

# **BEYOND THE BLACK BOOK WITH BERKSHIRE BEDLAM**

**A Personal View of a Modern Morris Tradition<sup>1</sup>**

**by Jameson Wooders**

Following Berkshire Bedlam's successful appearance at Sidmouth Folk Festival this summer, Jerry West and I (Foreman and Squire respectively) were interviewed by Beth Neill on behalf of *Morris Matters*. Having read the transcript of the interview, I decided that I wanted to elaborate upon some of the issues raised.

## **Background**

The origins of Berkshire Bedlam Morris date back to the mid-1970s. It can thus be seen as constituting part of the wider movement which saw many young people come into the folk scene at that time, and which in turn was largely inspired by the development of Folk Rock music from the late 1960s onwards. The young were dissatisfied with what they found. There appeared to have been a drift away from the vital characteristics of the morris: energy, youth, and spectacle. Although the Morris Ring had engendered the revival of morris dancing, it was thought (rightly or wrongly) that it had also been responsible for a rigid attitude towards innovation by encouraging a common repertoire of dances to promote the social aspects of "Ring Meetings". This included dances from the whole range of available sources and so incorporated several dissimilar "traditions". Most teams thus gave an indifferent performance in which style and competence in the trickier steps were lacking because of the technical difficulties of a "mixed" repertoire. The few jigs performed were one indication of this general lack of expertise. In short, most revival teams had ceased to question what they are doing and seemed too conformist for significant change to occur.<sup>2</sup> Certainly there was little evidence of the development of a rich variation comparable to the old village traditions.

In the past, the style of dancing varied greatly from village to village. Each "tradition" had its own way of stepping; the hand movements and slow capers were often distinctive; and the types and order of figures varied considerably. Whilst it is possible to view these differences as resulting from some vast, geographical game of "Chinese Whispers", with deviations from an "original" morris style occurring as it was passed on from village to village, it is more likely that each team took great pride in its own dancing and performance. Occasionally several teams would dance together at the great annual gatherings such as the Kirtlington Lamb Ale, and competitions were often held between teams from neighbouring villages. The competitive aspect of

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<sup>1</sup> What is it about morris dancing? Everyone seems to have an agenda, whether it is men versus women, working class versus middle class, competitive versus non-competitive, "white shoe" versus "black shoe". Everyone has their own point of view, and the historical evidence concerning other ways is often discounted or overlooked. I am no evangelist. This article is not intended to describe the "right" way or the "wrong" way: it is simply an account of *Berkshire Bedlam*'s way, and that is good enough for us. It is a "snapshot" of just one team amongst hundreds. As such, it may be of interest to others - or it may not.

<sup>2</sup> What's new? This remains equally true today, and not just about Ring teams. There still seems to be a widespread belief that what we do is *only* morris. By definition it is performed by amateurs and it therefore does not have to be very good. Indeed, I have heard it said that if a team's performance is too good, then it somehow is *not* morris!

morris dancing is generally overlooked today, but competition leads directly to innovation. Competition led to the elaboration of the “Final Figure” in the North-West morris, whilst a special innovation prize has been awarded in the John Gasson Solo Jig Competition in recent years.

## Origins

Berkshire Bedlam was formed with these original objectives:

- 1: to develop an original and true-spirited morris style using information from only one village tradition as a starting point.
- 2: to dance precisely and in an energetic fashion.
- 3: to present a generally spectacular and original performance.

The founder of the team was Jeff Bates<sup>3</sup>, who had become increasingly dissatisfied with the established morris scene until inspired (as so many at that time were) by the Gloucestershire Old Spot Morris Dancers, who appeared at Bampton on Whit Monday 1974 and subsequently. Old Spot had taken and reconstructed an entire extinct morris tradition from Longborough in Gloucestershire and presented it in a refreshingly colourful, precise and almost unbelievably energetic fashion.

The first suggestions towards the formation of Berkshire Bedlam were made in 1975, but the team’s inaugural meeting was not held until October 1976. The side consisted of students and staff from the Botany Department of Imperial College, and practices were held at the College Field Station at Silwood Park near Sunninghill, Berkshire. The enthusiasm of the student members was such that they travelled to weekly practices from central London.

The team was originally known as “Silwood Morris” and enjoyed a successful first season, at the end of which many original members finished their undergraduate courses and left the area. Efforts were then made to preserve what had been achieved and the team went “public”. A small group of new recruits was gleaned from a local folk club. In effect, the team was re-started at this time. The name was changed to “Berkshire Bedlam” and in the spring of 1978 the team moved to Wokingham.

## The Name

The name “Berkshire Bedlam” is not meant to be a faint imitation of anything else. It was suggested by the reference to “*ye bedlom morris*” in a paper by E.C. Cawte. The term seemed to express perfectly our approach to morris dancing and had not yet become synonymous with border morris. We now emphasise that there is no “s” in Bedlam to distinguish ourselves from the Shropshire Bedlams, and we threaten to turn up as a border team if we get an invitation as Berkshire Bedlams. We have discussed changing our name but it has a good alliterative ring to it, and by now we are who we are.

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<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Jeff, whose notes concerning Berkshire Bedlam’s early history have proven invaluable to the writing of this article.

## Kit

The costume, perhaps not surprisingly, was constructed along similar lines to Old Spot's, but included red, white and blue rosettes and armbands. Rosettes are worn both front and back to provide a flash of colour when we turn during a dance. The colours red, white and blue were in fact almost ubiquitous amongst the old Cotswold teams and were very appropriate in 1977, as it was the Queen's Silver Jubilee year. We also wear white shirts, white fencing breeches, white fishermen's socks, the all-important white shoes and grey top hats. We are a tall team on the whole, and the top hats emphasise our height. We definitely want to stand out in a crowd!<sup>4</sup>

## Evolution and Development

There are several possible courses which single-tradition revival sides can take. One is to reconstruct an old tradition and dance this in unvarying form. Another is to create an entirely new tradition, such as the Bantam Cocks' Raglan. Berkshire Bedlam adopted a third strategy, which was to take a traditional basis and gradually extend and adapt it to modern requirements. It might be thought of as an experiment to see how a historical tradition *might* have developed had it not died out.

The Field Town tradition (former dances of Leaffield and Field Assarts in Oxfordshire) was chosen, partly because of the large and varied repertoire, but also because the Field Town side(s) had a widely acknowledged reputation for good dancing. In 1854, for example, they won a challenge dance held at "The Pike" public house in Minster Lovell against teams from Standlake, Ducklington, Brize Norton and Bampton. There was also an element of irony: present-day teams normally dance "Field Town" in a "graceful" (for which read airy-fairy) manner, but there is strong evidence that the dancing was actually energetic and spirited. When the Travelling Morrice first performed the reconstructed Field Town dances in Leaffield, one of the old dancers (Alec Franklin) was not impressed and made it clear that the dancing was fussy and lacked vigour.

Jeff Bates went back to Sharp's notes, *The Morris Book*, Schofield's article in the EFDSS Journal and Lionel Bacon's *Handbook of Morris Dances* to see what actually had been collected concerning the Field Town dances. Berkshire Bedlam's repertoire thus began fairly close to that of the old Field Town side, but the team soon set about making up new dances and tunes.<sup>5</sup> The patchiness of the collected material meant that uncertainties about how to do certain steps or dances often arose. Berkshire Bedlam exploited these and usually chose another way from that more commonly practised. This allowed the team to develop its own distinctive style without necessarily deviating far from traditional authority. Some of the subtler stepping details underwent changes, and in some cases we deliberately developed our own

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<sup>4</sup> We take pride in our kit. We dress *up*, with the emphasis on the *up*. Our costume is our disguise. It helps us get into "character". Morris dancers *are* special. Dressing up and doing funny things puts us beyond the realm of the everyday. We can drop our inhibitions, and witnessing uninhibited behaviour can have a great uplifting effect on an audience. But no inhibitions does not mean *no shame*. It is ironic that greater freedom also brings greater personal responsibility. Riotousness must always be tempered with respectability. To appear wild and undisciplined actually requires greater discipline if one is to get away with it.

<sup>5</sup> Some of Jeff's tunes are still in use.

ways of doing steps because we thought they looked better. In other instances we achieved “uniqueness” by conforming accurately to what had been collected. We do not dance the spiral rounds or back-steps that have become characteristic “Field Town” features, for instance, because there is no traditional authority for either. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that there was an EFDSS-inspired revival of morris dancing in Leafield prior to the First World War which probably introduced some Headington Quarry influences. We are not unduly concerned about the uncertain origins of our dances - if they work, that is good enough.

## **Decline and Revival**

I first made contact with Berkshire Bedlam along with my brother Simon in September 1986. I had been dancing with Whiteknights Morris at Reading University for a year and soon became hooked. I started going to lots of festivals and workshops and decided to investigate other local teams. Although I had lived in Wokingham all my life I had not known that Berkshire Bedlam had existed. They did not seem to have a high profile and when I finally met them I did not consider that they lived up to the name “Bedlam” by any means. They did not seem especially outrageous, but they did have exceptionally high standards. Indeed, the team’s elite reputation put me off joining immediately as I did not think they would have me if I was already dancing with another team. Nevertheless, I maintained contact by going along to practices during the university vacations. Simon had remained with the team and I used that as an excuse to go along and watch.

I eventually joined Berkshire Bedlam formally in the summer of 1987. I felt jaded after Whiteknights had over-danced that year and needed a new challenge. The two teams seemed to complement each other. Although by no means what I would call a “bad” team, Whiteknights were more conventional because they wanted to have fun. Berkshire Bedlam was “fun” in a different way: it satisfied my desire to dance as well as possible. I knew I had to join when the foreman of Whiteknights described them as “the best”.

I danced with both Whiteknights and Berkshire Bedlam throughout 1988-89. At the beginning of 1990, however, several long-established members of Berkshire Bedlam decided that they had had enough of winter practices. Instead we would choose a handful of events during the summer and just practice for a couple of weeks in advance. This system lasted for two years and we were surprised to find that the standard did not really suffer. We were a small team who tended to dance in the same positions. We all knew the dances from our own positions and were familiar with everyone else in theirs. By limiting how often we met and danced out, we were able to keep the morris “special”.

But it could not last. In January 1992 the team met at “The Dukes Head” public house in Wokingham to discuss the future. Most of the longer-established dancers now decided to retire. They had formed a band (Kickshins) and decided to give that their time and energy. The newer members, however, including Paul, Simon and myself, did not want to stop and decided to continue. Ironically, the team had just gained two new recruits (Rob and Mike) who, of course, also wanted to carry on. Two experienced dancers from other teams (Jerry and Ian) joined us along with a German student named Sebastian. We did not have music, but Alan (the musician from the

“old” team) volunteered to play at practices although he did not want to commit himself to playing for us when we danced out in public. So we simply did not dance out that year! We spent all summer practising, apart from one occasion where we appeared in makeshift kit just to give Sebastian a taste of “real” morris before he returned home. Stuart (a dancer from the “old” team, who also played melodeon for Kickshins) volunteered to play for us on that occasion. The lack of regular music was a constraint, but there was also a feeling that we were not yet good enough to appear in public.<sup>6</sup>

In 1993 we managed to “borrow” a musician (Doug) every other week from another local morris team (not without some ill feeling). But at least things were beginning to come together and we enjoyed a successful season, culminating in a tour with Windsor that put the wind up Hammersmith! In 1994 we gained another dancer (Lee) and finally obtained regular musicians (Karen and Jane). Karen’s boyfriend Steve joined before going to teach abroad. To show that we were back in business we entered the Morris Dance Competition at Sidmouth. We did not win, but it was a valuable experience. We gained two more dancers (the two Malcolms) and received an invitation to Sidmouth as a town team the following year.

Although there have been some changes in personnel since (Ian has gone, John and Tim have come, and Gareth has replaced Karen as our melodeon player), it is the core of that team which remains today. Although it is now eight years since the revival, we still refer to ourselves as the “new” team to distinguish ourselves from the “old” team of the 1970s and 1980s.

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<sup>6</sup> That attitude seems incredible now. I cannot think of too many sides who would refrain from inflicting themselves upon the public in this way!

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## **Part 2**

*In part 1, I looked at the origins and early history of the team, up to the point where most of the original members left. I now want to discuss the motivation and ideology of the current side.*

### **The “New” Team**

The switch from the “old” to the “new” team has seen both continuity and change. Under Jeff Bates’ foremanship, the emphasis was on the standard of dancing. The aim was to dance as energetically as possible. The dancing was the show, and every dance was a show dance. In retrospect it might be said that we only had one gear - top gear!

When Jeff left in 1987 things began to relax, and the comic possibilities of “The Coconut Dance” (a hand-clapping dance using coconut shells, which break as they are hit together) first began to be realized. When I became foreman in 1992 I wanted to take things even further. I wanted to combine the high standards of the “old” team with the “fun” of my university side. Up to this time I had come across teams which appeared to embody only one or other of these characteristics, but very few had both. Either a team danced well but came across as somewhat straight-laced (some might say boring), or they had lots of fun but could not dance (which is equally self-indulgent). I wanted both. It became apparent that certain dances could still be danced well, but that others could be taken less seriously. Helped by the performance workshops run at Sidmouth by teams such as Seven Champions (with whom we now share some members), we realized that our dances fell into specific categories (not all necessarily exclusive). There were show and spectacular dances, stock or “filler” dances, coming-on and going-off dances, and humorous dances, all of which could add variety and contrast to our performances.

A long stand certainly requires attention to the sequencing of dances, and we try to tailor each performance to the specific circumstances of the time. We use our judgement and experience to read an audience and adapt accordingly. The individual context of a performance will influence our choice of dances. We now appreciate when to do a “show” dance or “fun” dance or fill some time with a “stock” dance.

Our approach to our dances has become even more flexible as a result. Established dances (both “traditional” in the stricter sense and made up by the “old” team) have been modified, others dropped altogether, and new dances composed. With their emphasis on height and energy, for example, we found that many of the

“old” team’s dances were simply too long. We have tended to shorten them where appropriate to make them more manageable - for an audience, that is, not just because we got exhausted dancing them!

There is certainly nothing “sacred” about our dances - they are simply dances, not rituals. Our dances are actually in a constant state of flux. We dance them out when they reach equilibrium, but they can always undergo subsequent alteration in the face of changing influences. A good example is “The Wheel of Fortune”, a rather long coming-on dance inherited from the “old” team. We wanted to perform it as part of a ceilidh spot at Warwick Folk Festival in 1998 because it has an interesting shape, but it would have put us well over the time limit with the other dances we wanted to do too. We made the decision to cut one of the sequences, with the result that we now have a “better” dance, which we perform much more frequently.

This is not to denigrate the “old” team by any means. We can only do what we do today because we have been through that phase in our development. Perhaps we do not get as much as height in our dancing as we used to<sup>7</sup>, but I’m not convinced that we are more relaxed about standards; it’s just that we have more to think about. I like to say that I have gained “gravity” as I’ve got older. It means that whilst I may not get off the ground as much as I used to, I can do things now as a performer which I could not do when I was eighteen.

The discovery of “fun” dances in particular has been a revelation for us. Humour provides contrast and variety in a performance, not just at a solo stand. At massed stands teams generally perform their show dances, as it is the one chance they get to impress. But after a while, even “show” dances can end up looking very similar. A humorous dance will grab the audience’s attention, wake it up, and hopefully make the team more memorable than all the others. Our “fun” dances are a way of making us different.<sup>8</sup>

In Berkshire Bedlam, we want to stand out from the rest. We *are* competitive. We want to be the best. We want to get the biggest round of applause. Not only does this flatter our egos, but it also affirms that we have impressed and/or entertained the audience: that they have marvelled at our dancing, laughed at our fooling, or simply taken the piss out of our posing. In short, we want to be watched. Our hobby is *showing off*, and morris dancing is merely a means to an end.

Our public image is very important to us, and we have thought a great deal about how we present ourselves to the public. When Jerry took over as foreman, he asked the team how we wanted to appear. As amateur? As self-indulgent? As ridiculous or embarrassed? Of course not: we want to appear as fun, lively, extrovert, exciting, boisterous, arrogant, and loud!<sup>9</sup> I do not think many teams on the whole

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<sup>7</sup> At our 21st birthday party, the “old” team danced for the first time (for some of them) in five or six years. Even then some of them were still getting higher off the ground than we do.

<sup>8</sup> Conversely, of course, a well-performed straight dance will stand out amongst self-indulgent teams who are messing about.

<sup>9</sup> Basically an exaggerated version of ourselves!

think enough about how they appear to the general public. It's not that they don't care exactly, it's just something which is very rarely considered.<sup>10</sup>

I believe that morris dancing is ultimately about self-expression. This is on two levels. First, I can express myself as an individual. Second - and more important - I can make a statement about belonging to a group of other people - my "gang" if you like.<sup>11</sup> Our dances thus make a statement about us. They say who we are and reveal to an audience our aims in dancing the morris. That is why we have developed a number of new dances recently. I guess the "traditional" Leafield dances did not permit us to express ourselves fully, so we had to make up our own dances. Only *we* could come up with *our* new dances. It is a deliberate policy to develop new dances. The creation of a new dance helps team bonding. It also stops us getting bored.<sup>12</sup> Our innovative streak suffered during the transition from the "old" to the "new" team as we had to concentrate on teaching the new members the old dances and jigs<sup>13</sup>, but we now aim to create at least one new dance every year. There is also undoubtedly an element of showing off in that we *can* make up new dances.

In general someone (usually, but not necessarily, me) comes to practice with a new dance about three-quarters complete. It then becomes "team property" and we all play around with it, experimenting and refining the ideas. Everyone has a chance to have his or her say. Even if a dance does not ultimately work out, we do not consider that time wasted.

Ideas for new dances<sup>14</sup> come from a diverse range of sources: West End stage shows, the Generation Game, overseas dance troupes, for example, in addition to watching other teams and workshops.<sup>15</sup> Often several influences are incorporated into

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<sup>10</sup> It seems to be generally accepted today that morris is something to *do* rather than to *watch*. Although morris dancing is implicitly a "spectator sport", how many active morris dancers actually go out to watch other teams? This shows how little audience awareness matters to most teams. They assume that the audience will accept what it is given, and it does not really matter if no-one watches as long as they enjoy themselves. By taking the trouble to go out and watch other teams, I certainly became much more aware of good and bad habits, and I make sure that my team copies the good bits and - just as important - avoids the bad bits.

<sup>11</sup> "Gang" is a very appropriate word. First and foremost, we are a group of friends who just happen to have been brought together by the morris. Membership of the team is more dependent upon how well we all get along than on dancing ability alone (although obviously that helps). It can occasionally be difficult to maintain a balance between the social aspects of the team and our professed high standards of performance. Sometimes good dancers have not fitted in, whilst not-so-good dances have got along well. It has even been said that our set contains six different, individual styles when we dance, but somehow it works nevertheless. Roy Dommett has described us as "scrappy", but if he means "scrappy" in the same sense as Bampton or Eynsham, then I can live with that!

<sup>12</sup> We also run the "Bunfight" every year, a ceilidh for our friends and ourselves. We always do a spot. We enjoy dressing up in silly costumes and making people laugh. It helps to stop us taking ourselves too seriously. The creation process for the spot also takes a considerable amount of time and adds variety to our practice season, possibly in a similar way to other Cotswold teams taking up Border or Molly during the winter.

<sup>13</sup> Jigs are still important to us. Everyone (or at least every pair) has their jig. When teaching the old jigs to the "new" team, however, we experimented with formations and often turned them into "set" dances. We have an eight-man dance ("Arse about Face") which was - and still is - a very nice two-man jig ("The Back-to-Front Jig").

<sup>14</sup> And Bunfight spots!

<sup>15</sup> There does not appear to be much new morris around nowadays, but I cannot overestimate how important it was for me to go out and watch other teams when I first started dancing. It gave me such a wide knowledge and experience of styles and traditions.

a new dance, but they are put together in such a way that the dance nonetheless fills a single niche in our repertoire. It is probably true to say that there is very little “new” morris. After all, there are only a finite number of figures to be done using six dancers in two rows of three. But I do like to think that we can put together old patterns in new ways.

The idea for a dance can change dramatically once it has become “team property”. “The Mazurka” was originally meant to be a fighting dance to take the place of “Old Marlborough” and complement “Albemarle’s Hop”, but using a 3/4 time. It was based loosely on “Sweet Jenny Jones” from Adderbury, but incorporating the Berkshire Bedlam heel-and-toe step. The hey is based upon that from the Moulton tradition. Originally I had wanted “The Mazurka” to be danced to the tune “The French Assembly”. The idea was that the dance should progress from hand-clapping through foot-stamping on to face-slapping, in the usual buffoon-like manner. The fact that the tune was in 3/4 time would give it an added clockwork feel. But Gareth did not know “The French Assembly” and played “The Mazurka” instead. The following week Gareth came to practice having learnt “The French Assembly”, but by then the team had got used to “The Mazurka”. This is a less snappy tune and it no longer felt appropriate to progress on to the buffoonery: we kept the choruses to the simpler hand-clapping.

“The Dance of the Little Fairies” is the best example of a team effort. I had developed the heel-and-toe and back-steps in 5/4 time having been inspired by the Seven Champions’ “Take Five”. Lee then remembered a good sticking chorus from one of Roy Dommett’s Wantage weekends, which we rapidly adapted to 5/4 time. Finally, Jane came up with Herbie Flowers’ “The Dance of the Little Fairies” to replace the corrupted version of “The French Assembly” which Seven Champions occasionally use for their dance.<sup>16</sup> The rest, as they say, is history.

I’m not sure how I would feel if I saw another team performing one of our dances. The standard response is that I should feel flattered, but I know that I would actually be quite indignant. It is not just a dance, a collection of steps and figures, which has been taken, but something deeper, a statement of who we are which does not belong to anyone else. That may sound precious, but it is true nonetheless.

## Silly Dances

“The Coconut Dance” was our first “fun” dance but it soon began to be over-used. I remember one Rochester Sweeps Festival where we did it about three or four times because all the other teams were generally doing very similar dances. After this we started looking at new ideas, such as “The Mazurka”. Ironically, “The Mazurka” is probably the dance which diverges most from our usual style, but it also encapsulates best our attitude to morris. It was designed to be a silly, throwaway little dance, a bit of fun. But a good fun dance must nonetheless still have a solid foundation. It is true to say that good dances are based on movement, not dramatization. The dance must work on a purely dance level as there will be times when the humour will not work or may be inappropriate.

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<sup>16</sup> I’m determined to get a dance to that tune somehow!

The audience certainly needs to know what is “correct” before they see the humour. A “fun” dance needs to build towards a climax. It’s useful to have a *range* of possible silliness. How far a joke is taken will depend on how receptive the performers and audience are on that specific occasion.

Our definition of a “humorous” dance is thus fairly flexible. It depends on the circumstances. Berkshire Bedlam’s fighting dance, “Albemarle’s Hop”<sup>17</sup>, is usually regarded as a “show” dance when performed outside, for there is an interesting hey in which the dancers form a line across the middle of the set, all turning at different times as if by clockwork. If it is raining, however, and the dancing can only be done indoors, then “Albemarle’s Hop” becomes a “fun” dance as there is usually much pushing and shoving as we attempt to form the line in a confined space. The humour is derived from keeping the dance going at all costs, in spite of the lack of space.

In humorous dances the whole team acts like a *collective* fool. Like jigs, humorous dances depend to a greater extent on the personality of the performers, who must therefore be confident in what they are doing. Confidence and competence permit improvisation. This may sometimes lead to mistakes, but if we are honest about them mistakes can actually enhance a performance.

“Jolly Jockey Sticks” arose out of the last Wantage Weekend. It has a non-stop stick-throwing chorus. Even the best dancers are going to drop a stick occasionally and it is rare to get an entire chorus right. Because of this we were initially reluctant to take it out, and we very surprised by the reaction when we eventually performed it in public for the first time. The audience liked it because they saw us dance well and then we tried this dance: they applauded when we got it right, and they applauded even more when we got it wrong! I don’t think anyone could have expected how well “Jolly Jockey Sticks” would be received, but it says a lot about our strengths that we can contemplate including a dance we cannot even get right!

It is true to say that we can only devote energy to fooling around in our dances if we are not using it to think about things such as stepping, hand movements, or whereabouts we should be at any given time. It is said that the fool was traditionally the best dancer in a team. If we are *all* to act as fool, therefore, we *all* have to be the best dancers.

Showmanship comes with experience. Roy Dommett has contrasted beginners, who are controlled by the dance, with experienced performers, who *express themselves* through the dance. Tony Barrand makes an analogy with social dance. We do not go to ceilidhs to learn long, complicated figures in which our whole attention is devoted simply to getting through. Instead, we want to do easy, familiar dances that allow us to make the best use of our energy - that is, flirting with our partner. In display dances such as the morris, we should flirt with the whole audience.

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<sup>17</sup> “Albemarle’s Hop” is another dance that has been shortened by the “new team”. We felt that it was too long so we rarely danced it out, but we were also loath to drop it from the repertoire because of its unique characteristics. After cutting out one of the figures we again think that we have a better dance. Indeed, it actually makes more *sense* now, and it is likely that this dance will be the subject of further development in the future.

## A “New” Tradition?

In recent years we have developed dances in 3/4 time (“The Mazurka”) and 5/4 time (“The Dance of the Little Fairies”). We find it easier to develop something completely new (although firmly based in the “Bedlam” tradition) than, for example, to introduce steps and figures from other recognized morris styles. Indeed, with the changeover in membership during the 1990s, we no longer regard our style as “Field Town” or even “based on Field Town” (although we are loath to sever the ties entirely). It is now *our* tradition. It has its own internal structure. There are areas where we feel free to make up completely new things and other areas where we would not mess about.<sup>18</sup> Introducing a new heel-and-toe step is fine, but we would not tamper with the double-steps in a dance. Our heel-and-toe dances provide variety in stepping. It might even be argued that our double-step and heel-and-toe dances constitute two different traditions, a bit like teams who dance a “mixed” repertoire, but that might be stretching things too far.

We have created a modern, evolving, living morris, hopefully of interest to a modern audience. We believe that teams are more interesting when they perform their own dances. They *think* more about what they are doing, usually resulting in a higher quality of performance. The creative process leads to greater team bonding and pride.

Black face teams (Border and Molly) have generally been more flexible in their approach to making up new dances because so little original material survives. Cotswold teams tend to have had a rather more rigid approach because there is greater documentation. But whilst we should certainly respect the past, we should not have too much *awe* for it. Today the morris is mature enough to make any source its own.

## The Future

I believe that we have more in common with the “traditional” teams than most revival sides, even though we are a thoroughly modern morris. Unfortunately, like most “traditional” teams, we may ourselves be extinct in five or ten years’ time. It will be our 25th Anniversary in a couple of years’ time, and we are not getting any younger. We need some new men. It is sad to see so many contemporary sides go through hard times and disappear. Whilst there may be no Berkshire Bedlam in the future, however, we are generally optimistic about morris dancing. Dog Rose Morris look like they will be around for some time<sup>19</sup>, and there are a number of young people getting involved in the folk scene in bands. Some of them may turn to morris. There may have to be a huge decline in the existing morris scene before the new wave takes over, but such is the way of these things. I appear to have come full circle. Isn’t this where I started?

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<sup>18</sup> We do seem to have a different sort of hey in each dance. This is one area where we don’t mind experimenting: the hey is fair game. Indeed, we even had to invent a new type of hey for a basic sidestep and half-hey dance we’ve just developed.

<sup>19</sup> Paul (who has been in the team longer than anyone) compares Dog Rose to how Berkshire Bedlam danced when he first joined.