

Weald of Kent Morris

We are often asked how and when Morris dancing started. There are many theories but nobody knows for sure. We do know that it is a very old custom and believe that it had its origins as a means of ensuring fertility for crops, animals and perhaps for our forebears themselves! Even today many believe that there is powerful magic in a Morris Man's hat and we would advise any young woman against wearing one.

The dances that we perform came originally from the Cotswolds but different forms of dance came from other parts of the country, notably ceremonial clog dancing from Lancashire and Cheshire and two types of sword dancing from Yorkshire, Durham and Northumberland. Cotswold Morris was traditionally danced by men and each village had its own style of dancing. Most Morris dancing had ceased by the turn of the century but luckily it was seen by the well-known folk song collector, Cecil Sharp and others who made notes on most of the dances that we do today.

Every dance has its own tune. The music was provided, in the earliest times, by the pipe and tabor. Later came the fiddle, concertina and melodeon and in more modern times, the piano accordion. The Weald of Kent Morris use all of these instruments for their dancing.

Though we have no knowledge from the past of Morris dancing in this county, one of our characters is purely Kentish. The Hooden Horse and his attendants were part of an old custom which came from the Isle of Thanet in East Kent. We took pity on this one and now he follows us everywhere. We hope he will not be too much of a nuisance to you - he means well.

Weald of Kent Morris was formed in November 1988 and first appeared in public on Mayday 1989. We practise in the church rooms Goudhurst on most Wednesday evenings throughout the winter and we dance locally throughout the summer.

Any potential new members will be made welcome.
For information ask any of the members or telephone
Tim Dwyer on 01580 240414
email timdwyer@wealdofkentmorris.org.uk

In the rare case of our not being able to perform, we don't want you to have a wasted journey – please check in advance with the publican or ring us or look at www.wealdofkentmorris.org.uk



Programme 2009

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To help you find us (and some of the best pubs in Kent!) the numbers shown next to the locations are their map references (from OS Map 188)

Saturday 11th April	Frittenden Beer Festival 12.30pm The Bell & Jorrocks, Frittenden (TQ815413) with Mad Jacks Morris
Friday 1st May	The Mayday Tour 5.32am Traditional dawn dance Goudhurst village centre (TQ723377) 8.00am The Globe and Rainbow, Kilndown (TQ700353)
Wednesday 6th May	8.00pm The Woodcock, Iden Green Benenden (TQ803315)
Wednesday 20th May	8.30pm The Lord Raglan, Rabbits Cross (TQ785471)
Tuesday 26th May	Walking tour of Tunbridge Wells with Ravensbourne Morris Men 8.00pm The Duke of York, Pantiles (TQ581387) 8.45pm The Grove Tavern (TQ584388)
Wednesday 3rd June	8.15pm The King William IV, Benenden (TQ807329) 9.00pm The Bull, Benenden (TQ809328)
Wednesday 10th June	8.30pm The Peacock, Iden Green (TQ747374)
Wednesday 17th June	8.15pm The Wild Duck, Marden Thorn (TQ763431) 9.00pm The Unicorn, Marden (TQ746445)
Wednesday 24th June	8.15pm Horsmonden Social Club (TQ700405)
Saturday 27th June	2pm Benenden Village Fete (TQ808325)
Wednesday 1st July	8.30pm The Bell & Jorrocks, Frittenden (TQ815413)
Wednesday 8th July	8.30pm The White Dog, Ewhurst Green (TQ794245)
Wednesday 15th July	8.30pm The Elephant's Head, Hook Green (TQ655358) with Motley Morris
Wednesday 29th July	8.30pm Halfway House, Brenchley (TQ681413)
Wednesday 5th August	8.30pm Castle Inn, Castle Hill (TQ691423) with Hartley Morris Men
Wednesday 2nd September	8.00pm The Green Cross, Goudhurst (TQ708371)
Saturday 31st October	2pm Cranbrook Apple Fayre (TQ776361)
Saturday 2nd January 2010	Midday Goudhurst and area tour

Which one's Morris?

Throughout the summer it is likely that you will see many different groups of morris dancers around the villages of Kent performing in a way that has been witnessed by many generations. Unfortunately there are no known traditions originating in Kent but this does not hinder the local 'sides' who perform the dances of the Cotswolds, Welsh borders and other areas of England. The costume worn by the dancers normally reflects the roots of dance; Cotswold dancers would generally wear white clothing, or simple shirts and breeches, whilst the more flamboyant northern clog dancers sport spectacular festooned headgear and gaily coloured tops.

Traditionally the appearances of the morris dancers were linked to the major festivals of the year. The coming of summer, the harvest and Christmas present occasions for the local morris side to celebrate with dance, mummers plays and song. Indeed until the 19th century the morris was performed in village churches as part of the celebration of Christian festivals. In England the history of the morris may be traced back to the 15th century and its name may well derive from the word Moorish although the dances themselves are unlikely to have originated from Moorish traditions.

Some say that the actions of the dance are to scare away the evil spirits whilst encouraging the fertility of the land and the growth of the crops, the movements of the dancers being emphasised through the use of handkerchiefs, bells, sticks and swords. To ensure further attention dancers are often accompanied by the 'Fool' or a 'Betty' as well as a 'hooden horse', dragon or other such weird and wonderful creature. The origins of such attendants are as mysterious as those of the dance itself.

The music is played by a variety of instruments ranging from traditional pipe and tabor, (whistle and drum), to concertinas, melodeons, flutes and tuba. The tunes themselves include the widely known such as 'Country Gardens' as well as the more oddly entitled 'Lollipop Man' or 'Old Woman Tossed up in a Blanket'. A good deal of the tunes and dances that are performed by today's sides rely on the notes taken down by Cecil Sharp prior to the Great War without whose efforts many dances may well have been lost.

Most sides have a main dance season that lasts from the May 1st (at sunrise) through to the end of harvest, there then follows a winter period of practise.



For up to date information and a map of locations see
www.wealdofkentmorris.org.uk