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much as the young hands had to study their employers and their homes and work in general. The old ones had and put more spirit into it.

1853

Not more than 60 years ago, there were several sets of dancers, Ducklington, Leafield, Filkins, Buckland and others keeping their sets in full swing. There are men left today who well remember them. I have heard my grandfather and old, big uncle Charlie Tanner telling some good tales when 3 sets have met at one village club and dancing in competition for money stakes and then finishing up at night with their fists for mastery. They would chuckle in the telling, "Ah but we held our own with the best of 'em. and had most money to bring away". The old style of dancing was much the best, and it is a pity the old, much loved, "Wit and Dub" couldn't be brought back and its wonderful players with it for without the slightest knowledge of much education or musical talent, the easy but graceful step to time was a marvel and some rare good players. Oft times in the old days the difficulty was to get a musician to play to them; dancers there were plenty. I have known my grandfather hire horse and trap and get a man from Filkins, Bradwell and other places for which they had to pay lodging, food and all expences and 8 or 10s. for his day's work, and most likely get half a crown each themselves; but they did it then for the love of the old thing (but times have changed, the next generation of morris dancers may do better but they can never beat the old ones or their method).

I will now try and put down in simple language, without music or talent, the tunes, dances and methods as they were handed down to me. Although there are about 6 very old jigs and six-handed dances gone in my time. We have used about 25 dances comprising of broomstick, pipe and sword dancing jigs and six-handed dances. I will take the names of all and try and explain their different movements and forms of stepping, whether jig or otherwise. The names of the dances now used are as follows

Six-handed Dances

1. The Maid of the Mill
2. Constant Billy
3. Trunkles
4. The Rose Tree
5. The Bride In Camp (Brighton Camp or Girl I Left Behind Me)
6. Johnny So Long at the Fair O
7. The Nutting Girl
8. Bobbing Around
9. The Highland Lary
10. The Shepherd's Hey
11. Glorishears
12. The Harvest Moon
13. Flowers of Edinburgh
14. Green Garters.

Two-handed or Jig Dances

1. Lumps of Plum Pudding
2. Old Tom of Oxford
3. The Nutting Girl
4. Princess Royal
5. Jogging to the Fair, O.
6. The Tinkers Hoard

The 3 tunes used as pipe broom and sword dances are the Keel Row, Green Bushes and Banbury Bill. These are all I can think of for the time present.

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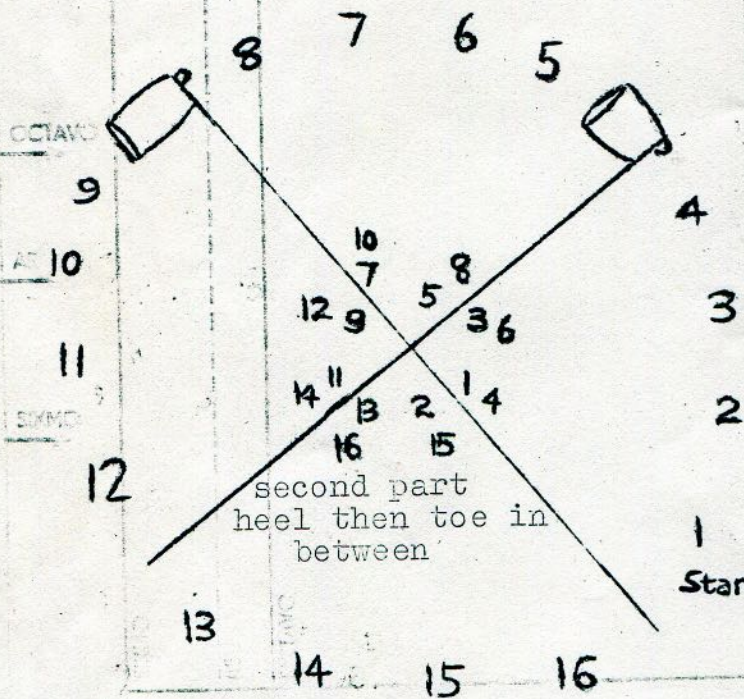
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Now comes the pipe dance; always done with two; long Churchwarden or long pipes but now rather difficult to get. A few years ago there were some really good pipe dancers. In my grandfather's time there were 4 or 5, but only perhaps one out of a dozen ever got clever enough to master it to perfection. In my time, the first year that Dr. Prall was sworn in Club doctor at the Wheatshaf Club about 22 years ago, my uncle Alfred Taylor, then an old dancer about 55 years of age, was quite an extraordinary good dancer. They were dancing in competition at the Club barn. None would take him on but myself, being fool at the time. But unfortunately he twice broke a pipe so of course he had to own defeat. I felt quite sorry for him for it was a bit of bad luck. Today, there are not many get to master or tackle the dance properly, although we have still two good men at the game, for it is decidedly a hard one to grasp. There are 16 bars in each part, each part being played twice over. I will try and show and explain the dance in its simple form, it being a two-handed dance, each man taking the part twice over. First part dancing round the pipes; next part, first toes then heels; as near into the corners of pipes when crossed as possible. This is the position of pipes when placed into position for dancing

Half round and back - change next time otherway

16 bars each part. A matter of quite indifference how you place pipes - a matter of taste. The swords being used similarly. Broom stick dances vary, some doing the same dance quite differently - you seldom ever see two do it alike, being a much simpler and easier dance. I have seen some good dancers of late years.



Today there is only one of the old whittles left, but to my knowledge no dub, the last one being broken up as a plaything to amuse a then little boy, Johnny Baston. I have seen accounts in books and in the paper where writers have always spoken of the "Wit and Dub" called and spoken of as the "Tabor and Pipe" as far back as the year 1609; but not more than 60 years ago there were several good pipe and dub players. I can remember 3 different players myself not more than 40 years ago. An old lady at Alvescot, old piper Rouse's daughter, still keeps her father's. He used to play to the Bampton morris men.

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~1891
nb. 1856

~1853
~1873
(aged 5)
w/ his

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I will now mention a few of the oldest dancers and players that are remembered today by my uncle Harry and James Portlock, the two oldest left.

Players:- with Wit and Dub.

- Bob Shurey, Buckland Marsh Berks 1840
- Old Rouse, Alvescot Oxon about 1848
- Richard Ford, Bampton Oxon about 1851
- old Mr. Potter (Stanton Harcourt) Oxon about 1856

Morris dance fiddlers there were many, but still remembered are a few as follows:-

- Robert Batt, Bampton about 1858
- Tommy Louis, out of Berkshire from 1862 till 1870
- Jim Provis, Bampton
- old fiddler Butler, Bampton 1876
- Dick Butler his son about 1880
- till I took his place in 1899

There have been a score during that period I have not mentioned, for they were put to often and were glad to get a man from any direction. The old dancers would say a fresh man generally brought a new tune. But my opinion is that there were a lot could play the wit and dub a bit but there were only a few really good players. Oftimes a shoemaker, a tinker, hive-basket or chair-bottomer or pig-butcher, a man of brains and wit, fashioned and made his instrument out of his mind's eye, as it were, was no scholar, not knowing an A from a bull's foot.

Starting work at 6 years of age, they are the men I claim the word wit ~~was~~ title for. It was brain and a gift, tis clear. Myself, never having a single lesson, I learnt the tunes and can play them on half a dozen different instruments, but the old ones were far before me and the dancers too, for they took a deep, keen interest in the old revel, more than the young ones will ever do again; although I do not condemn them, for everything is quite different in every way. I have composed several ditties and wrote several pieces of and about the morris and my mates in general. I will put down a few scraps and pieces whilst my memory serves me. It may or may not be of use or service in the near future - my uncles and oldest friends are fast dying out. In 40 years the population has decreased from 1700 to now about a 1000, so a few are departing

1873
-1913
8th 508

I will now mention a few of the old dancers, from about the year 1840, as long as the oldest living members left today can remember, down to last year:-

George Wells senior, Charles Tanner, Billy Wells, Tommy Wells, three brothers - Tommy, Jim and William Portlock, John and Robert Batts - brothers, William Provis, Richard Sperring, George Brooks, William Wiggins, Henry Radband, George Wells junior, Charles Tanner, John May, Henry Dixey, Steve Tanner, Jim Tanner, Thomas Tanner, Jim Jewe, John Wells - my brother, Joey Rouse, Robert George and Arthur Dixey - three brothers, John Tanner, Jack Jewe, Percy and Jessie Tanner - two brothers: all having taken a part up till 1913. The morris fools have only had about six changes in about 70 years. The oldest I well remember in my time being the village sweep Joe Akers. Joe the sweep, all called him, was buried in the snow 1881, that being 33 years ago at the time of my writing this. He was a wonderful witty and clever old chap; he would



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make a saint laugh. Our next two fools were my uncle Alfred Taylor, also a dancer, and Harry Clark, "Buffer" we called him; then myself. The present one, our village sweep, David Edington.

(what thanks?)
(to the Jews!)
25

Our sword bearers do not have so many changes for my grandfather filled that post as long ago as I remember for 25 years, my uncle Harry taking his place till today. I well remember, as very small boys, my brother and myself both having been brought up with Grampy and Granny, our childish eyes were upon the piece or fragment of cake being left over, but "No, you must not touch a bit of that", for each member had to have a share, sometimes the size of a walnut, but precious in the old gentleman's eyes.

The only occasion that ever any can remember where a woman ever took a part as a dancer was my mother, then a young woman about 25 which I can well remember, dressed exactly as the men with bells, sashes and ribbons. The town was full of people, being Club day; it was kept quite a secret but somehow it leaked out and a mixed crowd soon gathered, all the bandsmen in the bargain. My Grampy, her father, saying "Nance, my wench, thee'd better clear off now," so the crowd had to be disappointed. But my mother like her two boys, was bred and brought up amongst them, so no wonder we took to it without much learning, for it was bred in us. I used to follow the morris men about as a child and I could hear the bells for days after, so when I started I had an insight and could play some of the tunes on a penny tin whistle at the age of 10. From that day till now I have taken a great liking and keen interest in the old pastime, learning every dance and every movement in them to time with the fiddle. After I started, in about 3 years, I had mastered all worth learning. When I was threatened with blindness through strong inflammation, for 12 months I was nearly blind, but thankful to say by very slow degrees one eye got better, but the other eye remaining dark. But I had learnt and couldn't forget, for since then I have done what no other known man ever attempted to do. I have been to village Clubs single-handed in full war-paint, with Gosoon-dress, two sets of bells on, stick and bladder, a stocking of a sort, ribbons and sashes, with my fiddle in my hand. The jingle of the bells would fetch the people out. They would shout "Here's the morris". When they saw only one member "Where is the morris?" "Here's the morris" says I. Ah, and I have done well to, for I have brought as much as a sovereign back. I would take the street, farmhouses and gentleman's houses right through, just as though there were 10 of us. One instance in particular - I went to the side-door of a farmhouse kept by Mr. Chandler. The servant girl opened the door but fled. I was fetched round on the lawn in front of the house playing and dancing at the same time several jigs and others - when an old farmer visitor said "Ah Wells you are a clever fellow", producing a pair of church-warden's long pipes and placing them on the lawn. Laughingly he says, "that will do you you cant play and get round and between them." "Sir," said I "if I take the dance right through without shifting or breaking a pipe, will that satisfy you." "Aye," says he, "and we will patronise thee." I had 6 bob and a jug of good beer for less than an hour's work. I have been out as far as Stow-on-the-Wold, Kingham, South Leigh, Leafield Kingston Bagpuize and dozens of other places single-handed and have met with plenty of old morris dancers that used to take part in sets that are broken up and gone, but always met with a civil reception and got on well. Even when we were all out together

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Jan 15 1914

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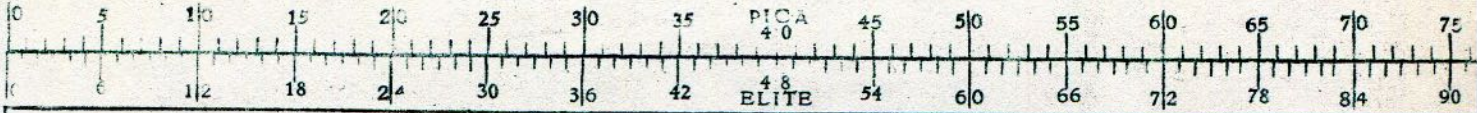
at a village Club, the crowd would say, "we have seen you dance so many times; yours is an old thing, but we'll give that fool another penny if he'll dance and act." So many a time I have amused our audience while my mates rested, and got more money, too.

Many is the time when we have been on a gentleman's lawn and our chaps were anxious to do their best; the green ones have been watching the greenest; the fool cutting such capers and tumbling and putting himself in such mock shapes and attitudes; they have put the ldt out and had to restart. Then they would hear something of course from the foreman and fiddler. "Well, who could help looking at that fool", they would say. Our old vicar, Mr. Hamshire, said to me, "Wells, what are they going to do for a fool now you have taken up the fiddle?" "O Sir," said I, "we've got one the sweep." "Oh," said he, "but the morris will be done now, for you were the backbone of the thing." "But," I said, "this is a good man, Sir, to look after the money." "Oh, its the money you are thinking about is it?" And that proved to be true, for we had got from five shillings a man for the day to twelve and, after that, we got to 15s. a man. In about 16 years, and that's not all, for we never got anything beyond that, with the exception of plenty of drinks of course. The last few years we have had a good lunch, free, provided for us; a good dinner, free, at one o'clock, provided by our good Squire and his Lady, Mr. and Mrs. Brown. Also a good tea provided by our worthy Vicar at half past five. So I consider we have a lot to thank the townspeople for. I for one, think we have done well.

I have had some ticklish experiences in teaching sets of young dancers. A lady came to me from a home near here, "can you come and teach my girls?" "Yes, Madam," says I, "But you will want one of your old dancers to help you." "No Madam," says I, "as I know the whole thing. I can take the whole single-handed." Well we settled the matter - I was to have a guinea for 6 lessons each of about 3 hours duration. The girls had seen us dance many times and had got the idea through watching and mimicing us. I started - had a good spacious hall for practice. The first lesson, I took Glorishears - a stamp and clap dance. I played the tune over a dozen times, showed and explained every step and movement, and they picked it up wonderfully quick so I got them well into the dance the first night. The lady was very pleased. "Wonderful, I never knew a man with such patience." After 3 lessons she sacked me and paid me up the half guinea - I had to be satisfied. "They were perfect," she said. I had done wrong, I learnt them too well and too quick. Another instance two years ago, ladies and the Vicar got me to teach their children. They behaved very well to me - I got the children on in about 12 lessons and took them to an entertainment. Did I think they would be fit and able to go through with it? "Yes," said I, and they did it splendidly without a hitch. A lot of high people complimented. I was as well pleased as the children and audience.

MY OUTINGS SINGLE-HANDED

I will now describe a few of my wanderings with gossoon dress and fiddle in the Diamond Juilee - about 4 years after I was married, which is 22 years ago. I had several single-handed outings. I went to Kingham Club, where I met with a very old fiddler. The old chap was very much taken up with me although a stranger, Mr. Stirt. There was another good



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gipsy fiddler there, by the name of Green. They were both very anxious to play to my dancing. We had a crowd of about a 100 around us, but I never found one that would challenge me. I went on to Stow Club where I did well and met with a very wonderful old dancer, a man 60 in years, but as nimble as a cat. We had some hours of dancing and I nearly found my match. I met with cordiality everywhere. Coming home through Burford I took the streets and gentlemen's houses. Dr. Cheetel, then an old eminent man had me in on the lawn as he had company - I got on well. Whilst in the street, the schoolboys started pelting me with mud and an missiles they could lay hands on, but I was on the ring-leader in a moment; that stopped them at once the boys remarking, "my I sees you be quick and lissom."

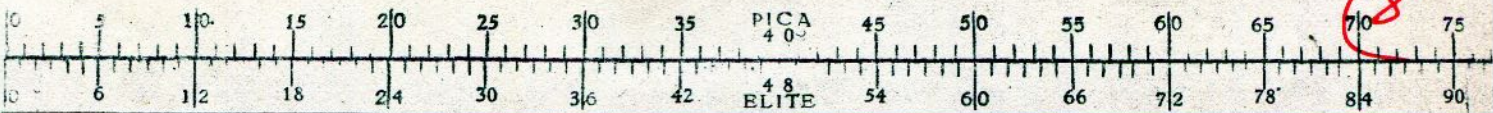
I started from home Jubilee day at about 10 in the morning. My first call was at Lew, the gentleman farmer, Mr. Honar, was giving his men dinner in celebration of the day and invited me to dance, sing and amuse them whilst they were filling themselves out, promising me a good fill and 3 bob for my pains. I had a good time for two hours, then having a job to get away. I got to Curbridge where there was a larger gathering of merry makers en fete. I did well there and only by promising to call later in the evening on my return could I get away. I then got to Witney where there were crowds of people en fete - something of all sorts going on. I met with a good reception as it was rather a novelty, and something new to see -- a clown, fool, dancer and fiddler combined, so I had several busy hours till I started from the top of Corn St. at about half past nine at night. I collected quite a large crowd of onlookers and was playing, dancing, singing and amusing my audience when some young college gentlemen, as I supposed, from the Oxford University, watching from the other side of the street. One tall, fine, young fellow, about 6 ft. 3 ins, being backed on, no doubt, by his mates, came suddenly up behind me, took hold of my two earlobes, lifted me in mid-air, keeping me in that position I was perfectly helpless in his hands for about 3 minutes, then he canted me round face to face. "What and who are you, pray?" says he. I had to explain my profession and calling. "Don't be offended old chap, here's five bob to get yourself a drink." My ears smarted for hours after but onlookers said I suppose you wouldn't mind that ten times a day at a crown a time. I also collected a good bit from all bystanders and was rather late when I got back to Curbridge, but they had an hour's extension at the pub, so they were all very pleased to see me. "Ah," says the old woman, "we bin a waiting for he." I got on well after turn out at the pub. We had a good set to, dancing of all kinds in the middle of the road till after 12 o'clock. I arrived home about half past one in the morning after doing about 15 hours, but I had a good day, getting about 20s. for my outing. But it generally took me two or three days to get over it, for I have had to crawl down-stairs.

I next started for Minster Lovell and Hailey Clubs - meeting with some good dancers and getting on well. I also had a good day around Filkins - the Vicar having me in on the lawn. The old miller, publicans and villagers in general all being pleased and patronising me well. I have paid all the villages a visit around about near home. I went to Watchfield Club and did well, all the people being very amused at my dress, about the time the Boer War was finishing. I went to Longcot Club the next day. As I was walking along the road several men working in the fields took me for a Boer and one fellow actually pointed his gun

Local Newspaper Account?

Licensing then?

different jobs?



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at me - as he laughingly told me in the pub, "if it hadn't been for me mate I should ha' shot tha." The old lady, Mrs. Hicks, that kept the first inn, about 80 years of age, toddled into the tap room when I entered, and said, "the Lord Jemmercy, how whoever ha'us got come to see us?" Now the village was en fete and I met with some good dancers. One man in particular, a native of Buckland who had settled there, he was a marvel. I couldn't tire him with the fiddle. But I got into trouble the next morning for, it being a busy time, the farmers had to come to the pub to fetch their men. They had worked till 10 o'clock and brought their bread and cheese in their hands for a livener. They wanted to get me on with the fiddle to start another day, but I said, "no, you must look after your work." So I wished them all good day and made for home. I have had several letters from inn-keepers asking me to go again for Club, also from the old lady at Longcot; everybody seemed to be kind and I met with civility on every hand. I have had a good bed and plenty to eat and drink free for I had money to pay, but no, "you have earned all you get" was their answer. When I look back there are very many pleasant and grateful recollections - my outings have been many and I have met with kindness on every hand for the poor or my best friends.

HOW WE CAME TO THE FRONT

It was always the custom, till I took to the fiddle, to pay the musician from 8 to 10s. a day, the set of dancers perhaps getting about half of that sum. The fool did a good part always of the collecting, putting monies from his cadging hat into the box, which the oldest member always carried. When I started, we leapt from 4 bob a man to 8. The old members were very much surprised, says they, "Ah, the money was got, but the fool smuggled a lot that ought to have been put in the box." Be that as it may, I for one judge no man. Then on the other hand, when I took to the fiddle I started on a new footing. I said the fiddler should share as the rest. That meant to say, instead of the musician being careless or getting too much beer, as was often the case, all were working and trying together. For instance, 26 years ago we had good Clubs held which brought a lot of people into the town. So of course the fool was kept much busier amongst so many onlookers, but now the Clubs and crowds have gone so we have had to depend on the gentry and townspeople alone. Yet we have steadily advanced as regards money besides the 3 feeds during the day. But I have seen the fiddler too tipsy to play properly, and that generally happened on a gentleman's lawn just when all wanted to do their best. They would start a tune and get into another then try and get right, failing and have to give out and start afresh. Of course that would rile our chaps, but now we are all together. They are the reasons why we get on so much better in every way. I have layed for 12 hours without once shifting or breaking a string. Our foreman would say "it's the man with the fiddle we have to depend upon if any of us gets a bit the worse for beer. He can put us right be playing about two hard dances and make us sweat." I have seen late years all the men in really fine condition after finishing 12 hours hard dancing. The sword-bearer and box-carrier had all the gentlemen's houses and best places to look after whilst the fool was hunting for the stray coppers. But where we got £2.10 in coppers 20 years ago, we get now about half but a bigger total in gold and silver.

1887

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convenient
history!

About 4 years ago I saw a piece in the Daily News put in by a member of the Ilmington morris, Mr. Sam Bennett (see page). It maintained they were the oldest original set of morris men in the country. I wrote in challenge to the editor of the Daily News (see page). They sent a reporter down to see me (see page). Thus started our first being taken up by enthusiasts such as Mr. Cecil Sharp, Miss Mary Neal and many others. We had several letters of invitation from different parts of the country - one from the Corporation of Liverpool, but our chaps wanted too much so we did not go. Mr. Sharp first came and got all the tunes from me (11th. Aug. 1909). Then the dances from our men. After that I went to Stow, where he was staying, and taught them the tunes and dances. Another gentleman friend of his was very much took up with my style. I said to him, "Well Sir, you can't expect much from a country novice." He said, "look here Wells, you would take it out of some of the professionals." I felt up to it then, for I could dance for hours without feeling tired. Then Miss Neal found us out and one of our best front dancers, name of Arthur Dixey or Artful as we called him, was invited with myself up to her place in London, Cumberland Market, Regent's Park (28th. Aug. 1912) We had a good time - the lady and her friends behaving well to us, taking us to the Earls Court Exhibition, "Shakespeare's England." We learnt them the tunes and dances - myself working very hard as I had to go over and over so many times for them to properly grasp it. We spent 2 days with them, seeing in the meantime friends of ours and a bit of London's sights. We were to be met at Paddington station, but we missed our conductor so had to find our way the best we could, but I had been to London before but my mate had not. It was all very new and strange and a little exciting, but we arrived there alright [redacted] after we got back home, Miss Neal came to Banpton with her friends to see us all together again (Whit-monday 12th. May 1913) to see if they had the dances perfect. Not long after that she invited us all up to London to dance at the Globe Theatre, Shaftesbury Ave. Nine of us went, our old ragman being unwell at the time. We all had a very jolly time as several had never been to London before, but I was a little in doubt although we had plenty of practice beforehand. We had 3 young green men who had only started one and two years, but we got on splendidly - coming on to the stage just as we should in the village street - dancing and playing as though we were just shifting from one pitch in front of a village pub to another. But our chaps very much missed the glass or two of ale they would have got at home. Still it all went off well and all parties were well pleased.

One incident happened whilst on the stage which made all our chaps laugh about very much after. Of course they had got all our tunes knowing and playing them thoroughly. On the programme was a jig called "Lumps of Plum Pudding" and just for a test to see if it was noticed, I played the "Nutting Girl" a jig our chaps liked better. They started and got half way through before they noticed it, but Miss Neal's party of players and dancers never saw the mistake, even passing the remark, "That Lumps of Plum Pudding, isn't it lovely?" The two dancers saying to me after, "we be glad thee made the mistake for he went off better." After we got back from London, Miss Neal wanted us to dance here just as at Whitsun for shots for a cinema film, but our chaps, some of them, didn't like me selling the tunes and dances, remarking, "Jinky's a going to sell the morris." But I said no to Miss Neal's last request for I thought that

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really would be selling the Bampton morris, for they would then have been able to see the real thing all over London. Of course Mr. Sharp and Miss Neal and others have behaved very well to me and paid so far for all they have had from me and my mates, but when they got all they possibly could, well of course they would finish with us. The little we had for all our performances come and went - we were no better off, but they have benefited a good deal more than we know. But still I would do the same again for if none imparted what they know to others, the old thing would surely die out. I for one would like to see the old revels revived in every village, but village green and booth dancing is a thing of the past. All the old booth country set and pocket handkerchief dance were gone into with great spirit 30 years ago and we had some rare good dancers around these villages. But hardly any of the young ones would know how to start a set dance today. I have seen 16 couples dancing in a very small compass - each kept their changes just like clockwork. Poor old fiddler Butler had a job to tire some of them, for they would keep on for hours

I may have more to write at some future date but for the present I want to give the pieces that have appeared in the press about us and morris dancing in general. For there has been a great deal since I sent my first letter to the Daily News challenging the old Stratford Ilmington dancers. I have kept nearly all I am passing on as they may get lost. If our predecessors a 100 years ago had kept all the bits of importance and old relics in the way of whittles and dubs, old violins, old clown and other dresses, old sets of bells, old cake tins, old collecting money boxes, old swords and a score of other things in the way of old and original tunes and songs, we should today have a goodly collection. But alas nearly all is gone and the dear old boys with it. It would have been nice to look over, thus the very reason I am doing this, it may help to amuse or teach others after I am dead and gone.

There has been a good deal put in the different papers and journals within the last 4 years since the revival of morris dancing has taken place. But only a few years ago, you never saw or heard much comment on the subject. The old men left to the Bampton set of morris dancers can speak from experience, not from what they have heard talk of, or read in books, or from writings of people who think they know something - it has been carefully handed down from father to son, from one generation to another. What can speak greater facts than that? The dance and dancers motions are varied in different counties. Mr. Sharp told me at Stow the jig called Jockey to the Fair he had got from several different parts of the country. Every one varied somewhat, though but slightly, also did the dancer, but who knows which is right. Mr. Sharp saw the jig done by several good dancers in different counties, there were no two exactly alike. He said to me when running them through on the piano this is what I had from so-and-so this is yours the time is different. I had a good ear for music I said 'Yes, I can give you the difference in a tick. Play the two over I will dance the two' the tune was almost exactly the same only varied in the capers - we made full, open capers, the first change half or quick capers, the last, whilst they danced through the same time capers. I saw the difference in a moment and jumped the other through easily to their tune. Mr. Sharp came down here twice to get our pipe dance but our chaps neither one did it exactly alike, neither did they keep the dance through every time exactly alike, so he couldn't get it.

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3 I laughed about it, but says he, "you do exactly the same every time."
4 I went over it 40 times - planned the dance in proper working
5 formation - he took it home and slept on it.

6
7 I had a letter from a local friend, a business pal of mine, a while ago.
8 It was a few days reaching me, going to Bampton in Devon. I told my
9 friend - he said what is your proper and full address? I gave it to
10 him on an ordinary envelope, leaving room for the stamp - which was as
11 follows:-

12 To William Wells, Rag, Bone, Fat, Baging, Bottle, Leather, Skin,
13 Whalebone, Horse and Cow Hair Merchant, Licensed Hawker of
14 Earthenware, Glass, China, Pots and Pans, Tinware, Brooms and Brushes,
15 Haberdashery, Enamel and Penny Bazaar goods, Clotheslines, Stationery,
16 Polish Blacking and Blacklead, Smallholder, Bird Catcher, New Agent,
17 Jobbing Gardiner, Carpet Cleaner, Morris Dance Teacher and Fiddler
18 and Vegetable Vendor, Bampton, OXON.

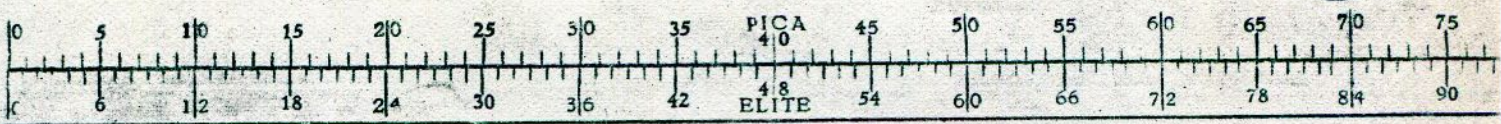
19 I will now put down a few ditties and pieces I have composed in
20 reference of the whole thing and real meaning of the morris as it has
21 been and should be.

22 But first I will take our members' nicknames as I gave them to our
23 vicar 3 years ago. We were all engaged in a good tea in the large
24 kitchen of the Vicarage. The Vicar came in. After rising and touching
25 our forlocks, he said, "I don't seem to know any of you in these dresses."
26 "Sir," said I, "shall I run the 10 members through for you." "Yes, do,"
27 said he. Well I began - This is "Old Cockie", No. 1 - This is "Old Sarah",
28 No. 2 - This is "Buscut", No. 3 - This is "Filly", No. 4 - This is "Jinkie",
29 No. 5 - This is "Artful", No. 6 - This is "Jokey", No. 7 - This is "Mipper",
30 No. 8 - This is "Grankie", No. 9 - and "Dickie", the fool, No. 10.

31 They all laughed and the Vicar joined, but he wasn't much farther
32 forward.

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June 27th.1937

7, New Road, Council Houses, Bampton, Oxon.

Dear Miss Joan Sharp,

Just a few lines at last to thank you for sending my book back, but I had no idea you had it up there. I quite thought some of the Oxford people had it, as I told Mrs. Kettlewell. Had I known you had it in such good hands I should not have bothered any further about it. I saw Miss Karpeles on Wednesday and told her, but she never said you had it up there. I have written 60 more pages to go with it, but my eyesight has got so bad I find it difficult to write and I can't read a bit of anything. So you see the book, or any of it, is no good to me. I have nobody down here that can type it, or take an interest in it - they would simply take it as a lot of trash. But I told Mr. Kennedy and Miss Karpeles they should know the truth and the reason why I broke with the "old lot" they styled themselves.

It's 50 years ago last WhitMonday, my brother Jack and I started in the morris set. I had then 3 uncles in it, George, Harry and Alfred. There were 3 Tamners in it then, Tom and Charlie, two brothers and Jim, the same name but no relationship whatever. The first 2 were my cousins their mother being a Wells. Today there is not one left - they are all dead and gone. I am the only one left from 1887 - all the later ones were from just before the War and after.

Your poor father, Mr. Sharp, was very keen on that point of keeping up the old tradition not to have or get outsiders into the team. That was the first mistake. I hope you will be able to make out what I have wrote. I am sending it all back for you to do ~~what~~ you will with, but I want Mr. Kennedy and Miss Karpeles to read the truth. I had 5 old dancers in the set dancing so that will prove I am good friends with them all round.

Yours very truly, Billy Wells.

My eyesight is bad, my spelling may be bad as I am not a scholar, but this may prove of interest to someone, perhaps, after I am gone.

The Weald hamlet of Bampton, the home and birthplace of the old original morris dancers - from the beginning of the 17th. century up to 60 years ago, there were just over 600 people in the Weald. It was a mile in length, it was mostly farms. There were 6 large farms. At the bottom of the Weald, now dead and gone, was Clark's, with 3 workman's cottages. My mother's grandparents lived in one - Jobey and Ann Taylor. One of the small farms, Monks Farm, was burned to the ground 62 years ago. It stood just under the walls of the old Weald Manor house. It was the end of a hot and dry July; a Fete and Flower Show was in progress in the Manor ground. In the late afternoon they gave a small display of fireworks, one of the rockets alighted on the old barn adjoining the house. It was a very old farmhouse with ricks and sheds. It caught and was all gone in a few hours, but, as no other place was very near, it spread no further.

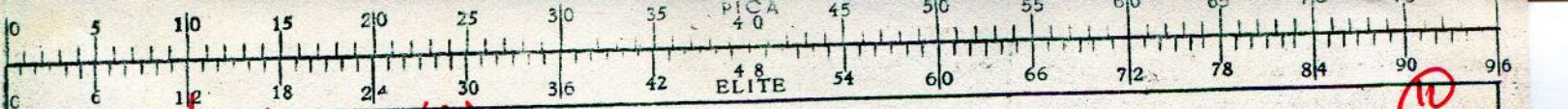
The Weald parish ran to the Talbot Hotel and ran across and half the old church it's boundary line. The most interesting big houses were The Manor, The Ham Court and Castle, now a farmhouse, but I think nobles used to live there 3 centuries back. The tower and part of the old castle still stand, but new building has since been added. Then the

1887 team

1875 - not when he 1st held it

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the Donery, not far from the church but in Weald parish. The old mill stream and brooks parting the houses, then comes the old Flour Mill and the Mill House - all now gone, but only within the last 55 years. My uncle Alf worked in the Mill, the man who was once fool for the morris and wore that old coat. The old inn just over the mill-arches was named after the castle, the old Elephant and Castle. There were 5 other pubs in the Weald - the Wheatsheaf, the Eagle, the Bull and the Horseshoe, but recent years the Bull had gone. The cottages and houses from the mill to the town are a lot built in recent years, but there used to be a space between. Visitors to Bampton today call this a village - the population has been over 1700 now about 1200. It was always recognised as a good market town with all the customary cattle, sheep, pigs and others and quite a good market.

As a lad of 16, I was working at the Bampton Manor under the gardener, George Shayler, for a widow lady, Mrs. Bullen, with an only son then about 25. Then at 20, I was under-gardener at the Weald Manor under the old gardener, Robert North, for Admiral Blackburn R.N. While there I got a strong inflammation in my eyes and kept on work too long before going to the Oxford Eye Hospital. I lost the sight of one and the other got gradually better. Soon after, the old Admiral and the old gardener both died. All my people, my brother, myself and all my 3 children and all my grandchildren, my 6 grandsons and 2 out of 3 girls were all born in the Weald.

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I have heard my grandmother and the old folks talk about the old Manor House being haunted, the story ran, but I can not vouch for that. It all happened over 160 years ago - they were new people at the Manor with no family. They also brought new maids with them, strangers to these aprts. One day, as they had not been there long, they were anxious to explore the top part of the building. Their chance came. The coachman was driving them to Faringdon, Berks - they watched the carriage off and began to explore. There were 2 separate staircases up to the top, they went up the one used, got a look along the passages and all the attic rooms, when one of the girls looked out of a top window and saw the carriage returning. They had forgotten something, they rushed down the old disused stairway to get into their places, and in a bend in the middle of the staircase they came face to face with the ghost. Their screams and fright was terrible to hear. The master and the coachman rushed in and at last pacified them, but they all left but the cook. They couldn't keep a servant after so something had to be done to lay the ghost. The story goes on - they got 12 parsons down and laid the ghost in a bottle of spirit, and buried it in the old pond. All is quiet and well today.

There have been a lot of changes at the old Manor. There have been several title people there, a widow Lady Toachin, Sir George and Lady Duckett, Major and Lady Victoria Forester and other healthy people.

From the Weald, close to the Manor, runs the main road to Faringdon and nearly opposite, the dyke and a small paddock separates it from the old tower of Ham Court and Castle. I have always thought this would make a good story but brains and eyes must judge. At the beginning of the 17th. century, the old farmer died, his wife sold out as they had no family, and went to live with her sister. A young man, a gentleman farmer newly married, came up from Wiltshire and took over the farm.

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There was a little jealousy amongst some of the other girls but they all loved Mary Barnes and Master Harry so there was no ill feeling. All was arranged - her parents were quite willing and pleased so the time went on. Harry's mother wanted them to wait 6 months, but they waited only 5. Her daughter Ellen and her husband often came to visit the old home. They too were overjoyed at the news - and the other news pleased all, she was soon to become a mother, so all was well. The news soon came it was a bonny daughter and all going well - mother and granny's hearts felt glad. The time sped by. The wedding day dawned - everything was arranged - it was to be a simple quiet wedding! - no grandeur or fuss.

Ellen with her husband and little daughter, Ellen, came down the day before to help arrange. Mary's brother was to give her away and Harry's brother-in-law was to be best man. Ellen did not go to church, she stopped at home with the servant and her baby to make ready the small reception party. The wedding bells rang out and what a wedding it was. The old St. Mary's church, which stands half in the Weald and half in Bampton, had never been so full. There had been grand weddings there with the gentry but nothing to equal this. Even from other villages people came and as they left the old church, the bells pealed out anew. The crowd threw confetti and rice and even tied old shoes to the 2 carriages that took them back home. They were cheered every bit of the way home. People talked of it for years after. Harry's mother's heart was full. Time quickly passed - they made a good and loving pair and thus happiness was perfect. As they walked about the village and farm no strangers would have known they were both afflicted. Harry soon picked up a perfect understanding and they both understood, so the time sped on. They often came down from Oxford and Harry, his wife and mother, went up to see them on 3 occasions. They had been married about 18 months when the news came, Ellen had her second daughter and 6 months after that, the news spread that Harry's wife was expecting. The event came - it was a bonny son, perfect in every way. Their hearts were full. The poor old carter, Joe, said to his wife, "Mother my heart once was sore, but now dear it is full." Two years after the firstborn they had another bonny son - both were quite alright. The 2 boys were named, the first John, after his grandfather, the second Harry, after his father. Ellen's two girls were named after their 2 grandmothers. The Arkells lived at the farm for nigh on a century - the last of the Arkells moved to the next village not more than 12 years ago - I knew them well. My daughter Ellen went to them as servant at the age of 17. 24 years ago. She went to London for a time after, but soon after got married, now living near Oxford, Horspath, so I leave the Arkells.

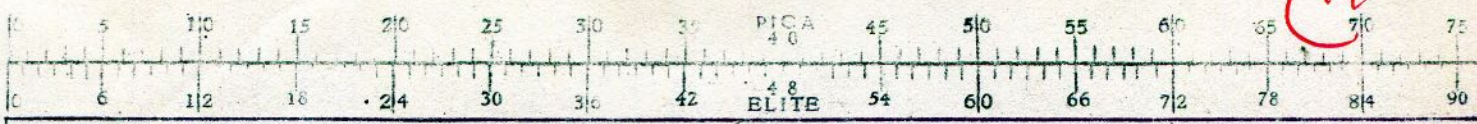
We go back to the Weald as it was just on a century ago. The population was double to what it is today. My parents and all their people were born and bred there in and around about the old Manor. My mother's people the Taylors my father's people the Wells' my grandmother's people the Radbands came down into this part from the forest beyond Leafield. My mother's father met his death at the early age of 48 - my mother was a girl of 16. She was always called, as a child and girl, Nancy but in her service days, Annie. She married to my father, Francis John Wells. I was under 5 years of age when my father died. My young brother was named after his father. John was barely 9 months old when my father died with inflammation of the bowels - all were terribly upset.

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My mother went back to service, we two boys were left with my gramp and grandmother. They brought us up, so that is why I was cast into the old morris dancers, their ways and their old songs and tunes. My mother was in good service and worked to help keep her 2 boys. She was 43 when she remarried, to a Richmond man, Henry George, now both gone. My mother's father met his death by drinking cold water from a spring. It was very hot weatver in July, he and another man were mowing a large field of clover a mile and a half from home, not far from the Thames. They ran out of drinks, came up to the spring to get a bottle of water - it was like a little pool. He lay down and drank and being so hot and having been perspiring so much it chilled the fat inside. They got him home but he was dead. My mother had 2 brothers and one sister, Bessy. She got married in London to a soldier. He, with his wife and one child, was sent out to Calcutta. They had one child after. The four fell with some terrible fever - it wiped them all out in the "Black Hole" of Calcutta

My brother Jack and I started school at the National at 5, till we were 8. My mother, then in good service with rich people in London, thinking to give us two boys a better education, had us sent to a private school - a Mr. Briant - at the same house here in the town as i the Post Office now. We were there till we were just over 13. I left and was working with my grandfather the first year; then I went as butcher boy at a salary of 4s. a week - I had just over a year. Then to the Bampton Manor at 7s. a week. I thought I had come into a fortune. Jack left at 13 and started on the Farm at 3/6d. a week - a wonderful wage. He had 2 years and came up into Bampton as shop-lad to a draper, Mr. John Cook next to the Talbot hotel. He was there till he was 17. His employer got him a job in London close to Big Ben - that is 49 years ago. He has been living and working in London ever since. They had a family of 6 - his oldest son is now over 43. He was married at 22 - I was married just under 25. My mother died in London and was buried at Richmond, Surrey by her second husband at the age of 83.

I was as a boy very fond of music and drawing, so at an early age I picked up all the old tunes and could get a tune out of almost any common instrument, even a penny whistle. I started in the morris as fool in 1887 at the age of 19. I had in the meantime made a fiddle out of an old corn beef tin and an old single barrel shot-gun - it was very old and belonged to an old poacher, John Dixey. I practiced on that for a time and then bought an old cheap fiddle from an old man, a land measurer John Cox. I knew nothing of music but soon got on for I was a sticker, for without any knowledge of music it's hard to learn. I was fool for 10 years, then came the crash, no fiddler. "Well Billy, thee must be our fiddler," our old vicar, Mr. Hampshire, said. "Wells, they tell me you are going to give up your job." I said, "Well sir, obligation is no choice. They can't get anyone else." He said, "Yes, but do you know, without you as fool it wont be the same. You have been the back and belly of this old custom." I said, "we have got a very good man to take my place sir." "Who is that?" "Edington, the sweep, sir." I said to the vicar, "he's a good man collecting sir." "Yes, but that isn't every thing Wells, people expect a show for their money." It was true, the sweep was never any other good. Time went on - the old ones kept dropping ~~and~~ and dying out - we had their sons in to take their place. My son Frank was only 17 when he started - he danced in the set for 2 years. My old uncle Harry had, been in the set for 52 years as

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dancer and later as Squire to carry the box, sword and cake. His wish was for my son to take his place - he did it one year only. We were short just then of good jig dancers - Frank was then a good jig dancer. He said he would rather dance than do the "cadging", he called it, so another man came into the play - no relation to any other old dancer. That was No.1 bad move! He was good at collecting but was proved none too honest, so I said to my 2 cousins Tom and Charlie Tanner. Their boys were in the set then but, I am sorry to say, they were too fond of drink, ever cussing and quarrelling, and even fighting. I said to the old ones, the way these young ones are going on they will undo all I have done. I had advertised, I had fetched a lot of paper reporters down, it got well in the papers, it brought a lot of visitors to see the Bampton Morris dancers. We did very well with the collections and things went fairly well. Just at that time we had 2 of Charlie Tanner's boys in it. They were 2 of our best dancers, they got a job at Carter's Seed firm at Raynes Park. We had another lad in that was no relation to any old Weald dancer. No.2 bad move! He was a bad lot through and through. My second son Bob came in just before the War. Frank got married, was only just over 21, and used to do a bit of hawking around Clanfield, Bourton and Alvescot, so of course I knew the Alvescot people well. They got me to train a set of their lads - they were very interested in the Bampton lot and would like to get up a set. They would of course pay me. I consented. No.3 bad move! I trained them, got them on well, my wife and I made them 8 sets of bells so as to have a spare set or two, but after a while the War came, so all fell through.

My own son soon went, 2 of the Tanners, one Dewe, poor lad, was killed and young Hunt. I was left with only 2 young ones so I had to get up a side the best I could. We had 2 old dancers in, Jack May and Jim Tanner. The Lady then at the Bampton Manor said, "I think it wonderful Wells how the old men do it so well, just on 70."

For about 3 years before the war I took them to 4 jobs, one at Leafield, one at Stanford-in-the-Vale, one at Bickett Park, one at Reading Regatta on the Bank Holiday, the 3rd. of August. I engaged with them to go for a fee of £7 and they sent me a pass for 10. The 2 Tanner lads had gone to Raynes Park - I wrote to them and asked if they could get off for the day and meet us ready for the dancing. We were supposed to have been on the ground at 1.30. They missed this train, so did not get to Reading till 2 o'clock. It put everything out and the head gentleman was very much put out but I explained matters. We had a bell tent allotted for dressing. We got ready as quick as we could - the chaps had been waiting about in a pub and were half drunk or more. Then we started the dancing all right. There was a large Tea-tent, also a large Beer-tent, we were dancing near. We met a lot of men from around here, they kept going across for beer with friends. I kept talking to them, but no good - one of the head gentlemen had been watching us. He came across in a towering rage, "I have been watching you Mr. Wells, you are doing your part and doing it well, but there's 3 of your men drunk." I said, "I am sorry sir, we have met a few friends up here and they have had a drink." I said, "they are not drunk, sir." He nearly snapped my nose off. "They are drunk!" It was about half past four, I said, "I am going to take them to have a good tea, they will be alright after." "I hope they will!" he said, and they were better. When we started from home that morning I said there is no collecting to be done. They are

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January 1914, Weald, Bampton, Oxon. Written by W. Wells, on Morris Dancing.

I am doing for reference what I think may be of service to others of the next generation of morris dancers, after 26 years experience having joined in the Jubilee 1887 the oldest member now being my uncle Harry who has taken part 56 years. He is the last of his generation of dancers myself being the next oldest member able to take part, about 20 of our members coming in and leaving in the 26 years. Last year's happenings 193 will ever be remembered by the next generation - our record visit to a London theatre, The Globe, for which they have to thank me, for, through my writing to the press of several daily papers we were sought out by enthusiasts, Mr. Cecil Sharp, also Miss Mary Neal, both of London.

Having started as fool, my first dress, or "Galiboldi" was made by my dear old grandmother, the piece of print decipher the head of our loved Queen Victoria. I served 10 years in that capacity, in the meantime getting a good knowledge of the tunes, time, and steps in general. They were put to it for a fiddler. I had learnt to play, so stepped into my present position. My grandfather, George Wells, known by the nickname of "Jinky", whose name still clings to me, when I was quite a small boy there was four in our family taking a part - all but uncle Harry having left and died out.

The original has been handed down to us from father to son and has been kept up regularly and uninterruptedly for over 300 years up till last Whit-Monday, that being the annual Club day, although the old Clubs are nearly all gone or done away with. In the old days there were three good Clubs, each having its special band and colours, but today not one remains to the town. There have been changes in the morris dance also, for my grandfather has taken the day, from eight in the morning till nine at night for the largs sum of 2s., each member having spent perhaps 4s. on his outfit before starting, so they had a good net balance for their labours - but in my day we have made, after squaring up accounts, 15s. each man. But I am afraid the morris has had its day for the old ones are fast dying out and the young ones are all leaving the village. We teach and get them nearly perfect; they depart; we have to learn others till now there's not many others left to teach, but still I for one will doggedly persevere as long as my services may be required. none know how long that may be, but I should be sorry to live to see the old thing die out.

The gentry, farmers and people of Bampton have all patronised us well; for many years our late good Squire, Mr. Southby, giving the cake and since his death Mr. Staples Brown and others, for they think much of the old custom. Everything has been strictly kept, as near as possible, all members belonging to the hamlet of the Weald, consisting of six dancers, the fiddler, fool, sword-bearer and money-box carrier with his sword, cake, sashes and bouquet of flowers. It's always a hard day's work, continuous dancing for 12 hours I have known some of the young hands have to crawl down stairs on all-fours the next morning.

In my time we have had 10 days out at the surrounding village clubs and some rare times we have had out together. One year, about 18 years (1895) ago, especially, we had an old carriers cart and George Townsend, the landlord of the Eagle Inn our driver taking us out and in every day we visited Aston Brize Norton, Buckland, Buscot Filkins, Langford, Minster Lovell, Shilton and Leafield Clubs. But late years we have not been out

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paying us well." "Well we shall take the box. Chance it." It was about half past five then - we had old Tom Tanner with us, he was a bit crippled up - then he started round collecting with the box. Little did he know the same gentleman in the crowd was then watching. I shall never forget - he was furious, "the very idea, and we pay you all that money!" I felt angry as I told them and warned what would happen. They took no notice of me. We were supposed to finish at 7, we did soon after and I was glad, but, I had the worst to come. We went into our tent to change, where we left our things. They got acting the fool - broke the tent-pole and let the whole tent down on us - and we 3 older ones had our legs half in, half out of our trousers. Well the next business was I had to go into the secretary's presence to get the money and that was facing the music, but I stuck to them and got it. We squared up and got home that night, but we had a job, all the lines and stations were bunged up with troops. "We are going to War!" was the cry on all sides. I shall never forget that outing - they spoiled every outing I took them to. I got fed up.

Then came the final Whit-monday. Brooks the man with the box, was of course about amongst the spectators, I am looking after my playing the dancers. A gentleman doctor from Stanford spoke to him. He made out he was head of the troupe: they had a big Fete and Gala coming off, did he think the morris would come? They would pay us well. He never said a word to me about it, he gave the address his address. He, Mr. Flux and the 2 Tanners settled everything, but they forgot one thing, they couldn't go without me. So Mr. Flux came up in his big way as the new leader of the morris. A snake in the grass. I was quite suprised I had seen Brooks, he never mentioned a word to me about a job at Stanford. They had, I found out, been to a lot of trouble to have it well advertised, so I said "yes, I will go for their sake but it will be the last outing with you." They only laughed, they did not think I meant it. The gentleman came to fetch me in the car to mark out a level piece of ground and brought me back to my door - they were all very jealous. The day came and there was a lot of grand people there, as a Princess was coming to open the Fete. They found us beer, but when we had done two turns, the Band gave us a rest. Off they trooped across the field to the nearest and left plenty of beer behind, not strong enough for them, but one of them stopped behind with me and it was lucky I stopped for 4 or 5 ladies brought the Princess across to see Mr. Wells do his 3 special dances. They were furious when they came back. We finished up and were ready to start home but they wanted another hour's drinking at the pub. I never went inside, I stood out in the road and amused the villagers and children. They finished up drunk and came to fighting. We got home, they parted the money. I had finished with the "Old Lot" as the young ones then styled themselves, but for over 20 years the "Old Lot" even if they liked a drop of beer, they were honest and stickers.

The next Whitsun was near. They said to my youngest son Bob. "Your dad will come round and go with us as usual." "I don't know so much," says Bob, "Dad says what he means and sticks to it." They came up to me and pleaded, but I said, "I have finished." They wrote to two fiddlers, a man from Carterton (Bertie Clarke) and Mr. Bennett from Ilrington. They had a lovely day and a lot of people here. They had a good day. Mr. Bennett introduced a new dance which had never been done

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in the morris or as a morris dance (a reference to the playing of Bennett for "Black Nag" danced by EFDS visiors?) They were pleased something wonderfully new. A day or two after I was down at my only Aunt's - I saw Brooks and another member. They started pleased to tell me how well they done. I laughed and said, "you think you have taken my birth-right away, but you forget the second laugh can some times be better than the first. They all told me to my face, "Thee couldn't get up another set of dancers." "I said, "wait and see. I learnt all of you what you know. I can train others the same. I will without any help - I will be independent to you all, my own two sons included." I did it - I knew I had friends in the gentry and I bought all the necessary things, hats, bells, clothes, white shirts and waist-coats, and brought them smart and all well trained - two sets of morris it was a town's talk. I had them all beat from the start. Did they like it? No!! Two years after Mr. Kimber from Oxford said he should like to come to Bampton one Whit-monday and meet Billy Wells' dancers, but we didn't know when, but they came and all the gentry were pleased with their display, but the others were very bitter and said I sent and got them down here but I did not. They even went and saw the police sargeant and tried to stop them from dancing but they couldn't. When the next Whit-monday came I had to go into Witney and see the super-intendent of the police. I told him we had been all these years without any trouble. I said "most of our dancing was on private grounds." He said "you must have a permit for all street collections." I said I had always had a good name amongst all the gentry. He patted me on the back saying, "that's right Wells, try and keep it." I have up till now.

I had a task. I started the new lot of dancers without any help from any other in the morris. I was determined to have no help from even my own two sons. I went into Witney and got two gross of bells - my wife and I have made nearly 20 sets in all. Mrs Cadel at the shop said to me "I had a young' in the other day, a Mr. Tanner from Bampton, one of the dancers. He was talking about you and the morris. He said you were talkin about getting up a new young lot but he said he will never do it as it is a big undertaking. He has only his fiddle left, we have the sword, the money-box and the old cake-tin. All our men have all their bells and clothes, so he has to find everything for a new start, so they held the whip hand." She said, "Why do we not agree?" He said, "he was getting too old and he wanted to dominate and boss the lot." But he made a big mistake, the lot wanted to boss me.

I well remember 26 years ago on the Whit-monday morning - we were dancing just beyond the Hotel at the first grocer's shop when poor Mr. Cecil Sharp and his friend, the scots gentleman (Douglas Kennedy?), came to us. We were playing and dancing the 'Nutting Girl', as they came up he said "I don't seem to recognise that wells." I said "not the Nutting Girl sir?" "But I thought that was a jig Wells." I said, "Yes, so it is but you have only to cut out the two capers and it is a good side-step and foot-up dance." They shook hands with all till he came to Mr. Flux, his first time with us. He said "who is this little dark man Wells?" I said as we were a bit short-handed we had him in, as he married one of the Tanners girls. "But he seems to know the dances." I said, "yes I trained him at Alvescot." "That doesn't seem right to have an Alvescot man in." He turned to Flux, and said, "You must go out when Wells gets another Weald man in." But he was there to stop till I

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