



[Topical Press]

WILLIAM WELLS OF BAMPTON

## WILLIAM WELLS

1868-1953

MORRIS DANCER, FIDDLER AND FOOL

AN outstanding figure in the revival of English folk music makes a contribution to this Journal. 'Jinkey' Wells of Bampton-in-the-Bush, Oxfordshire, died a few years ago after a prolonged illness had cut him off from his beloved Morris and deprived his village and his many friends of a gay and cultured personality.

While he enjoyed moderate health and certainly long after he was blind he was the leader and fiddler of the Bampton Morris Men who capered and stepped in the lanes and gardens of the village throughout Whit-Monday. He himself knew the custom was ancient and part of an England that was fast disappearing. With the May Day garland carried from house to house by the children and the cake borne on the sword he looked upon the six white dancing figures and the black-faced fool—a part which he himself had made memorable in his youth—as a living element in the historic mode of life of the English peasant. One of his greatest experiences was his first meeting with Cecil Sharp who was able to confirm his own views of the deep-rooted nature of this dance tradition. Sharp paid his tribute to Wells in his description of the Bampton Morris dancers in *The Morris Book*, Part III.

After Sharp's death Wells combined with succeeding generations of dancers to keep the local custom going—his blindness making dance tutoring no easy matter—until at last he had to give up. Long before his health failed he wrote some notes about the local custom and his notes are in the Society's Library. When he became bed-ridden he invited Peter Kennedy to record on tape his spoken views on the Bampton dance tradition. These views, some of which Peter has transcribed on to paper, portray the philosophical character of the man and his penetrating mind. The words preserve that pithy and at times poetical turn of his speech. But *the* abiding impression of this vivid country character is the gentle courtesy of one of Nature's greatest gentlemen.

D.N.K.

### Jinkey Wells

(from a conversation recorded in October, 1952)

My family have been connected with the Morris for over two hundred years. A hundred years ago my grandfather was head of the Morris, leader of the Morris, and trainer of the Morris; a century ago his two sons were in it for ever so many years; his grandfather, Thomas Wells, was head of the Morris a hundred years before that, and he was always called 'Jingle Wells' always. His name was Tom, but he was called 'Jingle'. Well, none of his sons never had the nickname—not to stick to 'em—till it come to my Gran'py; instead of calling him 'Jingle', it got to 'Jinkey'; he used to be a

terrible man, years ago, for growing green peas—and they used to call him ‘Jinkey the green pea’. Then it come to me—that was his grandson; so it come right through seven generations.

I was born—me and me brother Jack—there were only two of us. I was born down there in an old cottage, just down there in the Weald, not far from the Mill Arches—the Mill Bridge.

Where the Bampton Post Office is today—that was our school—but that was a private school. I went to the National School—me and Jack—for about two years and then my mother had us put to this other special school; of course thinking we should learn a bit extra I suppose. But I don’t know as ever we done much good over it.

My first job, when I was fourteen, I was a butcher boy—and then I went from the butcher boy up to the Bampton Manor—undergardener and house-lad, see. I went up to London from there for a bit; had two jobs in London and then I come back the beginning of May—Jubilee Year—’87 wasn’t it? Well, I come back the beginning of May and they’d got nobody to go Fool for ’em that year and they begged me to go round that year and fool for ’em; that was the year as I started. I was nineteen when I started (in the Morris).

Oh! I’ve been working on all sorts of work, every sort. I’ve been fagging, mowing, worked on the farms, thrashing—all sorts of work. I’ve walked six mile to work and six mile back at night for two bob—two bob a day.

Oh! I’ve been a-gardening quite half my time but later years—the last forty—I’ve worked on the building. I’ve worked on the Thames Conservancy and of course the last thirty-five years I’ve been working for myself; gardening until my eyes got so bad I couldn’t.

My grandfather was ’ead of the Morris and I got three uncles—yes three—Uncle Harry and Uncle George and Uncle Alf. Uncle Alf was supposed to be the best dancer as ever danced in the Morris—‘Heels and Toes’ (the Crossed Pipes Dance). He was a good dancer and there was only one man who ever beat him and that was Billy Wells—this man—and he didn’t like it poor old chap; but of course the judges gave me best you see and he had to put up with it. That was at the Club Room.

My grandmother—an old deaf and dumb lady—her was deaf and dumb but her eyesight was good. Her was a wonderful clever woman with her needle and they used to make a lot of these old smock frocks—the white smock frocks—they used to make a lot of them things; but my cousin—my cousin was a dressmaker—and my granny—they made my first Clown’s dress that I had when I was Fool for the Morris—my first dress—and on the stuff the dress was made of—was all the Queen’s Jubilee heads—all over the stuff. That old Clowns Dress they got up at Cecil Sharp’s House today—in the museum. But of course I used to wear—when I was Fool—white trousers; only my trousers was cut off just below the knee—you see. I hadn’t got long trousers—’cause I used to wear two odd stockings you know—two odd stockings—generally a red ’un and a blue ’un.

I’ll always remember an old gentleman—when we was down at The Weald—he was one of the Tanners. I was just dressing up [Whit] Monday morning when he come out—he’d had a wash and a shave—he was going out to the pub I ’spect—and I’d got my

foot up on the rail cleaning me boot a bit and I’d got these odd stockings on—I was half dressed then—so the old man come out, ‘Ha! ha! ha! Thee dost look pretty’, and he looked down—he said ‘Be damned if thee hasn’t got two odd stockings on!’—see—I says, ‘No fear’, I says, ‘Thee casn’t see straight—thee’s is colour blind’—‘Ha! Can’t ee! ‘Tis thee casn’t see’—so I pretended to look down—see—and I said ‘Begg, me if I don’t think thee’s is right, Enoch’—Enoch Tanner his name was. He went up to the pub and told ’em, ‘Wouldn’t ’ave known if I ’adn’t a told ’im,’ he says.

### The Morris Fool or Village Jester

It takes a good man to make a good fool. There’s three kinds of fools: there’s the natural fool and the unnatural fool, and there’s the man that’s paid to play the fool (like in a circus or anywhere else), but it takes a good man to make a good fool.

The Fool a merry man is he, with ever ready wit,  
With his elastic limbs as nimble every bit,  
A rare head-dress, sashes broad, with ribbons bright.  
The village people they all shout. Oh, my what a fright!  
His cadging hat he passes through; in and out the crowd,  
And every penny he doth get, I’m sure he’s mighty proud.  
If he tires them with his chatter patter  
The money helps the box to fill, so what matter!  
With fat calf’s tail and horse’s bladder strung,  
To a short stout staff, tied on with a leather thong;  
Bells on his shoulders and around his knees,  
They said he was the perfect Fool, one and all agrees.  
In galley-baldie gossoon dressed,  
If but a knave they give him best,  
But if that part he now has dropped out  
The people all still turn to shout.  
All the children laugh and clap  
At his silly acrobat.  
But if they don’t precaution take  
They taste his bladder, not the cake.  
The dogs they bark, they show their teeth and yap,  
But they don’t come back for his bladder’s second rap.

Our gentry, too, let me tell you,  
Are right good people if but a few,  
For the old traditional style  
They patronise our box and give a smile.  
Our dancers six all trained tried men must be  
Picked from the village best you see.  
Now mind you this, let it be said,  
Our chaps all from one village born and bred,  
With legs as straight as poplar tree  
They clap all together or bend the knee.  
In well-trimmed bowler hats, ribbons broad and bright,  
White pocket handkerchiefs, all dressed in white.  
And if perchance they don’t do just right  
They get a sound whack and serve them right.  
Our oldest hand we call the Squire. His duty ’tis to do  
To carry the money-box, the cake and sword that cuts the cake a-two.

You know, the sword runs right up through the cake—there's a slot in the bottom of the tin, you see—and the sword goes right through, and you carries the cake on the hilt of the sword. So he do cut the cake a-two.

His ribbons bright of every hue, if flowers they don't cost too much  
Are the very best that can be got. Smell but do not touch.  
The cake is given yearly by our most worthy squire  
To taste; touch the box or you're not a buyer.  
Our Ragman, too, I will admit, his duty 'tis a hard 'un.  
He's got to please the jolly lot and help them in the bargain.

The man that stands in front with buttons on—that's the tenth man. He's an old dancer, and if anything goes wrong with any of the other dancers, if a man was to sprain his ankle, or if a man wanted to go out for half an hour—that man's supposed to be able to jump in and take his place, you see. That's what he's there for. On the other hand, of course, he collects the jackets and coats and carries the coats about. Like, you want your coats off if its fine weather—well, not if it rains, you want your coat there with you. Well then, very often the boys got fags or got something in their pockets, you know, and he's got to go and hunt about and find all that. So that's what I mean—'His duty 'tis an 'ard 'un'. Course, he's got to please the lot.

[The following lines were written by Wells about an earlier team.]

Our lads, a lively set, for nicknames they're not lacking,  
For every blessed one of us for that will take some whacking.  
There's ould Sarcapp and Owd Cokey, they are the oldest two;  
Buskut, Granky, Jokey, Dickey, Jackey, Jingle, too,  
Filly, Artfull; now count them all well through,  
And find a rummier lot, I'm sure you that can't do.  
Our oldest tunes we love so well, to you a few I'll tell.  
There's Trunkles, Bobbing Around, The Highland Mary's Dell,  
Lumps of Plum Pudding, for Old Molly Oxford, and the Maid of the Mill,  
The Nutting Girl, Jogging to the Fair to see our Constant Bill.  
Shepherd's Hey, Princess Royal, for they are just my stamp.  
Johnny's so long at the Fair, to see the Bride in Camp.  
Our Fiddler, too, let me tell you, for music is not adepted much.  
The good old tunes he plays right well, his fiddle up to concert touch.  
Our present Fool, the sweep, is he a good 'un at the game.  
The lads today are being trained and taught to answer  
For six Fools and a Morris Dancer  
Bill Wells.

### The Bampton Tradition

My grandfather never had no trouble to get the dancers but the trouble was sixty, seventy years ago to get the piper or the fiddler—the musician. Sometimes they had very great difficulty in getting one, they've had one from Buckland, they've had one from Field Town—Lea-field—and they've had to go out here to Fairford and Broadwell and out that way to get a piper.

See, they used to play what we call the wit an' dub then—the pipe and the drum—as I've been over to Gran'py when I was quite a little kid—over there to fetch the man

to play the pipe. But, of course, this last few years it's been mostly the fiddle. Dick Butler played the fiddle for about fourteen or sixteen years and then after Dick I took the fiddle.

Well, I've always said and I'll always stick to it—I've played a good many instruments—but I say, for the Morris dancing, you can't, and you never will, beat the fiddle. You'll never beat the fiddle on any instrument you'd like to mention. The fiddle will beat all other instruments for that kind of dancing.

Well, the whole lot, years gone by when I first started—they used to dance in thick navy shoes—wi' nail shoes; and they used to wear the old half-top hats in them days—what we called the billycock. And I've known 'em start in the morning at eight o'clock and I've known 'em dance till eight o'clock at night, without being tired, but, mind, they used to have a drop o' ale, you know, in them days and all the farms where we used to call they used to make a drop o' cider—and some good cider too—and then we used to get round the cottages where they used to make the home-made wines. So, you know, they 'ad plenty.

### 'CONSTANT BILLY'\*

But I used to give 'em a dance as used to take it out of 'em—we made 'em sweat, you know, and use their handkerchiefs round their faces, you know—that was 'Constant Billy'; capering through—right through—that was the dance that used to take it out on 'em.

'Constant Billy' is the longest dance in the Morris—six-handed dance. They used to do it three different ways—Jumping Through—that's the proper old dance—then, they used to dance him Half Through—change hands and come back next time, you see—that was too much trouble for 'em. They got from that to Show 'Im In where you just step in, you see, and wave your handkerchief cross corners. Then comes the jump, you see—'When the fishes flies over the water'—then turn—'Then shall I see Billy again', that's four jumps—that's a long jump and a long jump and turn (it's like a *twizzle*—you know, you turn round quick), then jumping through again.

When the fishes flies over the water,  
Then shall I see Billy again.  
Constant Billy, my Billy, my Billy boy,  
When shall I see Billy again?

When I first started in the Morris they hadn't got no more than half the dances as they had when I finished, because I found a lot of dances.

They used to come and fetch me in a horse and trap and bring me back to the Mill Bridge about six times—they had a wonderful Club Room there—I'm talking about Leafield (Field Town they always called it but the name of the village is Lea Field)—and these young gentlemen used to come down from these big estates—they was agents and different things up there you know and they was wonderful dancers and I used to play for them.

\* For list of dances played by Wells see page 14.

### 'THE FORESTER'

Well there was an old gentleman there then—'course I be talking about fifty year ago mind (he was alive and well then) he was a fiddler—and I had three or four dances off of this old fiddler you know when I was up there. That was one of them that I had—'The Forester'—it's sidestep and foot up—six-handed dance. They called that 'The Forestry Keeper's Jig'.

(A)

(B) Side-step.

The musical notation for 'The Forester' consists of two systems of two staves each. The first system is labeled (A) and the second system is labeled (B) Side-step. Both systems are in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, and ends with repeat signs.

### 'THE WEBLEY'

Then there's 'The Webley'. What made me call it the Webley was I had it from a man by the name of Webb, but it was really more of an old fashioned big form dance; but it was a good tune—just right for Morris dancing. There was four verses, but I never knowed the song properly. I always reckoned, you know, that that was one of our best dances and yet up at Cecil Sharp's House they didn't think much of it (*hums the tune to himself*)—and then there was a forward jump.

(A)

(B)

The musical notation for 'The Webley' consists of two systems of one staff each. Both systems are in G major (one sharp) and 6/8 time. The notation includes a variety of note values and rests, and ends with repeat signs.

### 'OLD TOM OF OXFORD'

Old Tom of Oxford—he was a forester, he was born up in the Forest. Well, his eldest sister—of course, I do say she was perhaps twelve or fourteen years older than him—well, her eldest son—he took to this lad, see. They was caravan dwellers

(they lived and dwelt in a caravan), they was 'awkers—they used to 'awk all sorts of things—mats—brushes—and brooms—oh dozens and dozens of things. Well, they went about with this caravan, when he picked up with a girl in Oxford—you've heard what they've said—what they call the tune, 'Old Molly Oxford', see; well, as the song went:—

'Old Tom of Oxford and young Jim Kent' (that was his nephew) 'they married old Moll and off they went', and she lived in the caravan with 'em and while they was out, doing their 'awking, I suppose she used to look after the caravan and do the cooking and all that sort of thing—and I've yeard it said they lived in the caravan the three—the two men and the one woman. I've slept in a caravan, you know, so I knows what a caravan is. Well, they say they lived together for years and they never quarrelled they never had no disagreement—nor never fell out—the two men with the one woman.

(A)

(B)

(C)

Follow with (B)

The musical notation for 'Old Tom of Oxford' consists of three systems of one staff each. The first system is labeled (A), the second (B), and the third (C). The notation is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. System (C) includes a time signature change to 2/4. The piece concludes with the instruction 'Follow with (B)'.

### 'BONNY GREEN GARTERS'

My sister's going to Abingdon Fair,  
Bonny green garters I'm buying you each a pair.  
A pair here for Mary and a pair for Sue,  
A pair for Molly and a pair for Lou,  
And a pair for the girl that I'm after.

### 'THE QUAKER'

'Verily heigh; Verily ho; vivetty vob like the Shaker'—'Vivetty vob'—that means 'tug of war'—'Vivetty vob'—that means too many agitators and dictators—'All this world seems awfully wrong and it terribly puzzles the Quaker'.

Musical notation for 'Lumps of Plum Pudding' in G major, 2/4 time. It consists of three staves. The first staff is labeled (A) and contains a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature. The melody starts with a quarter note G, followed by eighth notes A, B, C, D, E, F#, G. A trill is marked with an asterisk over the eighth note G. The second staff is labeled 'Fine. (B)' and contains a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. The melody continues with quarter notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G. The third staff is labeled 'D. C.' and contains a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. The melody continues with quarter notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G.

**'LUMPS OF PLUM PUDDING'**

Lumps of plum pudding and pieces of pie,  
My mother she gave me for telling a lie.

'When you're ready, all together, you lazy lot o' rascals'.

**'THE MAID OF THE MILL'**

The maid of the mill is a sweet pretty girl,  
The maid of the mill for me.  
The maid of the mill, the maid of the mill,  
The maid of the mill for me.

She's straight and tall as a poplar tree,  
And her eyes are as bright as the diamonds.  
She's the sweetest girl as ever you see,  
When she's dressed in her best Sunday clothes.

'All together, you lazy lot of bone-shakers!'

**'JOHNNY'S SO LONG AT THE FAIR'**

Musical notation for 'Johnny's So Long at the Fair' in G major, 6/8 time. It consists of three staves. The first staff is labeled (A) and contains a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 6/8 time signature. The melody starts with a quarter note G, followed by eighth notes A, B, C, D, E, F#, G. The second staff is labeled (B) and contains a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 6/8 time signature. The melody continues with quarter notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G. The third staff contains a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 6/8 time signature. The melody continues with quarter notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G.

**THE ROSE TREE'**

Musical notation for 'The Rose Tree' in G major, 2/4 time. It consists of four staves. The first staff is labeled (A) and contains a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. The melody starts with a quarter note G, followed by eighth notes A, B, C, D, E, F#, G. The second staff contains a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. The melody continues with quarter notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G. The third staff is labeled (B) 3 times and contains a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. The melody continues with quarter notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G. The fourth staff contains a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. The melody continues with quarter notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G.

**'BANBURY BILL'**

Musical notation for 'Banbury Bill' in G major, 2/4 time. It consists of three staves. The first staff is labeled (A) and contains a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. The melody starts with a quarter note G, followed by eighth notes A, B, C, D, E, F#, G. The second staff is labeled (B) and contains a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. The melody continues with quarter notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G. The third staff contains a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. The melody continues with quarter notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G.

**Meeting with Cecil Sharp**

Thirty-five years ago [1908] I put out a challenge—that ours was the oldest Morris in the country and Mr. Cecil Sharp saw it and Mr. Cecil Sharp come down and found us out. . . .

Well he came down to Bampton and he made a few enquiries and he found old Uncle Harry—a man then about 72 and he'd put fifty years then in the Morris. 'Course, he told Uncle Harry his mission and asked him a few questions about the old Morris and asked him what kind of musical instrument was used in the Morris, and he say 'Our Billy plays the fiddle, sir. He's been playing the fiddle to us now', he said,

These fifteen years and he been in the Morris, you know,' he said, 'these twenty years. He started as Fool and he made an old fiddle when he first started (out of rifle butt and corn-beef tin)—but', he said, 'then he bought a fiddle, and when he was a-fooling, you know,' he said, 'he was a-fiddling—playing the tunes on the fiddle when he was a-fooling'.

Well Mr. Cecil Sharp came down to me—Uncle Harry brought him down, you know, and introduced him—and, of course, we had a talk over the old original Morris and he asked me to play the tunes to him and I said 'I'd be very pleased to help you in any way, sir'. I reached the old fiddle down—I well remember the first tune I played to him and that was 'Highland Mary'. 'Oh, Wells', he said, 'that's a lovely tune! Oh, it's a beautiful tune! That's lovely', he said.

Well, it was our annual flower show at the old Weald Manor and, of course, our cottage was close to the old Manor wall, and the band struck up and it was a local band—you know a village local band—and it made a tidy din. Well, of course, that put him out a little bit, but anyway we managed to get over that difficulty pretty well and I think he took about eight tunes.

Well, he come down several times after that and I give him sixteen Morris tunes and he and Mr. MacIlwaine come down to take 'The Pipe Dance' and I played the Pipe Dance to the two dancers over and over and over again. They stopped that night at the Talbot—at the Hotel—and after they went home and had tea they come back down to me—'Well, we can't get anywhere! We can't get it!' I said, 'No, you never will get it like that', I said, 'If you want to get the dance—the dance is as simple as A.B.C.'—I says, 'There's eight bars twice over and each part twice over'. I got the pipes on a piece of paper—drew the pipes—I said, 'There you are—there's 12345678. You go round eight, you go back eight; you go over the pipes either where your toes are or your heels, eight times round, eight times back.' They went home and slept on it, and they come down the next morning—early the next morning—with all smiles: 'Wells, we've got it!'

Some says the devil's dead,  
Some says the devil's dead.  
Some says the devil's dead,  
And buried in Cold Harbour.

Some says he's rose again.  
Some says he's rose again.  
Some says he's rose again,  
Apprenticed to a barber.

D'you know I've done the Pipe Dance with a fiddle in me hand, play me own tune, and I've never touched a pipe. I've been in and out, heels and toes, in and out them pipes with a fiddle in me hand, play me own tune, and I had ten shilling for doing that—once—and that was at Buckland.

Well then, two or three or four years afterwards they went to Stow to teach 'em the jigs and the dances and Mr. Cecil Sharp said to me, he said 'Wells' he said, 'I've got "Jogging to the Fair"', he said, 'From three different parts of the country', he says. 'They're similar and yet they're not alike'. So I said, 'Well, play ours'—'course,

he'd got the piano there—'Play ours'. So he played our tune and I danced to him. 'Now', I said, 'play the other'. He played that and I danced it to him and I said, 'It's quite simple', I says, 'They don't make no hopen capers', no hopen capers, they only make just a quick jump, half capers as we call it, see?' 'Oh, I got it, Wells, yes, I can see it', he said, 'It's simple enough'. I could see it in a minute as soon as he played the tune.

### 'JOGGING TO THE FAIR'

Well, then, of course, since then, I've been up to London nine times: four times I've been up with our set—Mary Neal's place first, at Cumberland Market in that little hall; the next time we went up to the Globe Theatre and danced on the stage, all the set. The next time we went up to the Friends House and the Albert Hall; and I been up there since then six times—up to Cecil Sharp's House to get that picture painted [by Sir William Rothenstein], and all that sort of thing.

**'Written by W. Wells, on Morris Dancing'**

*In his book of notes, which were written down just as he would have spoken them,\* Wells describes another of his activities—his one-man tours:—*

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 Bam Morris'. When they saw only one member, 'Where's the Morris?' 'Here's the Morris', says I. Ah, and I have done well too, for I have brought as much as a sovereign back. I would take the street, farms, houses or gentleman's houses right through just as though there were ten of us. One instance in particular—I went to the side door of a farm house 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 can't 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 all patronise thee.' I had six 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 Lea, Leafield, Kingston 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.

*Later in his 'book' he describes some of the tours he made in the Diamond Jubilee year of 1897 (about four years after he was married):*

I went to Kingham club where I met with a very old fiddler. The old chap was very much took up with me although a stranger, Mr. Stirt. There was another good gipsy fiddler there by the name of Green. They both were very anxious to play to my dancing. We had a crowd of about an hundred 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 sixty in years but as nimble as a cat. We had some hours of dancing and I nearly found my match. Through Burford . . . whilst in the street the school boys started pelting me with mud or any missiles they could lay hands on, but I was on the ringleader in a moment. That stopped them at once.

I started from home Jubilee day at about ten in the morning my first call was at Lew; the gentleman farmer, Mr. Honor was giving his men a 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 three bob for my pains. I had a good time for two hours, then having a job to get away I got to Curbage where there was a larger gathering of merrymakers en fete. . . . I then got to

\* The Editor has added punctuation and amended some of the spelling,

Witney where there was crowds of people on 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 Street 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 six feet three, being backed on no doubt by his mates, came suddenly up behind me, took hold of my two ear lobes, lifted me in mid air keeping me in that position. I was perfectly helpless in his hands for about three 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 arrived home about half past one in the morning, after doing about fifteen hours, but I had a good day, getting about twenty shillings for my outing. But it generally took me two or three days to get over it, for I have had to crawl down stairs.

*The greater part of Wells's notes were written in 1914 only a few years after his meetings with Cecil Sharp and with Miss Mary Neal, discussed above. There was, apparently, some feeling of resentment among the Bampton men at the amount of information about the Morris dance which Wells imparted to Sharp and Mary Neal. 'Jinkie's a-going to sell the Morris', they complained. Even Wells drew the line when he was asked by Miss Neal if the team could be filmed, 'for I thought that really would be selling the Bampton Morris, for they would then have been able to see the real thing all over London.'*

*But Wells from the beginning saw the value of the work of these collectors and he shared their interest and enthusiasm. He concluded the first part of his account of the Bampton Morris, thus:—*

But still I would do the same again, for if none imparted what they know to others the old thing would surely die out, for 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 dances were gone into with great spirit thirty 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 sixteen couples dancing in a very small compass. Each kept their changes just like clockwork and poor old Fiddler Butler had a job to tire some of them, for they would keep on for hours. . . . If my predecessors a hundred years ago had kept all the bits of importance and old relics in the way of wittles and dubs, old violins, old clown and other dresses, old sets of bells, . . . and a score of other things in the way of old and original dances, 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.

BILL WELLS.

## Appendix—The Bampton Dances

Wells claimed to know twenty-two Morris dances altogether:—

### SIX-HANDED DANCES

#### Processional:

BONNY GREEN GARTERS (see Sharp and MacIlwaine: *The Morris Book*, Part III).

#### Side-step Dances:

THE HIGHLAND MARY (Wells writes it 'Iland') (see *Morris Book*, III)  
THE QUAKER  
THE BRIDE IN CAMP (The Girl I Left behind Me)  
JOHNNY'S SO LONG AT THE FAIR  
THE FORESTER  
LUMPS OF PLUM PUDDING (*Morris Book*, III)  
THE NUTTING GIRL  
OLD TOM OF OXFORD (Old Molly Oxford) (*English Dance and Song*, XVI, 2, 1951)

#### Clap Dances:

STAMP AND CLAP or GLORISHEARS (Wells spells it 'Glory Shears') (*Morris Book*, III)  
JUMP AND CLAP or THE MAID OF THE MILL (see *Morris Book*, III)

#### Through or Corner Dances:

THE SHEPHERDS' HEY (see *Morris Book*, III)  
THE ROSE TREE  
BANBURY BILL (Wells writes, 'Bambury Bill')

#### Jumping Half Through:

BOBBING AROUND (or Bobbing Joe) (*Morris Book*, III)  
CONSTANT BILLY BOY (see *Morris Book*, III)

#### Knee Dance:

THE FLOWERS OF EDINBURGH (see *Morris Book*, III)

#### Show and Twizzle:

THE WEBLEY

### JIGS

PRINCESS ROYAL (*Morris Book*, III)  
THE FOOL'S JIG (*Morris Book*, III)  
THE PIPE DANCE or GREENSLEEVEES (Bacca Pipes) (see *Morris Book*, III)  
JOGGING TO THE FAIR (*English Dance and Song*, XVI, 2, 1951)

'I know twenty-two all together—twenty-two as we uses. 'Course, I can play several tunes besides, but then, you know, they be more the old-fashioned country dances.'

THE GREEN BUSHES  
TRUNKLES  
TOMMY MAKE ROOM FOR YOUR UNCLE  
THE OLD MYRTLE TREE

[According to Cecil Sharp's MSS the following dances also used to be performed annually at Bampton:

THE WILLOW TREE  
BOB AND JOAN  
THE CUCKOO'S NEST  
THE SOLDIER'S CLOAK]

## NOTES ON BAMPTON DANCES TO-DAY

BY RUSSELL WORTLEY

THE following remarks are intended to be supplementary to the references given on the previous page and to reflect a few aspects of the living tradition as it exists at Bampton at the present time.

It should be pointed out that three of the side-step dances enumerated by Wells are performed also as jigs:—'Lumps of Plum Pudding' (*Morris Book* III); 'Old Tom of Oxford' (*English Dance and Song* XVI, 2, 1951; 'The Nutting Girl').

With the exception of the processional, 'Bonny Green Garters', all the six-handed dances share the Bampton common figures (Foot-up, Half-gip, Gipsies, Half-Rounds) and finish with the side facing up in column. 'Through dances' finish at the conclusion of Half-Rounds, the remainder at the end of the distinctive figure which follows Half-Rounds.

There are eight side-step dances as given by Wells. He used to say that each side-step and foot-up dance was 'absolutely different quite', and of course it is true that each is made distinctive by the tune to which it is wedded. There are, however, only two varieties of stepping in these dances:—

(1) 'Single side-step'. Double step (4/3) throughout the side-step movement: 'The Highland Mary', 'The Quaker', 'The Bride in Camp', 'The Nutting Girl'.

(2) 'Double side-step'. Four plain steps (or one double step) and two hop-steps, repeated: 'Johnny's so long at the Fair', 'The Forester', 'Lumps of Plum Pudding', 'Old Tom of Oxford'.

In 'through dances', after Foot-up, corners side-step 'half-through' (i.e. meet and turn back to places); after Half-gip and Gipsies, corners side-step 'through' (i.e. change places). In 'The Rose Tree' and 'Banbury Bill' all caper four times at the end of each corner movement.

'The Webley' has not been danced at Bampton in recent years. According to a notation kindly supplied by Frederick Hamer this is a six-handed dance, the distinctive figure consisting of a short side-step and show to right and left followed immediately by a half-caper and quick turn or 'twizzle' into the hey which must be completed in the remaining two bars of music.

In the side-step jigs the first four bars of side-step are danced as in the corresponding six-handed dances, followed by a short side-step and show each way and two half-capers (see 'Lumps of Plum Pudding' in *Morris Book* III). In 'The Nutting Girl' a double shake-up is added; in 'Jogging to the Fair' ('double side-step') a single shake-up and four plain capers are added. For 'Princess Royal' ('single side-step') see *Morris Book* III. The open capers are often danced in 'threes', omitting the plain step and beginning and ending on feet together.

In presenting the foregoing notes I should like to thank Francis Shergold and the Bampton Morris Dancers for information on the side-step dances and also acknowledge the help given by Douglas Kennedy and Frederick Hamer. R. W.



## SOUND RECORDINGS OF WILLIAM WELLS

### *B.B.C. Recorded Programmes Library*

- 1321-2 Highland Mary; The Quaker (fiddle with dancers).  
Interview and The Maid of the Mill (fiddle with dancers). Recorded in 1937.
- 9844 Talk about Cecil Sharp.  
Recorded, December 1937.
- 6493 Conversation with Douglas Cleverdon, June 1943.  
Banbury Bill; Maid of the Mill, Constant Billy; Bobbing Along.
- 9827 Talk; The Rose Tree; Green Garters; Johnny's so long at the Fair (played on fiddle);  
Old Molly Oxford (concertina).  
Recorded in 1946.

### *Columbia Records (never released):*

Highland Mary; Bobbing Around.  
Flowers of Edinburgh; Maid of the Mill.

### *Tape Recording by Peter Kennedy, October 1952:*

Autobiographical conversation, including information about country dances and two songs 'Old King Cole' and 'The Dumb Wife'. This is the recording on which the preceding article is based. The tunes printed above were also recorded at this time.

## PORTRAITS

The portrait to which William Wells refers on page 11 is a full-length pencil drawing made by Sir William Rothenstein in 1931. A few years later a head-and-shoulders portrait in water colour was painted by Mrs. E. M. Bateman. Both pictures are hanging in Cecil Sharp House, where, too, a number of photographs taken at various times in Wells' life may be seen.

He is also represented by a costume model, 15 inches high, in the Society's Museum where the complete Bampton side is shown dancing to the fiddler—in a characteristic attitude—and accompanied by the cake bearer. This set of models was dressed by Miss Margaret Lester-Garland in 1937.

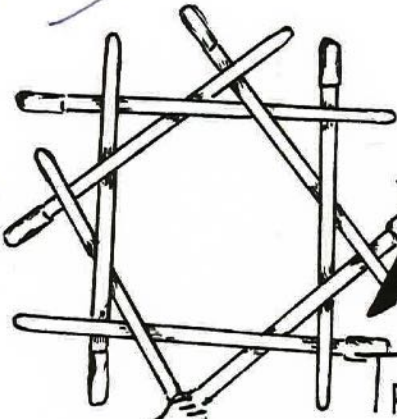
\* \* \* \* \*

'Every dog has his day and I've had mine'—I said that to a gentleman once years ago in a railway carriage. 'Every dog has his day, but', I says, 'the bitches has two!' So he looked at me—'I never heard that before', he says. 'What's the meaning of that?' I says, 'Well the honly meaning', I says, 'that I've ever found as I could tell you, is this: I've knowed men die in their early sixties and I've knowed their wives die at ninety-four, ninety-five, ninety-six, and very near the hundred,' I says, 'That was long enough to have wored another man out!'

To Bampton —  
Abingdon Mayor Making 1982

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John Potts



Sunny Gallagher  
(musician)

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SWORD RACK  
DANCERS



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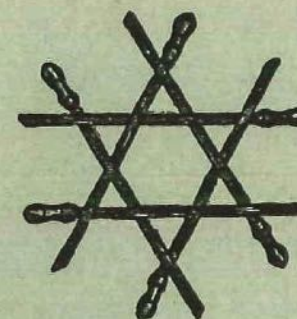
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# WILLIAM WELLS

1868-1953

## MORRIS DANCER, FIDDLER AND FOOL

(with *Notes on Bampton Dances To-day* by Russell Wortley)



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