



The Prancing Pony

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Total ban on Morris dancing -

As the season comes to a premature end it was gratifying to see so few of you in Shrewton last week. As things stand we won't be seeing you for the finale in Tisbury either. The Camping and Caravanning Club in August has been cancelled as has the Heytesbury Village event so see you on Boxing Day which unusually is on 26 December, unless that is also put into quarantine. BUT we will have an outdoor practice next week. Details on p3.

In this week's historical edition, we have a feast of pictures. Bob Hill looks back to a time when Morris dancing was considered a great evil and reminds us that things were tougher in the days of the

great plagues of the past. He also manages to get the phrase "self-flagellation" past the editorial censors - another first for the ever-liberal *Prancing Pony*. Two Bobs for the price of one (10p in "new money") Bob Burgess also shares some vivid pictures of crazed dancers from the past, including this one by Pieter Breughel the Younger c1634, and a very early image of our old equine friend Hob Nob from 1808.

The End of Frivolity is Nigh – from our historical buildings and epidemiology correspondent Bob Hill

Following on from PP18 something more about the night sky. A good site for satellite spotting (not comets) is <https://james.darpinian.com/satellites/>

Just type your post code in and it gives you a streetview location and view of the sky and if you live on the road you can actually move to stand outside your home to watch the satellites fly by. It gives good timings for these.

Now for something different:

Three hundred and fifty five years ago this month this country was in the middle of a pandemic that was even more frightening than the present panic. It was commonly decided to be the bubonic plague – Black Death – *Yersinia pestis*, although there are still doubts raised by some historians and biologists as to whether it was some other disease such as a pneumonic form or a type of haemorrhagic fever. Perhaps Nic can give us more background or information on it?

The death rates were rather high as seen on this marker stone (pictured right) for a communal grave in East Coker, a small village just southwest of Yeovil. Today it has a population of just under 1,700 people, but in 1645 when the plague first hit it probably numbered about 2 - 300. Between June and September that year, as marked on the stone, 70 inhabitants succumbed to the disease and no amount of psalm singing, burning incense, stoning of witches or self-flagellation did anything to stop it, although perhaps the latter did make it more enjoyable for some.



The overall death rate was likely to have been somewhere between 25 – 30%, which was reasonably low compared with some places where it has been calculated rates reached 45 – 60%. When this sudden visitation of death came upon the community combined with fiery comets seen at night it would have seemed to be another portent for the end of the world due to all those other sinners out there. Some claimed it was God's judgement because Parliament had rebelled against the holy anointed King Charles the First and deposed him of His right to govern unchecked and therefore the country had to suffer for challenging Religious Writ in such matters. Perhaps those believers thought only Parliamentarians would suffer and not Royalists as well?

Neighbours feared neighbours and face masks containing aromatic herbs were commonly worn. As there were no bank cards contagion at stalls selling produce was limited by placing your money in a bowl of vinegar on the counter. One could not travel beyond your own parish boundary and all gatherings were banned, including a total ban on that great evil Morris

Dancing. Lockdown would be total and if you disobeyed it was ensured by your doors being nailed shut and you then had the choice of starving to death or taking the quick way out with the plague. It all sounds so similar to modern times, apart perhaps for the last bit of nailed doors.

Now the death rate from plague is claimed to be about 10 – 12% with the control enabled with modern antibiotics. Are we in the state of fear about Covid-19 as were the 17th century population of East Coker in with plague because we are not used to death as a common reality? In comparison Coronavirus without a remedy is almost a pussy cat compared with what our forebears have gone through.

We cannot have frivolity in PP every week!

I forgot to mention that if anybody wants to see the marker it is just at the end of the row of the Helyar Almshouses beside the path to the church.



There if a good pub just down the road, The Helyar Arms (dated 1846), which when I popped in for a quick lunch last week had an excellent draft cider (Stan's 5.5%) on a counter pump and served a most enjoyable goose and plum burger.

Yours sincerely, Bob Hill

From a different Bob , our art history correspondent Bob Burgess

A few images gleaned from the web



Overton Mummers c 1930 - blackened faces as well as tatters...



Above is an older one from Israhel van Meckenem the Younger c1440/45-1503

Next we have Dance around the Maypole by Pieter Breughel c1625



A hobnob c 1808

Dancing Plague 1518





St. John's Dance, known historically as St. Vitus Dance, was a social phenomenon involving a type of



dance mania that gripped mainland Europe between the 14th and 17th centuries. One of the most well-known major outbreaks took place in Aachen, Germany, on the 24th of June 1374, just several decades after the Black Death swept across Europe.

During the outbreak, afflicted individuals would dance hysterically through the streets for hours, days, and apparently even months, until they collapsed due to exhaustion or died from heart attack or stroke. The number of participants at any one outbreak could reach into the thousands. In modern literature, women are often portrayed as being victims of the St. John's Dance, although medieval accounts record that men, women and children were equally likely to be affected.

OUTDOOR PRACTICE

Tuesday 4 August 7.00 – 8.30pm

At Fonthill Park Cricket Club SP36EZ

<https://www.fonthillparkcricketclub.co.uk/directions>

Do not wear kit. Do bring a stick and hankies.

The bar will be open!



Found a way to get around the no music on pub premises? Including their gardens? Find a pub that has a common land green next to it, we had a great session ! Took our own seats, BUT could buy drinks, and entertain other pub goers WIN, WIN

From our ornithology correspondent

A great spot by roving twitcher Reuben "Birdie" Chappell, who saw this beauty in South Devon



A Cirl Bunting singing his head off. (Picture taken with mobile phone thru' birding scope at East Prawle. Lots of them around which is fantastic as their distribution is very restricted.)

All items for the next *Prancing Pony* to Mike Perry by Monday 3 July. This will be the 20th edition.