

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.

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