









MORRIS MEN OF BAMPTON

HIP-SHAKING, gyrating youth have established a new mode of dancing since the pop groups monopolised the discos.

But at Bampton the scene may be changing — at least as far as the lads of the village are concerned.

Having struggled at times to maintain its well-known tradition, the town is now experiencing a revival in Morris dancing — and it is the young men who are partly responsible.

Two independent teams have kept the tradition alive, relying on a minimum hard core of adult dancers. Now, both teams have a second string of junior

dancers (there are six in a team) and others are being trained.

Mr Arnold Woodley, Squire of the team he claims to be the traditional one, says "We have more than enough lads at the moment although some do drop out from time to time.

"I first started training youngsters in 1951. I put the word around and had about 30 boys turn up. I didn't know which way to turn. Naturally they thinned out and I was left with eight good dancers.

"I don't know quite what the attraction is for youngsters in Morris dancing.

My mother told me that when I was about two or three years old I used to watch the dancers, and one day I grabbed a handkerchief and tried to join in the dancing on the green."

Bampton's history of Morris dancing goes back a long, long way. Nobody knows just when or how it started but today the town's dancers are in great demand all over the country.

The Morris dancing season usually starts at Bampton at Whitsun, with dancing in the streets. This year tours are planned as far afield as Birmingham and Minehead, as well as nearer home in the Thames Valley area.



The Traditional Bampton Morris dancers in action, Whit Monday, 1971. Left to right, Robin Connaughton, Bernie Basson, Fred Scott, Colin Baithe, Andrew Carruthers, Colin Knight, Arnold Woodley,

fiddler and Squire of team, Frank Purslow, accordion. Son Townsend (fool) and Ben Tanner (cake carrier) who complete the team are not in the picture.





Colin
Bathe

Fred
Scott

Trevor
Hewitt

Martin
Hewitt

Andrew
Bathe

Roy
Hewitt

Alec
Wixey

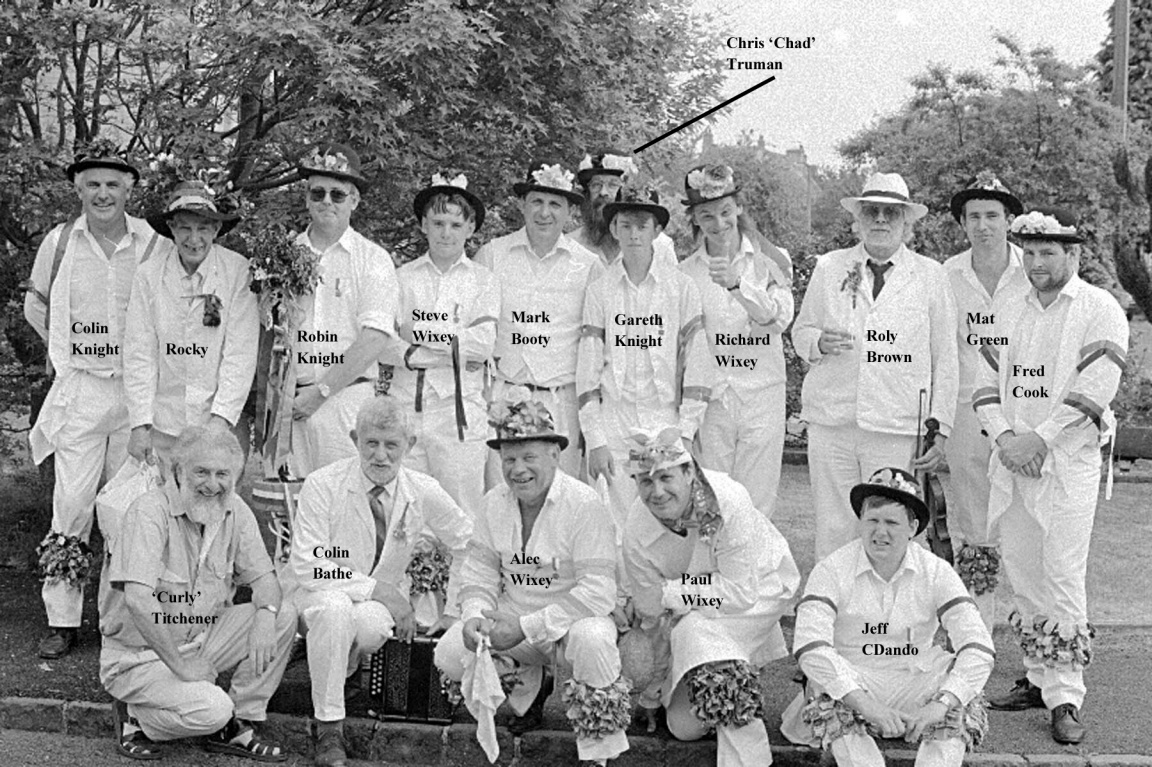
Colin
Knight

Paul
Wixey

Alex
Titchener

John 'Curly'
Titchener

Richard
Wixey



Chris 'Chad'
Truman

Colin
Knight

Rocky

Robin
Knight

Steve
Wixey

Mark
Butty

Gareth
Knight

Richard
Wixey

Roly
Brown

Mat
Green

Fred
Cook

'Curly'
Titchener

Colin
Bathe

Alec
Wixey

Paul
Wixey

Jeff
CDando













Two Bampton Morris dancers:

Colin Bathe and David John Titchener

Colin Harold Bathe died on 8 May 2011 at the age of seventy-three. His close friend David John Titchener, widely known by the nickname of 'Curly', preceded him by just a few months, dying at the age of seventy-six on 20 January 2011. Both were well known in the area around their home town of Swindon for numerous activities relating to sports and motorized vehicles, but it is their involvement with traditional music, Morris dancing, and song for which they will be remembered by readers of this journal. They shared many of the same musical interests and had 'discovered' traditional culture together.

Colin and I had spoken on numerous occasions over many years, but one Sunday evening in 2006 we sat in the courtyard of the Morris Clown in Bampton and, with a minimum of prompting, he outlined the evolution of his relationship with the local tradition. He first got interested via a folk and blues club in Swindon. His main musical interest was jazz, with the blues aspect having the greatest appeal. After about three years' attending and performing, club organizer Ted Poole arranged a day at which Cyril Tawney and Bob Davenport gave talks, encouraging people to go out into the countryside and collect material.

Colin and 'Curly' came over to Bampton quite by accident, knowing nothing about its Morris dance tradition. They went into The Jubilee and started chatting to landlord Reg Pratley, telling him what they were interested in. Within a few minutes he was singing to them, mainly snatches, one being 'Butter and Cheese and All'. He then produced sheets on which the words were written: Peter Kennedy had given them to him! Reg took them across to the Eagle, where Frank Purslow and Francis Shergold used to play in the bar.

The landlord was a one-row melodeon player, and after time had been called he would cover the pumps and bring his instrument out into the bar and play. Colin was intrigued by the melodeon, sold his guitar, and bought one. He became a regular at these sessions, but would always leave his instrument in the car, never bringing it in until the time he was invited. The first tune that Colin remembered learning was the Bampton version of 'Nutting Girl'.

Colin and Ivor Clissold started doing some work on the Alfred Williams manuscripts in Swindon Library. Every couple of weeks they would bring their efforts over to Frank Purslow, for criticism and approval, and following the

meeting would attend the Shergold Morris practice. There were occasions when they were short of a man and Colin was invited to join in. When Arnold Woodley, under the prompting of Frank Purslow, revived his team in 1970, following a break of a decade, Colin was invited to join as one of the regular dancers. That association continued until the well-known confrontation during the weekend early in 1974 when both Bampton sets were invited to perform at the Albert Hall Festival. The upshot was an irreparable rift between Arnold and his men, and the appearance on Spring Bank Holiday several months later of a third dance side.

The Morris set for which Colin had played for so long, never missing a year since first joining in 1970, clearly felt his loss over the dancing weekend this year (2011). For a long period the side has contained at least three men who are fully able to accompany the dances, but they almost always deferred to Colin. His absence was acknowledged on the Monday by each dancer wearing a black armband.

‘Curly’ Titchener was never a regular dancer in the Bampton set, although he knew the dances and at practices was as nimble as any man. Instead, he acted variously as cake-carrier and fool, as circumstances dictated, with his genial personality serving him well in both capacities for a good number of years.

He and Colin were instrumental in forming the Morris 8 Band, which played for scores, if not hundreds, of barn dance events. In this context Colin provided the melody line on melodeon while ‘Curly’ maintained a rock-steady rhythm on a cut-down drum kit. His heart attack in 2003, from which he fully recovered, forced him to retire from Morris activity, but he was usually to be seen out and about in Bampton on subsequent Spring Bank Holiday Mondays.

In a brief obituary it is impossible to document adequately a lifetime of achievement in so many diverse fields. For readers of this journal the salient details have been summarized, but scarcely do justice to the influence of both men on the local tradition.

KEITH CHANDLER

South Leigh

MO768B Bampton Traditional Morrismen's annual party in Bampton WI Hall (later called the Village Hall) in 1976. Musicians left to right on the stage:- Trevor Hewitt (bell-bottom trousers only showing), Mathew Green, Andrew Bathe, Frank Purslow, Colin Bathe, Curly (John) Titchen and Rod Straddling.

MO1904 Bampton Morris Men 1999. Back row left to right:- Richard Buckingham, Mathew Green, Colin Knight, Anthony Wixey, Bruce Piercy, Gareth Knight, Colin Bathe, Roly Brown, Alec Wixey, Chris Truman (Chad), Ian Packer, Paul Wixey. Front row left to right:- Jeff Dando, Mark Booty, Richard Wixey, Matthew Howes, Steven Wixey, Robin Knight, Rob Fidler.

MO1BED Bampton Morris Men. Back row left to right:- Colin Bathe on melodeon, Colin Knight, Mark Booty, Paul Wixey, Gareth Knight, Steven Wixey, Mathew Green, Alec Wixey, Chris Truman (Chad), Richard Wixey. Front row L-R:- Rob Fidler, Jeff Dando, Robin Knight and Alistair Cook (Fred). Circa 1990/1

MO1CA1 Musicians with the Bampton Morris Men L-R Colin Bathe on melodeon, Mathew Green on fiddle, Roly Brown on fiddle and Alistair Cook (Fred) on melodeon. 1992.

MO2607 Colin Bathe playing the accordion for the Bampton Morris Men c2000

MO2B26 The Bampton Morris Men. Back L-R Collin Knight, Ernie Hunt, Robin Knight, Garath Knight, Steven Wixey, Roly Brown, Alistair Cook (Fred).

front.. Collin Bathe, Alec Wixey, Paul Wixey, Jeff Dando, Richard Wixey (Leaning). Ernie became the self appointed coat carrier kitted out by Dora Townsend. Late 80s.

MO2B99 Roly Brown on fiddle and Colin Bathe on melodeon.

MO39D2 Morris musicians; Arnold Woodley, Frank Purslow and Andrew Bathe in Glebeland playing for the Bampton Morris Men

MO3B22 Back row L-R:- Mark Booty, Richard Buckingham, Colin Knight, ??, Paul Wixey, ??, Chris Truman (Chad), Roly Brown, Mathew Green, Jeff Dando. Front row L-R:- Alec Wixey, Colin Bathe melodeon, Robin Knight cake, Alistair Cook (Fred) melodeon.

MO3E1F Back row L-R: Richard Buckingham, Collin Knight, Garath Knight, Paul Wixey, Richard Wixey, Chad Truman, Roly Brown, Mathew Green on fiddle, Jeff Dando. Robin Knight. Front...Collin Bathe on melodeon, Clive Stevens, Alec Wixey, Joanna Stevens, Alistair Cook (Fred) on melodeon. Late 1990s.

Untit110 Bampton Morris Men. musicians 1999. L-R Roly Brown, Mathew Green and Chad Truman, front row L-R Jeff Dando and Colin Bathe.

a122 Article in 'Witney Gazette' January 20th 1972. 'Morris Men of Bampton'. Robin Connaughton, Bernie Basson, Fred Scott, Colin Bathe, Andrew Carruthers, Colin Knight, Arnold Woodley (Fiddler and Squire), Frank Purslow (melodeon).

B0010 Traditional Bampton Morris Men. Whitsun 1988. Back row L-R:- Robin Knight cake carrier, Mathew Green, Bruce Piercy, Gareth Knight, Ian Packer, Chad Truman, Mark Booty, Colin Knight, Richard Wixey, Paul Wixey. Front row L-R:- Colin Bathe melodeon, Jeff Dando, Rob Fidler fool, Alec Wixey and Alistair 'Fred' Cook.