometimes of a particular step. Unfortunately, in the English Morris of today, some of the steps have degenerated — some people say that this happened after the War, when Morris was in a decline and many of the people left dancing it were very elderly and therefore not able to put so much effort and energy into the dance steps. However, when one listens to old recordings of people talking about Morris dancing, one comes to the conclusion that this is not necessarily the case. One elderly dancer in fact did tell Cecil Sharp that the men always capered ‘as high as a table’, which would be over a metre in height. Nowadays most Morris capers do not approach that height, particularly after a full day’s dancing, whereas in the past we have heard that men have to be ‘upright and springtly and dance as high as table tops’.

There are still some Morris traditions and types of dancing that shortage of time prevents me from mentioning, even though they are quite well-known, but I will conclude by telling you some of the words of the Morris songs that you will hear us sing during our dancing. I will begin with the sword dance — this is the long sword dance, Sleights.

Here’s fourteen of us all;
 From Sleights Town we come,
 And we are going a-ramble-ing
 The country for to see.

And a holiday we will take,
 Some pastime for to make;
 So freely you will give to us,
 So freely we will take.

Although we are but young
 And never danced here before,
 O we will do the best we can,
 And the best can do no more.

So now you see us all
 Dressed in our bright array,
 Now we will start our dancing,
 So Music strike up and play.

MORRIS DANCES IN ENGLAND

One of our Morris Dances is called “Shepherd’s Hey” and the words here are as follows:

I can whistle, I can sing,
I can dance ‘most anything.
I can whistle, I can play,
I can dance the Shepherd’s Hey.

Another of our Morris Dances is called “Lads a ‘Bunchum” and the words for this are as follows:

O dear mother what a fool I be,
Six young maids came a-courting me:
Three were blind and the others can’t see,
O dear mother what a fool I be.

In conclusion, I hope you will enjoy the programme of Morris dances we have prepared, and I would like to leave you with a quote which is often heard in Morris circles:

“Morris is learnt by infection; Morris is not an antiquarian revival in England, nor an attempt to resuscitate the dead. We have no professionals enjoy doing it.”

RESUMEN / TRADUCCION

Inglaterra, así como otros países, debe mucho al trabajo de un hombre llamado Cecil Sharp.

Cecil Sharp se interesó mucho por coleccionar baladas, canciones y danzas folklóricas inglesas.

Ya en 1899 recogió de William Kinber, joven de 27 años que nació el 8-9-1872 y murió el día de Navidad de 1961, tocador de concertina, quien a su vez había aprendido de su padre. También recogió de William Sharp y otros.

Cecil Sharp describió esto como el punto de partida de su vida, comentándose más tarde que Inglaterra fue afortunada de esta decisión ya que existían en esta época pocos grupos Morris que bailaban completos.

En 1898 se había fundado la English Folk Song Society, la primera de este tipo en el mundo, en 1911 Cecil Sharp, con la ayuda de Helen y Maud Karpeles fundó la English Folk Dance Society, fusionándose ambas en 1932 con el nombre de English Folk Dance and Song Society.

Para 1914 Sharp había publicado una docena de libros con unas cien danzas Morris y veinticinco de espadas.

Recogió otras muchas danzas de diferentes grupos y partes del País, algunas cuyas noticias datan de 1700 y 1783.

Cecil Sharp murió en 1924. El año 1930 la English Folk Dance and Song Society adquirió unos terrenos en Londres y levantó un edificio en su honor, y es donde se guardan la mayoría de los apuntes y colecciones que él hizo. Otros folkloristas como él depositaron y depositan sus trabajos también. Es un lugar en el que se pueden realizar todo tipo de consultas así como audiciones de música, etc., y donde se venden las distintas publicaciones que han realizado.

Algunos folkloristas dicen que las danzas más viejas de Inglaterra son las de espadas, yo no estoy muy seguro de esto, ya que pienso que algunas Morris son

tan antiguas. D. Kennedy en sus investigaciones situó a las danzas Morris en el Neolítico. Muchas de ellas perdieron las espadas y posteriormente se han realizado con pañuelos.

En Bampton como en muchos otros sitios entró el violín y se impuso sobre la flauta y el tambor, a otros en cambio les parecía que cambiaba mucho y rehusaban bailar. Es así como pocos duraron para seguir enseñando. Más tarde entró el acordeón y antes de esta, la concertina.

En el pasado los Morris de Costwolds vestían pantalón y camisa blanca, con sombreros de paja adornados de lazos y flores silvestres, cuando no encontraban éstas lo hacían con rosetas de colores, flores artificiales de plástico o seda, y algunos más tarde, ponían las flores naturales sobre las rosetas. Zapato o botas negras y posteriormente vio también botas blancas ya que estaban de moda.

En la actualidad algunos grupos Morris resurgidos de los Costwolds, llevan calzón negro hasta la rodilla y medias blancas o calcetines de colores con diferentes cinturones o bandas. Bandas cruzadas con rosetas, insignia del club, escudo local, o del lugar en donde iban a bailar.

Podían llevar encima chaqueta o tabardo con emblemas o insignias también.

Las danzas de Costwolds se componen de seis danzantes, un personaje llamado "Fool" y sus músicos, al jefe del grupo llaman "Foreman" o "Squire", y al que se dedica a realizar la colecta, y al secretario los llaman "Bagman", suelen ser veteranos bailarines.

El principal lugar de danzas de espadas es Yorkshire, estas presentan personajes junto a los danzantes, el "Fool" mencionado, un personaje Hombre-Mujer conocido por "Betsy" y generalmente seis y ocho danzantes.

Las espadas son metálicas, sin filo, de un metro de largo, con mango rígido, teniendo en algunos lugares un agujero en la punta por la que pasan cintas para cuando bailan en las procesiones.

La mayoría de las danzas de espadas provienen de áreas donde existen canteiras. Hay algunas excepciones en la costa y son bailadas por pescadores que llevan jerseys o una especie de blusa de pescador, usan espadas largas de madera, diciéndose que representan los instrumentos que usan para arreglar las redes. Antiguamente llevaban pantalón blanco, botas negras y bandas cruzadas con rosetas, excepto los de la costa, que vestían como hemos indicado.

En Hansworth han existido durante años, siendo el número de danzantes de ocho, llevan una especie de traje militar negro con galones dorados entrecruzados, pantalón blanco, polainas largas, botas negras y gorrita roja.

En Grenoside llevan pantalón largo blanco, zuecos de madera con cuero en la parte superior y cintas para atar, chaquetas de diferentes colores, básicamente

rojo y verde, llevando el capitán una cabeza de zorro y un gorro, que cuando se le decapita al final de la danza caen al suelo.

Al final de algunas danzas se simula como si se matase a algún danzante cayendo éste al suelo y colocando sobre su cabeza las espadas anudadas, es lo que se conoce con el nombre de “NUT” y en el de espadas largas con el nombre de “LOCK”- que posteriormente la E.F.D.S.S. cogió como emblema.

Solían hacer también obras de teatro basadas en estas danzas de espadas largas que llamaban Hummers Plays o Dance Plays. Eran extensas historias siendo el significado de éstas la muerte del invierno y el renacimiento de la primavera.

En algunas danzas cuando las espadas están entrelazadas se pasan de uno a otro sobre sus cabezas diciéndose es el símbolo del sol de los cielos, sosteniendo se trata de un viejo ritual del culto al sol.

Las danzas de espadas largas se solían bailar en Navidad y durante las 2 ó 3 primeras semanas del año nuevo, y algunos de los danzantes eran conocidos como Plough Stots, porque solían llevar un arado con ellos mientras iban de un lugar a otro. El día principal era el lunes de la labranza, que es el primer lunes después del doceavo día, en el que lo adornaban con verde y lazos. Se decía que si la gente no les daba dinero generosamente cuando bailaban, dirigían su arado a través de su jardín. Los danzantes estaban normalmente acompañados por bastantes personajes como Toms y Betties y Hombre-Mujer; esto se hacía para ayudar a la colecta.

Así como las danzas mencionadas de Hansworth, Grenoside y Flamborough Head, hay danzas de Flamborough, North Skelton, Haxby, Askham Richard, Ampleforth, Sleights y Eskdale, por nombrar sólo algunas. El baile de espadas largas que esperamos enseñarles mientras estemos en su país, proviene de Sleights, es un pequeño pueblo rural en el norte de Riding of Yorkshire.

La danza de espadas de Sleights, como otras de espadas, lleva una canción que la acompaña. Los danzantes normalmente salen, cantan los versos y luego comienzan a bailar. Antiguamente, los hombres que bailaban Morris y bailes de espada larga, estaban sujetos a su propia tradición y en el caso de los danzantes de espada sólo sabían ésta, así para soltarse a bailar solían cantar canciones populares de la época o viejas canciones folk entre las figuras de la danza. Viejas canciones que habían aprendido de sus padres y abuelos.

La mayoría de las danzas de espada larga en Inglaterra han perdido su forma y sus canciones. Estamos contentos de que algunas formas y una o dos de las canciones existen todavía. Hoy en día sin embargo, cuando los danzantes salen a bailar son bastante tímidos para cantar y la gente se tiene que conformar con oír la llamada de algunos pasos y ver la danza antes que oír la canción o verles representar las obras. En algunos casos, cuando se ha matado a un personaje, la gente no se interesa en su vuelta a la vida —a menos que se trate de folkloristas o personas con conocimientos en este tema—. Así que a partir de esto, desgraciadamente, muchos danzantes omiten esta parte esencial en su danza.

En otras partes de Inglaterra existen también otro tipo de danzas, como el de la espada corta o espadín “rapper”. Es una hoja metálica de 20 pulgadas de largo con un asa corredera en un extremo y fija en el otro. Se ha investigado sobre este instrumento, diciendo unos se trata de la vieja hoja que se utilizaba para rascar a los caballos en las herrerías los mozos de mulas, otros dicen se trata de las utilizadas por los carpinteros para construcción de barcos, también utilizadas en minas, ya que este baile se asocia precisamente con mineros de carbón, etc..

El grupo se compone de 5, 7 ó 9 bailarines acompañados también de los personajes citados, Betsy, Tommy, etc..

Hay danzas en el norte de Walbottle, Winlaten, Easdon, Swalwell, Newbiggin, Walbottle and High Spen, por nombrar algunos. Tanto estas danzas como las de espada larga, Morris, etc., se les titula de acuerdo con el nombre de la localidad a la que pertenecen.

Suelen llevar también canciones bastante largas que denominamos llamada.

Como modelo presentaremos dos versiones de Newbiggin. Hoy en día, como alguna vez en el pasado sólo se hacen dos versos, el primero presenta la danza y dice:

“Buena gente, prestad oído a mi historia,
he venido aquí a veros, por casualidad,
y he traído cinco muchachos alegres y hermosos
para intentar daros un baile.
Oh, Inglaterra es nuestro habitat
el lugar donde todos nosotros fuimos nacidos y criados
no hay mejores muchachos en la nación,
y nadie es dirigido con tanto garbo.”

Y luego hacemos unos pasos y paramos. Después cantamos el último verso del canto.

“Oh, ahora veis mis cinco actores,
los únicos 5 actores tan vigorosos,
y resisten como un buen individuo
como nunca hubo sobre la tierra
y si son tan buenos como sus señores
sus hazañas son dignas de mención.
Así pues, camaradas, la concurrencia desea
ver como empuñais vuestras espadas.”

Y entonces comenzamos a bailar. Esta danza como las de espadas largas, van en círculo en sentido contrario a las agujas del reloj.

Otra danza que tenemos parecida a la de espadas de Escocia es el de “Broom dance” (danza de escobas), colocándolas en el suelo en cruz y evolucionando

sobre ellas sin tocarlas, son parecidas también las “Bacca Pipes” que se hacen con pipas largas de espuma de mar, que nada más tocarlas se rompen.

Las tierras de Lancashire y Cueshire tienen su propio tipo de danzas Morris, que pertenecen más a la ciudad que al campo. Estos llevan una indumentaria espectacular ya que en todo tiempo los danzantes tuvieron mucha conexión con la industria textil.

Llevan alrededor del cuello un collar con varias vueltas y en algunos casos un volante de encaje, fagín cruzado por el hombro derecho o izquierdo, los diferentes grupos tienen diferentes collares, suelen llevar también un fagín rojo por un hombro y azul por otro, calzón hasta la rodilla, medias de color y zuecos.

El grupo se compone de diez hombres y su capitán quien da las órdenes mediante un silbido. Los instrumentistas tocan concertina y tambor.

En épocas pasadas muchos de estos hombres solían acompañar a traer los carros de paja.

Estos carros solían traer nuevas recolecciones desde las afueras del pueblo hasta la iglesia y existen cuadros con escenas de cientos de hombres Morris trayendo en enormes carros la paja apilada hasta donde alcanza la vista, de altura y decorada para llevarla a la Iglesia. Estos juncos o pajas eran utilizadas para cubrir el suelo de la iglesia, antes de que tuviéramos el suelo de madera o de cemento. Era una ceremonia con las viejas cubiertas que se quitaban y se quemaban afuera, y las nuevas, puestas en su lugar. Había diferentes maneras de decorar las carretas de paja. Algunos de los hombres añadían trozos de junco a sus sombreros llenos de flores alrededor y encima.

Hay varias danzas de procesión procedentes de Derbyshire, algunas de las más conocidas se llaman, “Tideswell Processional” y “Winster Processional”, tienen melodías parecidas a las de Cotswold, y en otro tiempo tenían canciones que les acompañaban, la mayoría de éstas tienen poco significado para nosotros, hoy en día, y la gente no sabe si tuvieron alguno en el pasado o no. Una de las más sencillas que va con esa melodía es:

Usted no sabe y a mí no me preocupa
 lo que hay en Brodda.
 Una vieja cabeza de vaca y un trozo de pan
 y un postre hecho en un farolillo
 una barra de Fayberry y una tarta de estopa.
 Que hay en Brodda
 un poco para mí y un poco para tí
 y un poco para el bailarín de Morris.

Las Coconut Dancers se realizan en Bacup y Britania, el nombre de estas danzas lleva un poco a confusión ya que los danzantes no utilizan cocos.

Llevar la cara pintada de negro, una especie de cuellos grandes de color rojo y blanco, jersey negro, en los brazos unas piezas de madera, en la cintura una almohadilla de madera, calzón hasta la rodilla negro, falda a rayas roja y blanca, medias blancas y zapato negro y bajo las rodillas, espinilleras de madera.

Las maderas, se suponen, son piezas de telar y lanzaderas que los danzantes golpean rítmicamente, y se dice existía una especie de vocabulario con el que se expresaban los trabajadores en los pesados telares de la industria del algodón, ya que no se oían entre ellos debido al ruido existente.

Les acompaña un personaje “Whipper-in” que maneja un largo látigo de cochero, con el que ahuyenta a los malos espíritus.

El grupo se compone de ocho danzantes en dos columnas de cuatro. La gente piensa se trata de una danza de fuera de Inglaterra por ennegrecer sus caras, pero también solían hacer esto los Morris de Cotswold y de otros lugares, incluso los mineros, porque consideraban de mala suerte que conociesen a los danzantes. Se utilizaba cenizas de la tierra pensando se trataba de ritos de fertilidad.

Como acompañamiento musical utilizan la banda de la localidad, aunque en otro tiempo utilizaban también concertina.

The Abbots Bromley Horne Dance. Se conocen dos formaciones en Inglaterra. La indumentaria consiste en boina, chaleco, pantalón marrón con hojas de roble pintadas en verde sobre ellos y medias verdes. Tres danzantes llevan cuernos de reno en color blanco y los otros tres en color negro.

Con los de color blanco va un personaje que es un caballito de madera y con los de negro un hombre con un arco y flecha que simula disparar al caballo. Ritual del renacimiento de la primavera y muerte del invierno. Hay también un hombre-mujer y un niño con un triángulo. Solían recorrer las granjas bailando. Estos cuernos son guardados en la Iglesia y son muy antiguos. La Iglesia se hizo cargo de esta danza en particular y realmente la salvó durante el periodo de la Reforma. Se baila el primer domingo de Setiembre.

Los hombres pasan con los cuernos que el cura bendice, luego se ponen en fila y salen con el músico de la concertina.

Es impresionante cuando van a lo lejos a través de los campos viéndoseles únicamente las cornamentas. Hacia la hora de la cena llegan al Bilthriel Hall que tienen un rebaño de cabras Bagot, únicas en su especie.

Danzan allí antes y después de la cena que les es servida haciendo varias figuras entre las que destaca la del “8” que tienen casi todas las danzas de Inglaterra, y que es un viejo símbolo de eternidad.

En Thaxted, que está en Essex, hay un encuentro anual. Es una reunión de hombres Morris de los diferentes clubs de toda Inglaterra incluidos clubs de

amigos extranjeros, y tiene lugar a lo largo de un fin de semana al final de Mayo y principio de Junio. Los hombres llegan el viernes a la noche, encuentran sitio para pasar el fin de semana, en un camping, en una pensión, en los salones municipales o bien en los suelos de los clubs Morris del pueblo, etc.. Después de esto pasan a los pub del pueblo donde cantan y bailan hasta muy tarde, entrada la noche, porque como he dicho en ciertas ocasiones estos locales tienen una licencia especial para el cierre. La mañana siguiente los grupos de Morris se dividen y son llevados en 6 o más autobuses a los alrededores del pueblo, donde bailan en los prados o en los pubs del campo durante el resto del día, hasta que regresan a Thaxted al atardecer, donde toman una merienda y luego actúan para el público en el “Guildhall” donde los Morris han bailado durante muchos años. Las actuaciones continúan hasta las 8 de la tarde, cuando los danzantes van a los locales de la Iglesia para tener una comilona con cerveza Inglesa (Ale), como era costumbre hace años cuando los Morris solían juntarse.

Después de que han cenado habrá unas cuantas canciones y algunos discursos y luego salen de nuevo a bailar y es entonces cuando los Thaxted bailan la otra danza de cuernos. La melodía que utilizan es una que Sharp recogió cuando estaba investigando la danza de cuernos de Abbots Bromley. Sin embargo, hay una gran diferencia aunque ambas se supone que provienen de la misma fuente. Los hombres de Thaxted visten ropas muy antiguas dando así más carácter a esta danza; se baila mucho más despacio y sólo utilizan un aire, el que Cecil Sharp recogió a los de Abbots Bromley; su músico con la concertina toca cualquier melodía que le venga a la cabeza, la última canción pop o antiguas canciones folk o piezas para bailar, cualquier cosa que encaje básicamente en el tiempo y modo de la danza. La danza de cuernos de Abbots Bromley se baila más o menos de una corrida de principio a fin, mientras que Thaxted la bailan más o menos como Sharp la anotó.

Durante este tiempo hay cientos de personas en Thaxted que han venido a ver este baile, y se puede oír el vuelo de una mosca. Todos los coches paran mientras el baile tiene lugar, porque se ocupa toda la carretera. Bailamos con la música de un sólo violín, gradualmente entrando en la noche, entonces los clubs de Morris son libres de dispersarse en los pubs locales y comenzar a bailar hasta casi la mañana siguiente.

La siguiente mañana que es Domingo, los hombres se reúnen en la Vicaría (una gran parte de los visitantes acampan en los prados del pueblo). Se recogen los cuernos de la Iglesia, con muchas velas, estandartes, cruces, etc., son llevados a la Iglesia. El Vicario abre la procesión, seguido por los muchachos del coro, llevando incienso y mirra y después siguen otros dignatarios eclesiásticos, tras ellos los músicos Morris seguidos por los Morris Men —actualmente 200 ó 300 Morris toman parte en esta procesión—. Los hombres danzan todo el camino hacia la Iglesia y dentro de ella, en donde ocupan sus respectivos lugares. Durante la función religiosa una pareja de danzantes baila en una nave lateral de la Iglesia, según una antigua costumbre. En muchas Iglesias de Inglaterra esta costumbre se ha perdido, pero todavía existe en dos o tres. También durante la función religiosa, cantando un himno concreto, todos los asistentes aban-

donan la Iglesia por una puerta, conducidos por el Vicario, dando una vuelta completa a la Iglesia, regresando por la otra.

Los danzantes de Thaxted no son un grupo tradicional; han bailado como grupo durante 70 años, y de hecho este año celebran su 70 aniversario. Mantienen estrecho contacto con varios grupos tradicionales. Chambers, que junto con Sharp fue uno de los que recogió las danzas, bailó durante cierto tiempo en Bampton y recogió sus danzas; más tarde llegó a ser sacerdote de la Iglesia de Thaxted y transmitió algunas de las danzas que había aprendido, al grupo de Thaxted. Puede también que conozcáis al Rev. Conrad Hoel, un párroco inglés conocido por sus esfuerzos en favor de los campesinos: se enfrentó a las autoridades para proteger los derechos e intereses de los trabajadores y granjeros locales en la época en la que se estaban introduciendo en Thaxted las danzas Morris. Tras él, su yerno, al que conocemos como el Padre Jack, mantuvo las danzas Morris hasta épocas recientes, en la que ha debido retirarse debido a su delicada salud, habiendo dedicado toda su vida a los Morris, de los que faltó tan sólo el año pasado.

Uno de los primeros encuentros celebrados en Thaxted al que asistieron clubs de otras localidades, tuvo lugar en 1927, siete años antes de la fundación del Círculo Morris. En esta ocasión, Thaxted invitó a otros grupos a bailar con ellos, y este encuentro continuó anualmente durante unos años, hasta que decidieron reunirse y formar una asociación, que llamaron el Círculo Morris —círculo porque la mayoría de las danzas Morris tienen un movimiento circular, un movimiento continuo e inacabado—. Esto ocurrió en 1934 y los miembros fundadores del Círculo fueron los seis clubs siguientes: Thaxted, Cambridge, East Surrey, Greensleeves de Londres, Letchwort (de Hetfordshire) y la Universidad de Oxford. Eligieron un Presidente y un Tesorero, siendo el primer Presidente Alce Hunter, que era el líder de los Morris de Thaxted.

Por ahora más de 200 clubs integran este Círculo. Cuando un club ingresa en él, se presenta con un bastón de cargo, blanco con una banda roja arrollada en espiral en toda su longitud, parecido a los viejos zangolotinos ingleses, o al tipo de palitos de barbero que fueron comunes en Europa en otro tiempo. Este es el distintivo del grupo, y cuando asisten a los Encuentros y los hombres van a la Iglesia, los distintivos son presentados en el altar por los capataces de cada grupo, y bendecidos.

Los Morris tienen un estrecho vínculo con la Iglesia en muchos lugares, y cuando los clubs se reúnen en estas Concentraciones, acuden normalmente a la Iglesia los Domingos por la mañana. Cuando existen diferentes creencias religiosas entre los Morris bailan en la puerta de la Iglesia durante el servicio principal y luego se dirige cada uno a su propia Iglesia volviendo a reunirse con el grupo más tarde.

Estamos todavía aprendiendo nuevos hechos sobre la forma en que se bailaba Morris en el pasado. Parece ser que los palos de Morris solían ser de color, o bien rojos en un extremo y azul en el otro, o bien dividido en tres bandas, rojo,

blanco y azul, o en algunos casos solía ser anaranjado y rojo y en otros anaranjado y azul. Estos parecen ser los únicos colores de los que hemos oído hablar hasta ahora. Uno se alegraría de encontrar palos de colores en un grupo, buenos palos, no siendo tan abundantes como antaño, pues muchas zonas de bosques han sido cortadas y dedicadas a la agricultura o bloques de oficinas. Un buen palo de Morris tendría que estar hecho de madera de castaño o fresno aunque también puede estar hecho de sauce o roble. Pintar los palos no es tan fácil como parece, pues si se pintan con pintura comercial, después de usarlos un tiempo, la pintura se desconcha, así que uno se pregunta si de hecho antes tenían otros medios de teñir los palos para obtener el resultado esperado.

Cuando los hombres están bailando una danza, es costumbre del Capitán del grupo ir nombrando los pasos. La mayoría de nuestras danzas son bailes establecidos, lo que quiere decir que hay formas tradicionales según las cuales se debe llevar a cabo el baile, con números fijos o figuras en la secuencia correcta, sin embargo, aunque la mayoría de los hombres conocen estas figuras, el Capitán las va anunciando. Los términos utilizados son unos de dirección o modelo de movimiento y algunas veces de un paso particular. Desgraciadamente, en el Morris de hoy hay algunos pasos de estos que han degenerado —algunos dicen que esto ocurrió después de la guerra, cuando los Morris estaban en declive y mucha de la gente dejó de bailar— eran muy mayores y por lo tanto incapaces de poner energía y esfuerzo en los pasos. Sin embargo cuando uno oye viejas grabaciones de gente hablando sobre danzas Morris, llega a la conclusión de que este no es necesariamente el caso. Un viejecito de hecho, dijo a Cecil Sharp que los hombres siempre brincaban “a la altura de una mesa”, lo cual sería un metro de altura, después de un día entero de bailar. En la actualidad son pocos los que lo hacen, apenas llegan a ocho.

Hay todavía algunas tradiciones Morris y tipos de danza que la escasez de tiempo me hace abstenerme de mencionar, aunque son bastante conocidas, pero concluiré diciendo algunas de las letras de canciones Morris que nos oírán durante los bailes.

Empezaré con el baile de espadas largas, Sleights:

Aquí estamos catorce de nosotros
venimos de la ciudad de Sleights,
y vamos vagando por el país
para ver.

Y haremos un día de fiesta
un pasatiempo que tener
lo que libremente nos deis
libremente tomaremos.

Y pues que somos jóvenes
y nunca hemos bailado aquí antes
lo haremos lo mejor posible
y no se puede hacer mejor.

Así pues, nos veis a todos
vestidos de brillantes atavíos
ahora empezaremos a bailar.
Así pues, resuene la música.

Una de nuestras danzas Morris es llamada Sheperd's Hey.

Puedo silbar, puedo cantar
puedo bailar casi todo
puedo silbar y tocar
puedo bailar el hey de los pastores.

Otra de nuestras danzas Morris llamada "Lad's a' Banchum"

Oh querida madre, qué loco he sido
seis jóvenes vinieron y me cortejaron
tres eran ciegas y las otras no veían.
Oh querida madre, qué loco he sido.

En conclusión, espero que disfrutéis del programa Morris que hemos preparado y me gustaría dejaros con una frase muy oída en los ambientes Morris:

"Morris se aprende por contagio, Morris no es un recuerdo de la antigua Inglaterra ni un intento de resucitar lo ya muerto." Entre nosotros no hay profesionales, disfrutamos haciéndolo.

Abril 1981
Traducción: Luisa de la Hija



Danzas Morris. Thaxted 1973.





Danzas Morris. Thaxted 1973.



MORRIS DANCES IN ENGLAND



Danzas Morris. Grupo Garstang de Lancashire
Sidmouth 1972. (Archivo Argia)



Danza de cuernos de Abbots Bromley
(Fotografía del The Morris and Sword dances of England de Arthur Peck)