

## The debt Bampton Morris owe Wells

I HAD hoped my recent letter regarding the Bampton Morris would prompt further correspondence in these columns.

I am always willing to be contradicted and I am now very grateful for a long conversation with Jingy Wells's surviving son, Bobby, which not only filled in a few blanks in my knowledge, but also shed fresh light on some things I already knew.

I have also, just recently, been able to see certain letters, including some from Wells to persons outside Bampton, dated 1922, and from Sam Bennett to Arnold

Woodley in 1949 — which were of great interest.

It was unfortunate certain statements in my letter gave the impression I was blaming Jingy Wells for the present position of the Bampton Morris. Everyone in Bampton, including myself, knows the debt which the Morris owes to Wells.

His life was almost entirely devoted to it. If it had not been for his efforts, the tradition would certainly not have survived the Great War, and it was a great pity he

should have so soon found himself at loggerheads with the team which he had raised to keep the tradition alive.

I am not proposing that Jingy was a paragon of virtue; all of us have our failings; but there is little doubt that the attitude of the team in the 1920s did not do much to smooth their relationship, and when Wells left his old team to its own devices to form a completely new team of his own in 1925 (or thereabouts), it was probably the result of severe provocation.

Nevertheless, the old team did continue in existence, and its survivors have every right to the claim that they are carrying on the tradition.

Although it certainly seems clear that Wells exceeded his authority by going over the head of the Squire (Charlie Tanner) and giving Mary Neal and Cecil Sharp the tunes and steps of the dances, at least two of the other "rows" I mentioned were not of his making — the "unofficial" collecting at Reading and the business at Clanfield. The alleged team

at Alvescot still remains a mystery, however.

I offer my sincere apologies to Bobby Wells, and to all of Jingy's relatives, if my previous letter gave them offence. If I made Jingy sound like the villain of the piece, it was absolutely unintentional, I assure them. I must emphasise that the present "troubles" only go back to the period 1947/9 and, as most of the contestants are still very much alive, it is very difficult indeed to try to unravel their claims and counter-claims in the public

columns of a newspaper.

What I hope I have succeeded in doing is to show the younger generations of Bamptonians, and new residents, that Mr Woodley is not — as your original article seemed to imply — a recent upstart trying to usurp the position of leader of the Bampton Morris. He has as much right to this title as Mr Shergold.

That these two gentlemen should have preferred to run separate teams since 1949 is a matter for regret, and if Jingy Wells was alive today I am sure he would be very happy to see the two teams come to an amicable arrangement

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