

A CHRONOLGY OF PERFORMANCE IN BAMPTON

- C18th** One correspondent in 1858 noted that Morris dancing – by implication at Bampton – was by that date a ‘very ancient adjunct of the Whitsuntide holidays.’ [c] This suggests a tradition of performance at Bampton which extended into the distant past, and which was almost certainly extant for at least a portion of the eighteenth century. In 1894 Carter was told that Bampton ‘Feast,’ and by implication its association with Morris dancing, had been kept up for ‘200 years & over.’ [bi] In addition, it was noted in 1910 that ‘The present generation of Morris dancers in Bampton...can go back some two hundred years by means of documents and traditions handed down to father and son.’ [cl; see also bi] William Nathan Wells claimed in 1943 that his grandfather’s grandfather, Thomas Wells, had been ‘head of the Morris 200 years ago.’ [fn; see also fp] In fact, while it is certain that he was actually referring to his grandmother’s father, Thomas Radband [see below], the oral tradition relating to longevity of performance is unambiguous. In 1927 there were said to be two pair of bell pads still in use which had been used ‘for over 150 years’; [dy & dz] and two further pairs for ‘at least 120 years.’ [eb & ec]
- 1790s[?]** Thomas William Tanner claimed in 1926 that his father and grandfather had both been Morris dancers. [dt] His grandfather, Thomas Tanner (born 1771) would have been of a suitable age to have first danced during this decade. In addition, Thomas Radband (born 1776) was said to have ‘played the whittle and dub for many years and carried the box.’ [bg] Given that his grandson, Henry Radband, claimed that the bells he had used had belonged to both his father and grandfather, perhaps he had been a dancer also. [bj] [Thomas Tanner].
- 1820[?]** In 1858 one correspondent recalled that during his ‘boyish days’ the pipe and tabor had been played – by implication as an accompaniment to the Bampton Morris set – by ‘poor old Master Beechey, of Lew.’ [c] Although the identity, and thus age, of the writer is unknown, in 1862 he refers to the common features of the village club feast as being ‘just as we have seen them for the last half century.’ [k] 1830s Manning possessed a wooden collecting box made at Bampton circa 1830 and used there by the Morris set. [bf] In 1910 it was noted of the region around Bampton that ‘One hundred years ago...there were eight sets of dancers in the district...These sets visited the village clubs, and did much to enliven the proceedings. Oftentimes three sets would meet in competition, and if Bampton were in it they generally came out top,’

which may refer to this decade [cl] It was perhaps also during this decade that the Bampton side danced at Brize Norton in competition with that from Field Assarts and were triumphant. [bl] [Charles Tanner and Richard Sperring].

1840s William Nathan Wells recorded in a manuscript history [cv] the names of musicians remembered by his oldest relatives, among whom were the pipe and tabor players ‘Pot’ Shurey of Buckland Marsh, who played in 1840, and ‘Old Rouse’ of Alvescot, ‘about 1848.’ Manning possessed a miniature ale keg, made circa 1845, and used by the Bampton side; [bf] and Giles wrote of the dancers in such a manner to suggest regular annual appearances during the period preceding 1847, [a] although being a newcomer to the town, Whitsun 1846 would have been his first viewing of the side. [George, William and Thomas Wells, John White, Robert and John Batts, William Provis and George Brooks]. Ca1840 ‘Pot’ Shurey of Buckland Marsh was musician around this date. [cv]

1847[?] Performance is likely to have occurred during this year. [a]

ca1848 ‘Old’ Rouse of Alvescot played for the dancing about this date. [cv]

1850s Among the musicians recorded by Wells were Richard Ford, who played ‘about 1851,’ John Potter, ‘about 1856,’ and Robert Batts, ‘about 1858.’ [cv] Although Wells claimed in January 1914 that his uncle Henry Radband had ‘taken part 56 years,’ [cv] fixing a date for primary public performance at 1858, by July that same year Radband was claiming activity stretching over ‘sixty years,’ [cv] positing a date of 1855. [William Henry and James Portlock, William Wiggins and Henry Radband].

Ca1851 Richard Ford took over as musician about this time. [cv]

1854 The dancers were out on Whit Monday, 5 June, and their perambulations included a visit to the house of the incumbent. [b]

ca1854 Carter was told in 1894 that forty years earlier there had been a challenge dance between the sides from Standlake, Ducklington, Brize Norton, Bampton and Leafield, the last named set being victorious. This competition occurred at the ‘Pike’ [i.e. the White Hart] public house on the turnpike road from Witney to Burford, above Minster Lovell. [bm]

ca1856 John Potter of Sutton acted as musician around this date. [cv]

1858 In 1858 one correspondent was of the opinion that the dancing on Whit Monday, 24 May, had been ‘very creditably performed,’ although he complained both here and in subsequent years of the ‘substitution of a squeaking fiddle for the appropriate, and orthodox “tabor and pipe”’.

[c; see also d] Given that, according to Wells, the piper John

Potter played for the dancing ‘about 1856,’ and Robert Batts, a fiddle player, ‘about 1858,’ the accuracy of his manuscript appears to be, in part at least, validated.

1859 Although the Bampton set performed on Whit Monday, 13 June, one local inhabitant noted that his home had not been visited and he had thus not been ‘favoured with any evidence of their saltatory powers.’ [e]

1860s Wells recorded that ‘Tommy’ Lewis, a traveler ‘out of Berkshire,’ played the fiddle for the Bampton dancers ‘from 1862 till 1870.’ [cv] A 1936 obituary notes that ‘Over 70 years ago too, Mr. [Thomas] Portlock was one of Bampton’s keenest Morris Dancers and he danced each Whit Monday for many years.’ [fa] [Alfred Taylor, Thomas Portlock, Charles Henry Tanner, Henry Dixey and John May].

1860 The dance set ‘cut their capers’ during the club feast celebrations held in Bampton on 28 May; [g] and once again there was a complaint regarding the use of the violin as accompaniment. [f]

1861 On 20 May 1861 ‘the Morrice Dancers capered, [and] the “Squire” grimaced and exhibited his antics.’ [i; see also h] During this year, Charles Henry

Tanner, having already been taught the dances by his father, joined ‘a boys’ team, formed with the laudable intention of outshining the men’s team.’ Tanner was invited into the adult set and the young side was disbanded. [db]

1862 The Bampton correspondent reported of the Whit Monday celebrations in 1862, ‘We heard that there was a party of Morris dancers, but we were not favoured with a specimen of their evolutions.’ [k; see also j] Fiddle player Thomas Boswell/Lewis first played for the dancing about this year.

1863 On 25 May the Morris dancers ‘made their appearance, but there was not much of novelty in their proceedings...they still obstinately persist in employing a squeaking ‘fiddle,’ instead of the more legitimate tabor and pipe which considerably marred the effect of the whole.’ [m; see also l & n]

1864 On Whit Monday, 16 May, the Bampton set performed as usual in their home village; [o-q] and again three days later at the club feast festivities held at nearby Clanfield. [r]

1865 One observer implied that the performance of the Bampton side in their home village on 5 June lacked its customary standard: ‘they seemed to lack that fire and energy in their saltatory movements, which they possessed “When our old hat was new”...We must again express our

dislike of the substitution of the violin for the orthodox “tabor and pipe”.’ [s; see also t]

1870s Among the musicians recorded by Wells as active during this decade are James Provis, between circa 1871 and 1875, and ‘old Fiddler’ Edward Butler in 1876. [cv] [Stephen, James George and Thomas William Tanner, and George Wells/Taylor].

1870 On Whit Monday, 6 June, the Morris dancers ‘made their appearance in the streets.’ [u & w; see also v]

ca1871 James Provis first acted as musician during this year. [cv]

1872 ‘The Morris dancers put in an appearance, as is their wont on Whit-Monday, and they cut some fine capers when performing their grotesque dances.’ [x]

1874 Thomas William Tanner (born 1861) claimed to have first joined the team when aged thirteen. [eb, ec & fd] Sarah Ann Taylor, the mother of William Nathan Wells, dressed as a man and danced in the set one Whit Monday about this date. [cw; see also cf]

1876 On 5 June the Morris dancers ‘were busily engaged from house to house in their accustomed fashion.’ [y-aa] Edward Butler’s primary involvement as musician occurred during this year. [cv]

1877 ‘The Morris dancers busily tripped the “light fantastic toe” to the sound of fiddle and tambourine’ on 21 May [ab-ad; see also ae]

1880s Wells recorded that Richard Decimus Butler played the fiddle for the dance set from ‘about 1880’ to 1899. [cv] Of particular significance is the complete absence of any suggestion of a lapse in regular performance during this decade, a unique occurrence throughout the whole of the defined geographical area. [William Jones, James Dewe, Charles Thomas Rouse and Robert Dixey, and William Nathan Wells].

1880 ‘The Morris dancers were as usual very busy’ on Whit Monday, 17 May. [af; see also ag] Richard Decimus Butler succeeded his father as the regular musician about this year. [cv]

1881 On 6 June the dance set ‘as of yore, did their grotesque bit of jiggling, to the delight of the onlookers.’ [ah & ai]

1882 ‘The Morris dancers, as usual, were very busy’ on 29 May. [aj; see also ak]

1883 On 14 May the side once again ‘made their appearance, and much amused a multitude of people.’ [al-an] On 10 or 11 July, perhaps both days, they appeared at a ‘bazaar and gala’ at Aston. [ao]

1886 The Morris dancers ‘attracted attention’ when they performed on Whit Monday, 14 June. [ap; see also aq]

- 1887** William Nathan Wells became an active member of the dance set in 1887, when he was drafted to fill the role of fool [eo & ez; see also ex, where he erroneously claims 1886 as his first year]. His brother, John Edward Wells/Taylor, then aged sixteen, also danced in the set this year for the first and only time. [fn] In his manuscript, Wells gives a complete list of the men who were actively involved with the side on Whit Monday 1887. [cv] The Bampton set also ‘paid their annual visit’ to the club feast celebrations held in nearby Aston, on the Tuesday of Whitsun week, 31 May, [ar] which suggests regular ongoing performances at this venue during the years preceding this date.
- 1889** During this year there appears to have been a renaissance of sorts, for a contemporary report noted how, ‘To an old inhabitant it was a matter of pleasant reflection that the dancing this year was more picturesque and in character with the tradition of the occupation than for many years past.’ [as]
- 1890s** One informant in 1933 commented that he had attended the Club Feast at Buckland since 1889, and that the Bampton side ‘always used to come up’ on that occasion, [ex] presumably throughout this decade, and probably in previous years also. [George and Arthur Dixey, and John Tanner].
- 1890** ‘The ancient “Morris Dancers” afforded great amusement’ when they made their annual Whit Monday appearance in the streets of Bampton on 26 May. [av; see also as & au] 1891. ‘The ancient order of “Morris Dancers” created a great deal of amusement’ in Bampton on 18 May. [ax; see also aw] Manning had in his possession a costume which had been worn by one of the dancers during this year. [bf] It was probably also during this year that Charles Tanner (born 1816), though old and blind, was paid by various onlookers to perform solo jigs. [bk]
- 1892** In 1892 a correspondent noted that, on Whit Monday, the dancers were to be ‘commended for the respectable manner in which they carried out their performance this year.’ [az; see also ay] They were ‘also admired in their grotesque costumes’ at the Forester’s Fete, held at Weald Manor, on August Bank Holiday Monday. [ba] Arthur Dixey (born 1880) claimed to have had a dance with the side since the age of twelve. [fs] 1893 The ancient Morris dancers, as usual, created a great deal of amusement, and received a fare share of patronage.’ [be; see also az, ba & bf]
- 1894** Carter recorded the names of men who comprised the dance set which had been active during 1894; [bg] while an extant photograph almost certainly dates from Whit Monday this year.

- 1895** On 3 June the Morris dancers created ‘some rare fun, and were followed by a large crowd.’ [bo; see also bn] Wells wrote of the Whitsun period around 1895, ‘every day we visited Aston, Brize Norton, Buckland, Buscot, Filkins, Minster Lovell, Shilton and Leafield Clubs.’ [cv]
- 1896** The dancers performed as usual on Whit Monday, 25 May. [bp] Arthur Dixey claimed to have been invited to join the side in 1896. [fs & ft; see also ga] He is, however, conspicuously absent from photographs taken on Whit Monday of the following year. Moreover, his personalised bell pads, which were worn when dancing, are clearly inscribed ‘1898.’ [gf] He is, therefore, more likely to have become one of the six dancers in the actively-performing set at this later date [see below].
- 1897** Manning visited Bampton on Whit Monday, 7 June, and commissioned a series of photographs of the occasion. [br; see also bt & bu] On the following day, the side performed at Aston Club Feast. [bu]
- 1898** ‘The grotesque Morris dancers...attracted much attention’ when they performed on Whit Monday, 30 May. [bv] The bell pads used by Arthur Dixey when dancing are inscribed ‘1898,’ [gf] which suggests that he had been one of the dancers in the set during this year.
- 1899** ‘The Morris dancers also came in for a share of attraction, as usual’ on 22 May. [bw; see also bx & by] It was during the morning of Whit Monday this year that the musician Richard Decimus Butler broke his fiddle and went home. William Nathan Wells, who had been acting as fool, fetched his fiddle and played for the remainder of the day. [fs, ft & ga]
- 1900** On 4 June, the performance by the Bampton side ‘created a great deal of amusement, Mr. Wells causing roars of laughter, his excellent dancing was much admired.’ [bz]

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C20th & C21st musicians

William ‘Jinky’ Wells	1899-1948
Bertie Clarke	1926-1932 / 1949-1958
Sam Bennett (often	many years between 1926 and 1939
	in tandem with Bertie Clarke)
Jack Newton	1959
Reg Hall	1960 to date
Arnold Woodley	1950-until his death 1995
Frank Purslow	1960s-1990s