



CHANCTONBURY
RING
MORRIS MEN

A HISTORY

Introduction

The production of this booklet gives a rare opportunity for members of the public to look behind the scenes at the formation and organisation of Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men. We hope that by reading this you will be filled with a knowledge and understanding of morris men, and have the answers to all the questions which you have asked or thought of asking. As long as morris men have danced, the question 'Why do they do it?' has always been prominent in the mind. The 'answer' is simple: 'Because they enjoy themselves and in doing so hope that they give pleasure to others!'

We also give ourselves the opportunity to visit many places of interest, apart from the local hostleries that form our natural habitat.

We practice hard to achieve the standards of which we are proud. We give our best with large audiences, so, watch the dancing, enjoy the music, read our history, and come again to see us.

*Doug Parrott
Squire*



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Chanctonbury Ring

Chanctonbury Ring is a familiar landmark to Sussex people – which is hardly surprising as it can be seen from more than thirty miles away. Nearly 800 feet high, the ring was the site of an Iron Age camp, and in Roman times a temple was built on the hill. The circle of beech trees (which is the motif of our badge) was planted in 1760 by Charles Goring of Wiston House. He was one of the generation of landowners who believed the Downs were there to be landscaped.

Many legends are attached to the Ring. It's origins are said to derive from Satan's labours in digging Devil's Dyke. Chanctonbury was one of the clods of earth thrown up as he attempted to dig a channel through the Downs to drown the Weald.

Another tale is told that anyone running 'widdershins' seven times around Chanctonbury Ring on May Eve, whilst Steyning church clock chimes midnight will raise the Devil who will proffer a bowl of stone soup.

However, since the Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men took to dancing on the top of the hill at the appointed hour, sightings of the satanic apparition have become a rarity. Could it be that our musicians drown out the sound of the clock?

Ed Bassford



What is morris dancing?

We are often asked how old morris dancing is, how it originated and where our dances come from. Great minds have speculated on the origins of morris dancing but no definite conclusion has been reached. Mankind has probably danced since he first appeared upon this earth particularly at times of celebration. We know that our Anglo-Saxon ancestors used dances somewhat akin to morris dances during Springtime religious ceremonies concerned with promoting fertility in crops and animals. As morris dances have been found entirely in non-celtic areas it seems likely that when they came to this Country they brought their dances with them and that these dances formed the basis of what is known today as morris dancing. Over the years the dances have of course, undergone vast changes producing the many forms of dance which have come down to us: the well known Cotswold dances, the North West tradition, the dances from the Welsh Borders and East Anglia, and the Rapper and Longsword dances of the North East of England each having a different style and containing wide variations within each tradition.

Above: Will Kemp, the 16th century Shakespearian actor, dancing the morris from Norwich to London.

Facing page: Morris dancers from a window in a house at Betley, Staffordshire. (From 'The Morris Book' by Cecil Sharp 1907).



The dances performed by the CRMM come from three sources. Firstly there are the Cotswold dances. At one time, many of the villages in the Cotswolds had morris teams each of which performed its own set of dances in its own way. Most of these teams had however died out by the beginning of this century when enthusiasts such as Cecil Sharp went round interviewing old dancers and obtaining details of the dances which they had performed. The information which they collected was later published and it is from this large and varied repertoire that our dances are selected.

Our second source of dances are those which come from the North West of England – principally Cheshire and Lancashire. These are quite different in character from the Cotswold dances. Most of them were processional dances and consisted of a figure which was used to move along coupled with stationery figures which were performed whenever an opportunity presented itself.

Finally there are our own dances. Although they have been made up over the last few years, they are based on dances which were performed in pubs in Mid-Sussex during the early part of this century.

In this article it has only been possible to give a brief outline of the origins of morris dancing and the dances we perform. If you would like more information, please feel free to ask.

Paul Setford



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Chanctonbury Ring Morris— an extract from 'Dick's Diary'

Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men began as an offshoot of the Shoreham Folk Dance Club which had been founded in February 1949. Some members attended a weekend course at Lodge Hill, near Pulborough in 1951 where they were introduced to morris and sword dances.

In the Festival of Britain celebrations of that year, some members of the folk dance club processed through Shoreham in morris kit, though no dances were performed.

At Whitsun 1952, some men visited Bampton in Oxfordshire where they learnt a number of dances. It was not until May Day 1953 that the Shoreham Club Morris Men made their debut. They performed both morris and long sword dances wearing dark blue tabards, white trousers and straw hats.

On the 15th September 1953 the Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men were officially formed, the name being suggested by Paul Plumb, a founder member. The badge was designed by Ian Scott-Walker, who also made the first baldricks, and ruggles (bell pads). Baldricks are the ribbons that we wear diagonally over the body.

The Times dated 3rd May 1954 featured a picture of us on their back page. This had been taken two days earlier at the Shepherd and Dog, Fulking. That year also marked our first television appearance.

In June it was decided that black breeches and white stockings should replace the white trousers formerly worn. Could it be that the wives complained about washing beer-stained trousers?

We were the first Sussex team to be admitted to the Morris Ring at our election on Saturday 9th July 1954. On Boxing Day of that year we performed the first of a long series of festive displays. We danced at The White Horse, Steyning, Henfield, Wineham and Fulking. (Nowadays we only perform at two stands – old age?)

Boxing Day 1955 saw us give our first performance of the Steyning Tipteers Play. This had been learnt from Ted Purver, a master of Steyning Grammar School, who had researched it at Clare College, Cambridge.

I joined the side in 1957 and the following year saw the first of our highly successful Whitsun tours. (I was 34 years old at the time, so you don't have to be that young! What it required is keenness and a certain amount of natural ability. An understanding girlfriend/wife/mother is also a great help!)

I was 32 when I first saw morris dancing, a distinct advantage as many people still associate it with young children or old men.

From the 4th–6th September 1959, I attended my first Ring Meeting with the side at Headington, Oxfordshire, and there met the legendary William Kimber. He



supplied much of the early information to Cecil Sharp who played such an enormous part in the revival of Morris.

August 1960 marked the first of our many displays at Michelham Priory in East Sussex. Since that year we have made numerous appearances at CoSIRA's events at the same venue.

On 3rd June 1961 we attended the wedding of founder member and first squire, Geoff Biggs. No one did more for the side than him and it was a sad loss for us all when he tragically died four months later, aged 31.

Fortunately Paul Setford had joined and proved an able successor as captain, and has now given many years devoted service to the club.

Easter Monday of 1962 coincided with St George's Day, so we started our dance season rather early. We danced at the Royal Pavilion Brighton, Brunswick Lawns, Hove, and the Devil's Dyke. My memories of the last stand are largely of holding the thighs of Valerie Greenfield as she was lifted into the air at the end of dancing 'Brighton Camp'!

This was the year we entered both Brighton and Worthing music festivals and won our classes. (Usually without opposition!)

For several years we participated in the Sidmouth International Festival. I remember well our performance in the Connaught Gardens as one of our team collapsed during a dance and was replaced without the side stopping.

On another occasion we were dancing at the Unitarian Open Air Conference when one of our men, the worse for drink, passed out and had to be carried off in triumph! The hundreds of abstemious spectators applauded loudly thinking it was part of the act.

In Dorset one year at the village of Winterborne St Martin, our dragon came to grief. There was a deep ditch along the road we were dancing and the men leapt over this. Unfortunately the dragon has limited vision and fell headlong into the water, to the unconfirmed joy of the spectators.

1962 saw the revival of the 'firing of the anvil' at Pyecombe forge, on St Clement's Day, 23rd November, with Sean Black and his family, who provided cider and sausage rolls.

We attended the Winchester Ring Meeting in September 1964 when Lionel Bacon was squire of the Ring. He produced the 'Handbook of Morris Dancing' – an invaluable and much needed updating of Cecil Sharp's original work.

That Boxing Day we made the first of numerous appearances at The Marquis of Granby, Sompting, followed by the White Horse at Steyning. These continue to be our stands on the 26th December.

May Day in 1965 fell on a Saturday and after the Shoreham breakfast the team repaired to Chanctonbury Ring and danced in the sunshine.

It was about this time that Harry Mousdell, who was already familiar with the legend of the dragon of St Leonard's Forest, suggested we had one of our own. This was designed and made at Worthing School of Art and has remained a distinguished feature of the team ever since. The old Shoreham May Horse was recovered in 1982 and reappeared as a second animal.

Facing page: The Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men dancing after Apple Howling at Furners Farm, Henfield, 6th January 1977.



An innovation in 1967 was the revival of 'apple howling' on January 6th, Twelfth Night or Old Christmas Day as it was formerly known in Sussex. This again was largely the work of Harry Mousdell who had researched the procedures in Somerset though we like to think that a similar thing happened in Sussex. Our first ceremony was at Tendring, Magham Down, East Sussex, followed by a ceilidh in the village hall.

The really big occasion in 1967 for the team was the Brighton Ring Meeting for which I was bagman and it involved a tremendous amount of work. There is little doubt that a Ring Meeting puts a morris side on the map nationally. This most successful event provided an enormous boost to our members. On Friday 7th July we had a Morris Ale and on the Saturday some 250 men departed on various tours around Sussex.

The first New Years Day bank holiday occurred in 1975 and from that year we have always included a tour to include the Steyning Tipteers Play. Our first venues were the Fountain, Ashurst, the Frankland Arms, Washington, and the Blacksmiths Arms, Shipley.

I revived 'apple howling' on January 6th 1977 at Furner's Farm, Henfield. Old Mr. Whittome was interested in tradition and had served on the National Executive of The English Folk Dance and Song Society, so he and his son Donald were pleased to give us every assistance in the occasion which has now become part of the life of Henfield.

In 1980 we organised the Round Britain Tour. At 5am on Friday 23rd May, fourteen intrepid men set off for Scotland. Reaching Ambleside by lunchtime, a kind American plied them with huge quantities of Theakstons Old Peculier, which necessitated a row across Windemere to sober up! The night was spent in a barn half way up Blencathra where they woke up a cuckoo. After Saturday's breakfast in Carlisle it was a quick dash across the border through Gretna to Dumfries. It is said that the first Scotsman to put money in our trug asked for change! The day ended with a ceilidh at Kirkcudbright. Sunday marked the dash over another border – Wales, then returning by way of the Cotswolds they arrived in Brighton at 5pm.

The other big event of 1980 was the second Brighton Ring Meeting, whereby Chanctonbury joined the other sides who have earned this dubious honour! This was a major event for us, playing host to no less than fifteen morris sides. Four coach tours spread their nets over Sussex with the teams displaying many styles of dancing from all over England.

The weekend culminated in a massed procession along Brighton seafront and dancing at the Pavilion.

We were happy to dance at the newly opened Chalk Pits Museum at Amberley in 1981, returning there in 1982.

On Good Friday, 1982, the Chanctonbury Men and The Knots of May revived 'long rope skipping' in the village of Alciston, East Sussex, which attracted many people. The skipping formerly took place on the beaches but was moved inland during the last war.

No account of our first thirty years can be comprehensive, there are some things that I don't know about, and others I will not disclose! I have only been



The Chanctonbury Ring dragon – prefers eating money!

able to write about things as I saw them or as I remembered them. In particular I have not been able to do justice to the fine singers and musicians that have been with us over the years.

The one thing about the Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men has always been the tremendous friendship and comradeship amongst the side. All the jokes and laughs we've had, whilst at the same time being really concerned about the standards of dancing and music – the presentation of what we are doing for the public – the creation of a real rapport with them.

The facade of a relaxed bunch of men conceals the fact that behind it all lies a great deal of hard work and organisation. It's a wonder that we have time to do full time jobs as well! Some of us are away from our wives and families quite a lot during the dancing season. It's a good job that they know that they can trust us! They know that we are not drinking the whole time or chatting up those delightful young women! They are happy that we are enjoying ourselves in our innocent and wholesome pastimes – God bless 'em!

The Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men now celebrate their first 30 glorious years – let's hope that the next 30 are just as good!

Dick Playll

Facing page: The Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men at The Marquis of Granby, Sompting, Boxing Day, 1981.

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The North West morris side (Clog)

1975 saw the formation of a clog team within the club. Dancing the distinctive morris of the North West of England, they wear red socks, clogs, sashes and floral hats which are associated with this particular form of dance. On occasions accompanied by a huge band of musicians – including brass players and drummers – the ‘cloggies’ have been made welcome at many events where a procession is called for. These include, Shoreham May Morning, Lewes Garland Day, and Lewes Bonfire Night.

The invitation to the clog team from the Lewes Borough Bonfire Society to appear on November 5th 1978 prompted a lively controversy in the local press, with accusations being made that the introduction of Morris dancers to the traditional events would bring an undesirable element of carnival into the proceedings. As things turned out, there was nothing but praise for the side's contribution, and we have continued to dance at Lewes on the fifth ever since.

When the Borough Bonfire Society were invited to process down the Mall to Buckingham Palace in 1979 in connection with ‘Carols for The Queen’, the clog side were honoured to be invited to accompany them. We do not know if Her Majesty was amused!

The fact that Chanctonbury Ring are one of only a handful of sides south of Crewe who perform the North West Morris has enhanced the wider reputation of the club. As a result, a number of invitations have been received over recent years to show these dances at festivals such as Bracknell, Broadstairs, Sidmouth and Whitby.

Ed Bassford

Facing page: The Chanctonbury Ring North West side at the Whitby Festival.

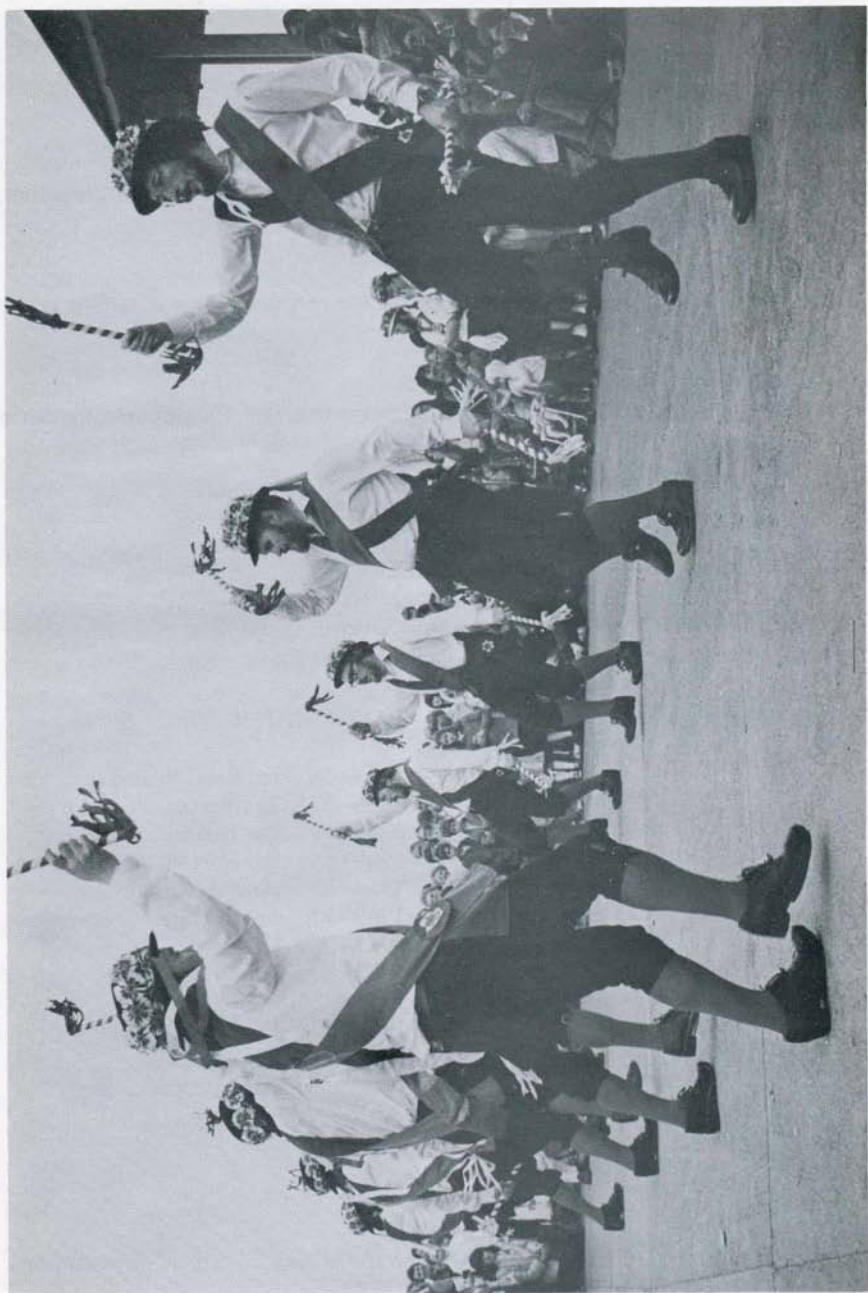


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The club officers

SQUIRE

Chairman – elected for a two year reign. He is responsible for the club organisation, dancing policy and public performances.

CAPTAIN

Foreman – elected annually, he is responsible for teaching and maintaining dance practice standards and policies.

BAGMAN

Secretary – elected for a two year period and responsible for all correspondence and enquiries.

TREASURER

Elected annually and responsible for finances and accounts.

THE CLUB OFFICERS 1983

Squire	:	Doug Parrott
Captain	:	Paul Setford
Bagman	:	Brian Cooper
Treasurer	:	Wal Jarvis

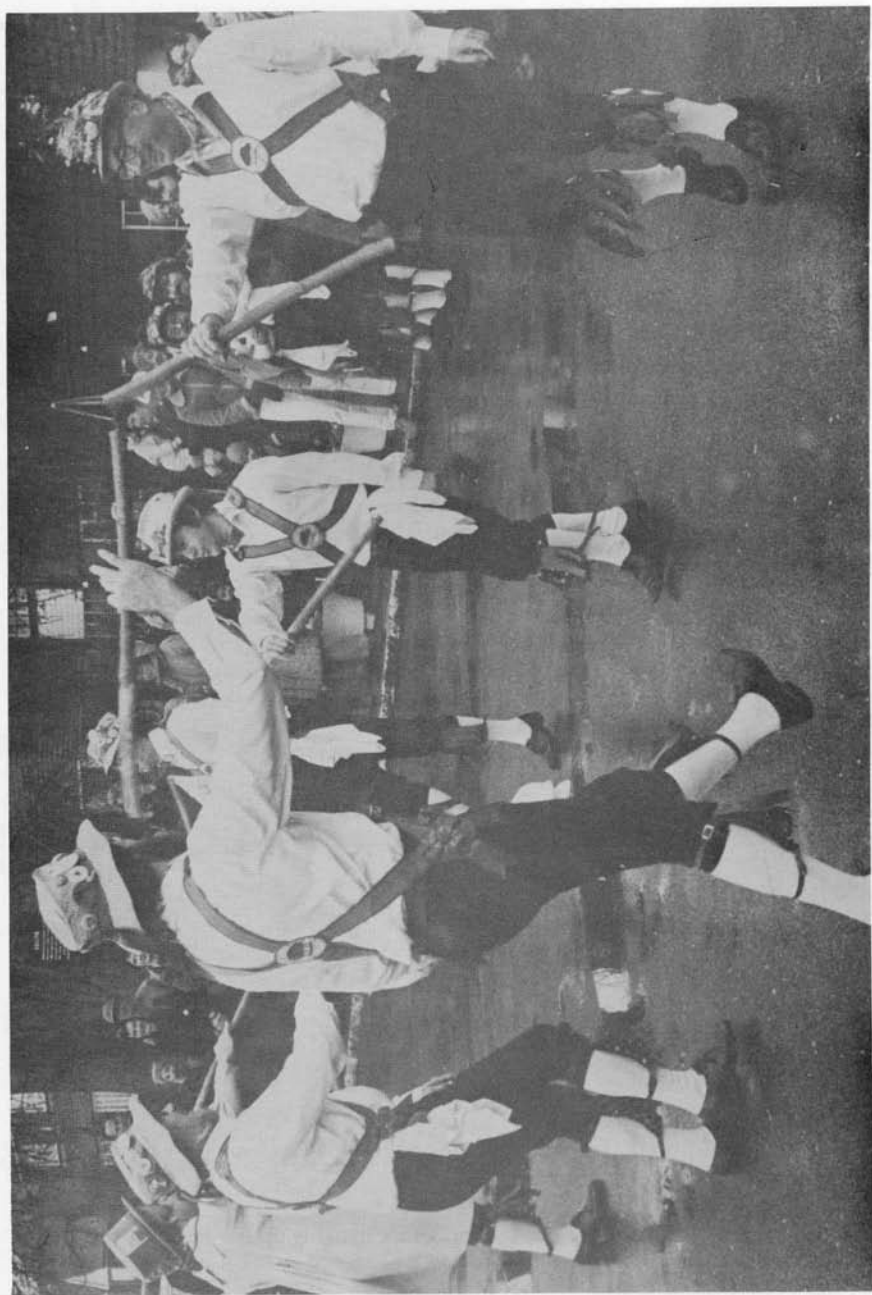
PAST SQUIRES

1953–55	Geoff Biggs
1955–57	Jim Hoare
1957–59	John Portlock
1959–61	Dick Playll
1961	Mike Nash
1961–63	Alan Skull
1963–65	Paul Setford
1965–67	John Beeston
1967–69	Derek Lockwood
1969–71	Harry Mousdell
1971–73	Eddie Upton
1973–75	Dick Playll
1975–77	Ed Bassford
1977–79	Brian Skinner
1979	David Williams
1979–81	Barry Luck
1981–83	Doug Parrott

PAST BAGMEN

1953–55	Ian Scott-Walker
1956–57	Ted Purver
1957–60	Jim Hoare
1960–64	Bill Horton
1964–69	Harry Mousdell
1969–71	Angus Morris-Coole
1971–73	Mel Dean
1973–75	Tony Humphrey
1975–78	Mike Stevens
1978–80	John Harryott
1980–82	David Millum
1982	Brian Cooper

Facing page: The Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men at The Rose and Crown, Cuckfield, New Years Day 1983. (By courtesy of The Mid Sussex Times).



Regular annual events

BOXING DAY

The Marquis of Granby, Sompting and the White Horse, Steyning. A popular Christmas spectacle is the performance of the Steyning Tipteers (Mummers) Play, giving amusement to actors and audience alike.

APPLE HOWLING

On Twelfth Night, at Furners Farm, Henfield. This ceremony is essential to ensure a good apple harvest for the coming year. It is a short, but ancient ceremony ending with cider and wassail cakes for everyone.

MAY EVE (30th APRIL)

For many years we have climbed up to Chanctonbury Ring at midnight on May Eve to dance and sing in 'The May' being a major date in the folk calendar.

MAY MORNING – SHOREHAM

To celebrate May Day itself we are out again in the early morning as guests of Shoreham Folk Dance Club. We process through the streets of Shoreham with our May blossom boughs and give dance displays at certain points.

MAY BANK HOLIDAY MONDAY

In recent years we have been pleased to be associated with The Knots of May (a local womens dance team) in the revival of Lewes Garland Day celebrations. Young children are invited to make flower garlands for judging by a local dignitary and these are then carried in procession through the town accompanied by the dancers.

SPRING BANK HOLIDAY

This event is keenly awaited by all members, as at this time we go away for a whole weekend of dancing, music, and singing, (plus a little bit of drinking!) Destinations of these tours have included Dorset, Norfolk, Yorkshire, Herefordshire and Wiltshire.

DERBY DAY – BLACK HORSE, AMBERLEY

We are always made welcome by 'Mine Host' and his customers after their day out at the Derby. Inevitably we dance 'Jockey to the Fair'.

MICHELHAM PRIORY (CoSIRA)

Annual display of rural crafts in early August at which we are pleased to add to the country atmosphere with our dancing.

AUGUST BANK HOLIDAY

This is normally the finale of our season before hanging up our bells for the winter.

Wal Jarvis



The Chanctonbury Ring Mummers at The Laughing Fish, Isfield, on New Years Day, 1982.



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FROM YOUNGER FANS

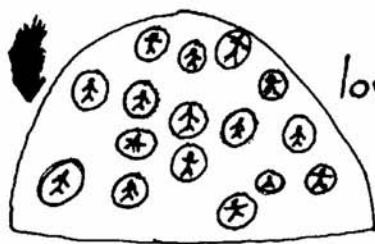
We are always happy to accept photographs or drawings from our audience. Please send to our Bagman whose address may be found on our current programme of dance.

Kingston Buci Firt School
Middle road
Shoreham-by-Sea

Dear Morris Men,



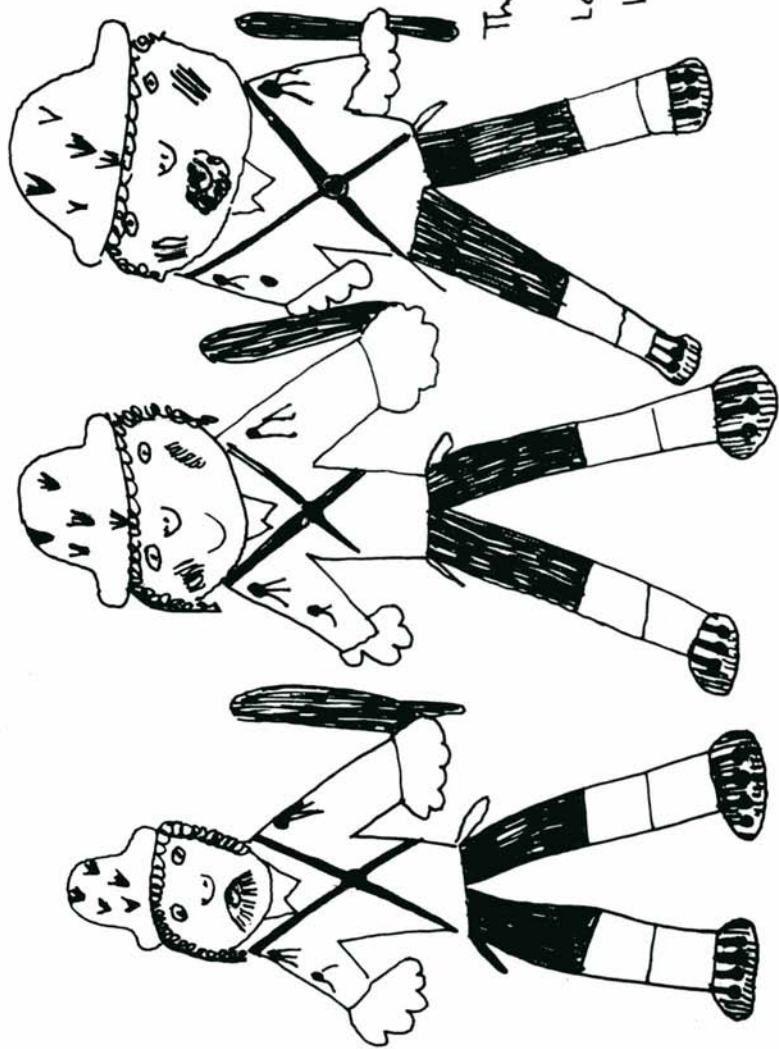
I had a very good time and my mummy said that you looked like you had grown out off your trousers and it was funny when you played leep-frog and your bells made a funny ^{noise}. And we hopped you liked our country dances.



love

from

Joanne.



Thank you for
coming
Love from
Kirsty wead
X

Joining the morris

The basic requirements for becoming a morris man must be enthusiasm and dedication, as with most organisations, the more we contribute the greater will be the rewards. Any man interested in joining, and having made contact by talking to dancers or writing to the Bagman will be invited to practice as a novice from October to May. By March the new man will know if he is likely to be proficient enough to dance in public in May; if he is not sure we will tell him.

Having reached an acceptable standard in a limited number of dances, a new man will dance in public for the first time on April 30th, May Eve. In October of that year he may be elected for full membership. A fully elected member is one who wears the Chanctonbury emblem on his baldricks. All dancers will admit there is always a new dance to learn. This acts as a great leveller to new and experienced dancers alike.

Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men are always pleased to welcome new dancers and musicians, so don't think about it – join us!

Morris men are identified by their dress or kit, the colour and design of which relates to a particular group. Many variations of kit can be seen in different parts of the country. The club badge often relates to a place or historical event. We have as our emblem the trees from Chanctonbury Ring, near Steyning. This is worn on the front and back of the baldricks of elected members.

Hat – a straw Panama becomes an expression of individuality, being decorated with badges from dance sites or gifts from our audience.

Neckerchiefs – preferably red with white spots, worn with open neck shirts.

Shirts – plain white – spares always needed.

Baldricks – crossed ribbons in the club colours of red and green, passing diagonally across the body and decorated with rosettes.

Breeches – black breeches held in place with black belt.

Socks – white. Several pairs are needed, especially when on tour.

Bell pads – made of leather and strapped just below the knees, decorated with red and green ribbons.

Shoes – black leather lace-ups with a plentiful supply of stick-on-soles.

Facing page: The Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men at The Frankland Arms, Washington, 30th April 1983.



Acknowledgements

To Dick Playll, for the valuable notes from 'Dick's Diary' which forms the nucleus of this historical account.

To Paul Setford, for many dedicated years of teaching and for having the patience to remain our Captain since 1963.

To Wal Jarvis, Paul Davis, Ed Bassford, Martin Taylor and Dick Richardson whose enthusiasm and hard work made this book possible.

To all members of Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men for their tireless efforts in supporting the club from its foundation to the present day.

To our advertisers for their invaluable support, and to The Alexandra Brewery, Portslade for the supply of Tom Becket ale for our 30th anniversary celebrations.

Here's to the next thirty years!

Doug Parrott

Further copies of this book may be obtained from our Bagman whose address may be found on our current programme of dance.



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