

Weald of Kent Morris

Dancing Programme 2024

Our dancing tours

Sunday, 14 th April	1.00pm The Bell and Jorrocks Beer Festival, Frittenden (TN17 2EJ)
Wednesday, 1 st May	The 36th May Day 5.31am May Day Dance - Goudhurst Church (TN17 1AL) Followed by breakfast and local dancing 12.15'ish pm Bell and Jorrocks, Frittenden (TN17 2EJ)
Wednesday, 8 th May	7.30pm The Woolpack Inn, Benover (ME18 6AS)
Wednesday, 22 nd May	7.30pm The Eight Bells, Hawkhurst (TN18 4NX)
Sunday, 26 th May	11.00am Cranbrook Goes Nuts, High Street (TN17 3HA)
Thursday, 30 th May	8.00pm The Good Intent, Farleigh (ME15 0NN) as guests of Kits Coty Morris
Wednesday, 5 th June	To be confirmed.
Wednesday, 12 th June	7.30pm The Milkhouse, Sissinghurst (TN17 2JG)
Wednesday, 19 th June	7.30pm The Star and Eagle, Goudhurst (TN17 1AL)
Wednesday, 26 th June	7.30pm The Rose and Crown, Clay Hill, Beckley (TN31 6SE) with Romney Marsh Morris
Wednesday, 3 rd July	7.30pm The Lord Raglan, Rabbits Cross (TN12 0DE)
Wednesday, 10 th June	7.30pm The Hopbine, Petteridge (TN12 7NE) with Ravensbourne Morris Men
Wednesday, 17 th July	7.30pm Halfway House, Brenchley (TN12 7AX)
Wednesday, 24 th July	7.30pm Bell and Jorrocks, Frittenden (TN17 2EJ)
Wednesday, 31 st July	7.30pm The Bull, Benenden (TN12 7NQ)
Saturday, 28 th December	The Festive Tour - please confirm details on website



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 provide 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, tuba and, sometimes, a serpent. 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.

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 our website.

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

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 hat.

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 (although there are now many women's and mixed sides) and each village had its own style of dancing. Most Morris dancing had ceased by the turn of the century but fortunately well-known folk song collector, Cecil Sharp and others made notes on most of the dances that we perform 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.

The first rural Kent Morris tour recorded took place in 1589 and one of our characters is of similarly ancient Kentish descent. 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 May Day 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



QRCode to website

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