



The Prancing Pony

The Official Newsletter of White Horse Morris

Issue #22

<http://www.whitehorseorris.org.uk/home/4594741622>

19 November 2020

Prancing Pony – bigger than ever!

Sometime d-list celebrity, James May, has bought a half-share in the Royal Oak at Swallowcliffe and has stated that he will not permit “stuffed” Morris dancers to perform there. The local Morris side, White Horse Morris has reacted angrily to this comment and have vowed to perform Molly and Rapper Sword dances instead.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAfwfZr0EHO&ab_channel=DRIVETRIBE)

This month we run to six pages with a selection of responses from different generations of White Horse men and women about their memories of the side.

John Wippell makes a suggestion about how we could celebrate the 70th anniversary, Mike and Liz Dixon give a potted history of the last ten years, while Mike Perry looks back at his encounter with dancers in the Alps. There is also a quiz from Helen Sanderson, and some photos of Pairs.



White Horse Morris Goes Mixed

Mike & Liz Dixon

As we look forward to celebrating our 70th anniversary as a Morris side it is also time to recognise our 10th anniversary as a mixed side.

January 2011 saw the introduction of a cohort of new



members. Previously, White Horse Morris Men had for 60 years been an entertaining all-male side dancing a variety of Morris traditions with

their particular spin on them but sadly practice and dance outs were struggling with numbers. Knowing that there was a considerable amount of interest in a mixed side the time was right to look forward and give it a go.

Dress Rehearsal in Wylde Village Hall

With so many new members, thirteen in all, the majority of whom had no experience of Morris dancing the challenge was set high with the intention of the new side ‘White Horse Morris’ dancing on St George’s day outside The Bell in Wylde.

In the limited time we had, new border dances were learnt by all and some of the simpler Cotswold dances were taught to the newbies. This led to some fairly intensive practice sessions on both Tuesdays and Wednesdays both inside the hall and on the village playground to build confidence dancing outside.

Alongside learning the dances there was the need to look at the kit. A bone of contention if ever there was one! The aim was for the traditional all white Cotswold style to remain but with the introduction of border

dances it was decided to have the contrast of an all-black outfit. Our famous Rag Coats with green and blue rags would unite the two and the addition of black top hats individually styled certainly made an impression on our audiences.



Since then there have been some memorable occasions: A joint Winter Solstice celebration with Beltane at Stonehenge

followed by a spectacular flaming torch dance outside The Bell afterwards.

The regular dance outs in the local pubs with three sets up to dance – not quite up to Hammersmith Morris but quite an achievement!!

St George’s Day 2011

The camaraderie and fun that come from being part of a Festival Line up – Weymouth, Chippenham, Upton upon Severn and Bovey Tracy (where we met Beltane!)



In the last 10 years White Horse Morris has seen dancers and musicians come and go but as former members have discovered - once a ‘White Horse’ always a ‘White Horse’

More Memories from Mari Booker

Bill Bush was the registrar in Westbury. He signed my birth certificate in February 1950. I wonder if that was the first time my mam and dad (Bet and Ioan Jenkins) met him? Or more likely, dad met him at the pub near where they both lived.

We lived with an old Spanish shepherd called Alphonso, who escaped from Franco. He refused to have running water or electricity in the house, so dad had to go up to the well every day which was just outside the pub. I have some photographs of me with David Bush, Bill's son in 1951. Len (also WH) and Pearl White, lived in the same terrace as Bill Bush.

Mari

Musical Numbers Quiz

Fill in the missing words to give the song title, e.g. 1 D I F A = One Day I'll Fly Away

1) 9 T 5	9) 99 L
2) 8 D A W	10) 9000, 000 B I B
3) 3 L B	11) W I 64
4) T 5	12) L P No. 9
5) I T Y 2525	13) 50 W T L Y L
6) 1 N I B	14) I A 16 G O 17
7) 24 H F T	15) I S 3 S C S I
8) 16 T	16) 3 L M F S A W

Answers on page 6.

Italian Dancers in Les Contamines Montjoie

Many years ago, when our boys were young, we used to go to the Alps to a village called Les Contamines



Montjoie. The village is in one of the valleys that surround Mont Blanc and from the village square it is possible to see the snowy slopes leading to the peak of Mont

Blanc (4808 m) itself. Les Contamines Montjoie is not far from Chamonix and is joined to Italy by the Mont Blanc Tunnel (11.6 km / 7.215 miles long). An oddity of the Italian side of the Alps is that the local dialect is French which shows the link to the former Savoie kingdom.



In the summer there is a programme of events for tourists and we were fortunate to come across a group of Italian dancers from

the Valle d'Aosta called Les Sargaillons de Torgnon

dancing with a local French group. They were very elegant as can be seen from the photos but it was



extremely hot – about 30°C) so it was interesting to see them between dances trying to cool off. Their dance style was very formal and slow, more of a country dance. I've tried finding links but have only come across this:

Torgnon inhabitants are cheerful, lively and friendly. In a word, Sargaillon, as

they came to be known by the residents of neighbouring villages. This nickname inspired the foundation in 1969 of the folk group "Les Sargaillons de Torgnon". The group uses old work tools and various wooden implements devised and assembled by some of its members to accompany accordions in playing melodies and dances that evoke the local people's everyday life and feast days. The participants' costumes are simple and bright and are lovingly cherished as mementos of former times.

Les Contamines Montjoie is on the Tour du Mont Blanc route; a long distance route that goes from France to Italy to Switzerland and back to France. It is 170 km/110 miles long and has some 10,000 m of ascent/descent. I have done this twice, once backpacking and the other time using refuges. This was when I had my own knees!

<https://montblanctreks.com/tour-du-mont-blanc/tour-du-mont-blanc-map>

Mike Perry

Ideas for next year's 70th anniversary

Hi Mike,

White Horse' first public display (see cutting from the Wiltshire Times 21.4.51) took place at a Westbury Folk Dance Club Square Dance, Tuesday evening, 24th April 1951. The 24th April 2021 falls on a Saturday. Westbury Folk Dance Group seems to still exist, well, they have a website at least.



Could we possibly arrange something where representatives of the folk dance club are there to watch us dance outside the Laverton Inst? We might even be able to manage a performance of 'The Blue-eyed Stranger'. And if we've all been vaccinated - a Square Dance!

John Wippell

“White Horse Morris and Me”

Following the AGM, the Squire wrote to everyone *ex cathedra* requesting responses to these questions:

- What first got you interested in Morris dancing?
- How did you come to join White Horse?
- What do you like (most) about White Horse?
- What are your top six memories or experiences with White Horse?
- If you were given autocratic decision-making powers, what change would you make to the current White Horse kit?

Naturally, experience told him not to expect many if any replies, so he was astounded to receive three in the space of a few hours, all recalling vivid memories of yesteryear. The Editorial Board wouldn't mind betting that these anorakish chaps had also read the recent AGM Minutes! Then came a fourth, a fifth, a sixth and a seventh!! Keep them coming: more to follow next month.



Graham Lever (WH Retired) was the first to bounce back:

- I saw Winchester Morris in Sutton Scotney around the Coronation year, 1953. I was about 5. I thought I'd give it a go one day, and did.
- I joined White Horse Morris around 1982, around the same time as Robin Marshall-Ball, through friendship with member Peter Pike,



- of noble memory.
- I like most, the ethos of 'once a White Horse Morris Dancer, always one'. As a retired member it means a lot to me.
- Top six memories: our own Ring Meeting; annual Chalice Morris Christmas Ales; the annual exchange visits with Horwich; Coventry Ring Meeting; Ashmore Filly Loo; Ansty May Day. In no particular ranking.
- Kit? Arm Bands!!! (An 'in' joke for the oldies!).

Knotty Ash's responses came in a close second

- Working in my Fathers shop in Westbury in 1964/65, hearing music up the road and going to see what it was all about.
- I was kidnapped by Bill Bush, who forced me kicking and screaming into a lifetime's dancing.
- The comradeship and support over many years.



- The South Devon tours (very early days for me). Tours to Horwich, France, Germany, etc. The music, singing, and dancing that I have so enjoyed over the years.
- Bring back arm bands, or not, you decide.
- I think that we should elect Donald J.Trump. as Squire of the Morris Ring.

Third on the podium was “Slim” Bob Burgess

- I first joined Gloucestershire Morris about 1970 +/- - as an apprentice at Dowty in Cheltenham. One of my bosses turned out to be the squire (Pat Snelling if my memory serves me) - I also joined Herga Morris when doing the university 6 months of my sandwich course at Brunel (Acton and then Uxbridge).. Somewhere along the line I fell in with White Horse, then struggling, and ready to hand the staff back to the Ring, so White Horse Colts was formed, with black breeches under the tutelage of Nigel Bonnalack (??)...
 - Abiding memories are of the Devon tours with other Morris dancers joining us, e.g. John Watcham from Chingford, Tiny Gibbons on accordion and many others - sleeping in the village hall at Seaton (??)
 - The White Horse Christmas walks organised by Pat McGovern and others - not forgetting the walking tours.
 - Mendip Ales - Keep Turning Right we'll get there eventually.
 - Boxing Day at various venues, Salisbury, Bath Arms and later the Weymouth Arms in Warminster
 - Twinning with Westbury at Soisy sur Seine, where Richard Baker threw a wobbly with John (???) the optician
 - Our 50 year party at Sutton Veny - good to see old long lost members such as Julian Lucket on his fiddle...
 - Kit?? I still have my hat and armbands, I did have Ioan Jenkins' top hat and waistcoat - the former I think went to Knotty and the latter to John Dipper (who still plays Ioan's 'Warwick' violin) - I also have a tatter jacket from days when some of us also did Mummung Plays.
 - AND where is the White Horse Drum??? Brass body, white rope tensioners and blue and red hoops.... Where did it go???
 - I also still have the WHMM brand I made for the sticks, the badges and belt buckle I made for myself (Richard and Calvin also had buckles as thanks for their help when building my first house) - John & Sue Holman made the belts. Mine no longer fits; my slim 32" waist has expanded to 40" and trousers no longer have 2" belt loops - they are all 1½" or less.



Alison Packer and the Singing Horse

- I first became interested in Morris when I brought David to practice: he'd had a cataract operation and didn't feel comfortable driving at night. Initially I sat with the musicians and watched and sketched. Then one evening someone told me to come and dance – and I did!
- I enjoy being with the Morris as they're a lovely group of people, pretty laid back and not taking themselves too seriously. If I'm feeling low, one dance and I'm happier and re-energised. I like being involved in such a traditional activity and making a small contribution to preserving tradition. It's a good all-round fitness session too.
- A highlight has been being Hobnob. It's hard physically but great fun connecting with the public, especially children. People show interest in the origins of Hobnob, and one can of course be cheeky in disguise! Some very young children really believe in the talking horse. At one Filly Loo a group of them took me over and walked me around on a leading rein. In this equine persona I have been asked to sing 'Happy Birthday' to a toddler.....no problem.
- Attending Filly Loo and Ansty May Day have been my Morris highlights. It's so magical when that strange piping music begins, the girls in white appear and the stags begin their leaping dance.....I also loved Wassailing.
- I'm very taken with Reuben's hat on May Day, covered in blossom. And who can forget Llad's top hat (Llad was the collie before Indie) which David made for him, and he wore with such dignity.
- One very poignant memory for me: the Morris coming to David's care home just before Christmas 2019 and delighting everyone. David's hands were playing an invisible melodeon!



Ali

Nic Jones controversially speaks out on WHM kit

- I like dancing, and Morris dancing doesn't require me to bring a dance partner. Also dancing at different pubs has a benefit.
- Saw you dancing on Tisbury High Street and joined that winter.
- It is a mixed side that dances together.

- ...Eermm, difficult. Dancing in front of Westbury White Horse at the village pump festival. Weymouth dance outs. Playing boules (?) in Semley. Dancing for Dave last year. General – seeing children get involved, before they become too self-conscious/scared to dance.
- Kit? No Comment – too much of a contentious issue.

Nic

Heather Crisp blames sons

- My sons started dancing first and I enjoyed seeing them dance out but never imagined that I would do it myself.
- I agreed to go along to the first practice when the side decided to accept women dancers. I really only went to keep my sons happy, I thought I would go once and then reclaim my quiet Wednesday evenings in, in command of the remote control. I was surprised to find that I enjoyed the dancing and have been dancing ever since.
- White Horse are a friendly bunch and I have made some good friends over the last ten years.
- My first memory, which is perhaps the strongest, is the complete terror that I felt at our first dance out in Warminster Park. I tried to think through the dance (Not for Joe) and found that I couldn't remember anything. I now try not to think in advance as I am no good at it. The dances come into my head as the music plays and we set off.
- I have good memories of dancing at Stonehenge, Bovey Tracey and a few Wassails .



Heather

From Reuben Chappell and the lure of beer

- Hey Mike, Here are my answers to the first three bullet points. I can't do any more this evening, it's all too emotional.
- The short story of how I became a Morris Dancer and joined White Horse is that, as a schoolboy I was groomed by a group of my male teachers. Hypnotised by their strange droning music and subliminal messages flashed in an ancient form of monotone semaphore, I was coerced into joining their quasi-religious organisation with the promise of beer and the future life as an untouchable mystic. My purpose would be to confuse and embarrass passing strangers by reminding them of their forgotten culture.
- My mother had a longer tale. On her death bed she told me about our family Saturday shopping trips to Salisbury. On most Saturdays she would get on the No. 24 Wilts and Dorset to go shopping. My father was working or in the pub, so my brother and I had to go along with her. It was difficult to get some quality browsing with two young sons dragging and squabbling through the aisles of Marks and Spencer so she had to get rid of us. My brother was easy. He

was older than me and predictable, so she let him wander off on his own. She probably knew that he wouldn't go much further than the army surplus shops. I was more of a problem, younger and more inquisitive than my seven years older brother. Then, on a glorious May morning in 1968 her salvation came with the sounds of ancient music and the sight of unusual characters, possibly clowns or heroes from a comic strip. These warriors were leaping ten feet off the ground and weaving mesmerizing patterns in the air with crisp white bedsheets. I was clearly entranced and wouldn't leave the spot, so Mum took advantage of the situation and nipped into Pringles to buy a new head scarf.

- From then on that was it. Every Saturday she would seek out the Morris Men and dump me there while she checked out the new fashions.

- I know now that it must have been The White Horse as there were no other Morris sides in existence at that time. The movement had just begun. Little did my mother know that I had been spotted and singled out as a future disciple of the cause. The strange and distorted image of an ancient horselike God had been lodged deep into my inner workings, ready to leap up and kick any sense out of me the moment when I next heard *The Shepherd's Hey*. That would be the moment I knew I would become a White Horse Morrisman. I heard that tune in the corridors of Durrington comprehensive school, the rest as they say, is history.



- The thing I like most about White Horse Morris is the strange and distorted image of an ancient and horse like God leaping over the green downs, under a blue sky.

That was like writing a confession.
Left two three hop, right two three hop.

Reuben

This month's photo competition theme - "Pairs"



A pair of odd pairs of shoes from Mark.

Another photo for the pairs gallery with the caption: *A Pair of Dimmocks* or as a question "what unfettered pair



was lifted in this photo?" The back-story is that we were dancing where the Ground Force team was filming. Although the photo shows some Wessex men it was our gig. We were filmed lifting Charlie (couldn't do it now) in "Old Woman" and got a few moments of glory when it was screened.

This entry from Donald J. Trump (now running for election as Squire of the Morris Ring) was disqualified on numerical grounds although he complained that he couldn't understand what all the fuss over numbers is all about. After two recounts, his disqualification was upheld.



From Mike Perry – pushing the rules a bit – is a pair of photographs of White Horse and German dancers. The 2 photos are from when Tanzkreis Wunstorf visited us and were at Stonehenge and Stourhead.



Can anyone name the date and the other major side with us?

A pair of Guinea Pigs from Kate pictured with their favourite pair of cuddly toys.



Did you say “Pears” or “Bears”?

(A pair of bears, pictured here on the road to Studland)



But the winning entry comes from Tim Jones

A pair of Canada geese in flight over Langford lakes, near Wylfe.



Musical Numbers Quiz – Answers

- 1) Nine to Five
- 2) Eight Days a Week
- 3) Three Little Birds
- 4) Take Five
- 5) I the Year 2525
- 6) One Night in Bangkok
- 7) 24 Hours from Tulsa
- 8) 16 Tons
- 9) 99 Luftballon
- 10) 9 million Bicycles in Beijing
- 11) When I'm Sixty-four
- 12) Love Potion No. 9
- 13) Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover
- 14) I am 16 Going on 17
- 15) I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing In
- 16) 3 Little Maids From School are We

Christmas is a-coming

The next *Prancing Pony* is due out on Thursday 17 December, when we will feature some more responses to Mike’s questions for the “White Horse Morris and Me” treasury, so please send yours in if you have not already done so. We also hope to feature something about Mumming.

Also do feel free to write about Christmas. Thanks to editorial indecision we have two themes for the Photo competition: **Generations** and **Christmas Jumpers**.

Saint Cecilia and Christmas Pudding

The patron saint of musicians and organ-builders - St.Cecilia’s Day is 22 November, this coming Sunday. She is thought to have been a Roman maiden martyred in the 2nd or 3rd century and is often portrayed in stained glass windows with an organ. Her story is told in the Second Nun’s Tale in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales.

This year, 22 November is also the last Sunday before the start of



Advent and is known as



“Stir-Up Sunday” when every member of the family would

traditionally take their turn at stirring the Christmas pudding mixture while making a wish. Let’s wish for a good 2021.

Stop Press: Breaking News:

Donald Trump barred from election to Squire of the Morris Ring as “illegal voting” took place.

A Morris side in Wiltshire (and a bit of Dorset) is being held responsible. Their “elected”



Squire, Old Mikey said that “as a side we felt that someone with such small hands should not be let anywhere near a Morris stick and so we cast 3 x 10⁶ postal votes”.

[The picture shows Trump (left) alongside former aide Mike Dixon who he “terminated” as Bagman in 2019. Mr Dixon is currently working as a journalist for *The Prancing Pony* but was not available for comment, after he omitted Donald Trump completely from his recent article on the history of WHM since it went mixed.]

All items for the next *Prancing Pony* to Mike Perry by Friday 11 December, and preferably sooner.