

NO SMOKING
Smoking is
not permitted
in this hall
by any article of the
By-Laws of the
Society of the
Society of the
Society of the



1996

Francis Shergold -- Gold Badge Award

Citation by Derek Schofield

The Gold Badge of the English Folk Dance and Song Society is awarded for distinguished and unique contributions to the folk performing arts. Today we recognise the contribution of Francis Shergold, singer, musician, but most especially, morris dancer with Oxfordshire's Bampton Morris Dancers - until recently, the Squire of the team, and now their Honorary President.

Francis Shergold moved to Bampton from Black Bourton, a couple of miles away, in 1931 at the age of twelve. His great-grandfather, Robert Lock, had been a morris dancer in the nearby village of Field Assarts in the 1830s. As a young teenager, Francis watched the morris dancers practising outside the Malt Shovel public house in the centre of Bampton. The Squire then was the legendary William 'Jinky' Wells, who was the sixth recipient of the Gold Badge in 1928.

In 1935 Francis spent the morning of Whit Monday carrying the dancers' coats, and Jinky Wells said, "You've done very well this morning, you'd better have a dance this afternoon." He did, and has danced ever since, including this year at the age of 77. That's 60 years.

It was in 1939 that Francis first met Nibs Matthews, later the Director of the Society, when Nibs and friends danced the Headington dances with William Kimber as musician, on Whit Monday in Bampton. Both Nibs and Francis have fond memories of the occasion.

On leaving school, Francis was employed as a groom at Weald Manor. After war service as a sergeant in the army, during which time he was wounded whilst on active service in Europe, he returned to Weald Manor where he remained as head gardener until his retirement.

In 1949, Francis Shergold became Squire of the morris dancers when Jinky Wells retired. Francis continued as Squire for 45 years, announcing his retirement at the team's Christmas Party in 1995. Over the years, Francis has led his team of dancers at performances all over the country, including the Royal Albert Hall, the Purcell Rooms and the Royal Festival Hall in London, and at festivals from Cornwall to Ireland, including Sidmouth, Loughborough, Dartmoor and Wadebridge. In addition to his role as Squire, Francis has also acted as secretary, musician, dance teacher, master of ceremonies and enthusiast.

Francis has always been regarded as an excellent dancer, taking his inspiration from the late Fred Pettifer. As Francis says, "A good dancer must, above all, have a good sense of rhythm. He must also be able to show off just a little bit, and enjoy the crowd. He's dancing for the public and to enjoy their reaction".

Francis Shergold is without doubt a 'natural' leader. He has always been keen to develop everybody's potential, and has been able to maintain the interest of the younger dancers when other attractions have tempted them away from the dancing. He has displayed patience when teaching the new dancers, and has encouraged nearly

all of the younger dancers to perform jigs. Needless to say, Francis was regarded as an excellent jig dancer, often with his brother Roy.

Francis's encouragement has not been confined to the dancing: visitors to Bampton on the Spring Bank Holiday are made very welcome, as long as they respect the town and its traditions, and singers and musicians are invited to contribute to what has become a weekend of festivities. For Francis, the occasion for dancing, and the dancing itself, must be for the enjoyment of all concerned.

Morris dancing in Bampton is very much a family occasion: Francis's mother helped with the costumes of the dancers, his brother Roy was (and occasionally still is) a dancer and fool for the team, his sister Ruth Wheeler and her husband Cyril are enthusiastic supporters, and his nephew Jamie Wheeler is now the team's principal musician. Francis's distinguished contribution could not have been possible without the support of his wife, Ann.

Francis Shergold is also involved in other aspects of Bampton life - especially as a bellringer in one of the most beautiful parish churches in Oxfordshire. In recent years, Francis has enjoyed considerable pleasure from seeing his nephew Jamie develop as a musician, and the two men have been guest performers at selected festivals and clubs, particularly following the release of the cassette recording of Bampton tunes, reminiscences and Francis's singing, entitled 'Greeny Up' issued on the Veteran Tapes label in 1988.

Visitors to Bampton on Spring Bank Holiday cannot fail to notice that there are currently three teams of dancers in Bampton. Whatever the differences of the past, the three teams now enjoy harmonious relations, which Francis is keen to see develop, and indeed, representatives of the other dancers are here for the presentation this evening.

When Francis retired as Squire, he handed over an extremely strong team, with over 20 dancers and musicians, the youngest still at primary school. The contrast with the late 1950s, when Francis almost single-handedly kept his team going with only four dancers, and when there was little interest in the dancing in Bampton itself, is obvious. The credit for building up the team to its present position of strength, lies with Francis Shergold.

The singer Bob Davenport once told Martin Carthy, "If you want to know about English music, you have to go and see English people dance, so go to Bampton". Thanks to Francis Shergold's commitment to, and enthusiasm for, the Bampton Morris tradition, we can continue to enjoy the dancing, and gain that insight into English music and dance. More importantly, the people of Bampton can themselves continue their town traditions into future generations.

It gives me great pleasure to announce this award of the Gold Badge of the English Folk Dance and Song Society to Francis Shergold, and I should like to invite Nibs Matthews, former Director of the Society to present the award.

NO SMOKING
Smoking is
not permitted
in this hall.
You can smoke in the
bar or the garden.



NO SMOKING

Smoking is
not permitted
in this bar.
Please see notices in the
bar or the garden.







ROCK & ROLL
DANCE

The Musical Traditions Club

TI-FER
CAFÉ'S HAND
5.30 - 7.30 PM
BARBICAN
CENTRE
ADMISSIONS FREE

BARRY DROGDA



Francis Shergold

1918 - 2008

Francis Shergold died on November 27th, just two months shy of his 90th birthday. He was widely known in the folk world as long-time leader of the morris dance side at Bampton in Oxfordshire, a position honoured some years ago by the EFDSS when awarding him their Gold Badge.

When he first started dancing, in 1935, there was only one active morris team, that led by William 'Jingy' Wells. During his active career he saw the brief reactivation and subsequent demise (after Whitsun 1941) of the second team, led by the Tanner family; the breaking away by Arnold Woodley in 1950 to form a second side composed mostly of young boys, which continued until the end of that decade; the regrouping of that set (now with grown men) in 1970, so that, once again, two sides were competing for dance spots on Whit Monday; and, finally (to bring the situation up to the present), the breakaway group from the Woodleys in 1974, to form another set, which led to the situation of three distinct teams out and about on the dancing Monday.



I rehearse all this to highlight a kind of ironic paradox. When he first joined there were half a dozen active dancers. By 1959 there was so little interest in the custom that he was forced to take out a set with only four men, using outsiders from the folk revival as musician and fool. On Spring Bank Holiday Monday this year there were more than fifty dancers spread between the three teams.



And it was Francis who kept it going, firstly by being there when needed as a teenager, then assuming the responsibility of leadership upon the death of 'Jingy' Wells, and even appearing in whites long after formally passing on the leadership to Tony Daniels. In fact, famously, he told the story of how Wells, on his deathbed, had said to him, "Don't let the morris go." Through lean times and prosperous he

never did; now the morris has been forced to let him go.

The accompanying images date from 26 May 2008, and feature what was surely his final appearance with his dancers. Several images show him, walking-frame in hand, joining in the final dance-off movement of *Bonny Green Garters*. Over the course of seven decades he must have performed that many hundreds, perhaps thousands of times. Registered medically blind for a good number of years (though retaining some degree of vision), he was able nevertheless to recognise people he knew either by their voice, or (in my case) by my bulk! And he remained cheery throughout.

Two months ago he suffered a stroke, and was taken into the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford. His health deteriorated steadily, and he finally succumbed on the 27th. Some of us outsiders will have the honour of attending the annual morris dancers' party in Bampton tomorrow evening. I would expect the mood to be a little less boisterous than usual, but nevertheless celebratory, honouring a man with a life-spanning career as dancer. In an obituary for Arnold Woodley, written thirteen years ago, I said that the morris would never seem the same again. Those sentiments are certainly echoed here. It will carry on now but, without the presence of Francis, that sense of history, extending back to into the dim and distant past before many of us aficionados were born, will be missing, and the whole thing seem ever more rooted in the 21st century.

Our sympathies are extended to his brother Roy and sister Ruth, and their children. Rest in peace.

Keith Chandler - 28.11.08

The funeral will be at St Mary's Church, Bampton, on Monday 8th December, at 2:00. His family have requested that people do not take flowers or wreaths but if you want to give something, a donation to the Bush Club (Bampton) would be appreciated. Also would any Morris men please refrain from wearing whites. Thank you.

Tony Daniels - 30.11.08

You may also wish to re-read Keith Chandler's excellent [article](#) on Francis, which has been on this site since 1998. And you may also be interested in the Ellen Ettlinger webpage, which contains some early (1940s/50s) Bampton photos: <http://england.prm.ox.ac.uk/englishness-Dance-images-from-Ettlinger.html> - Ed.