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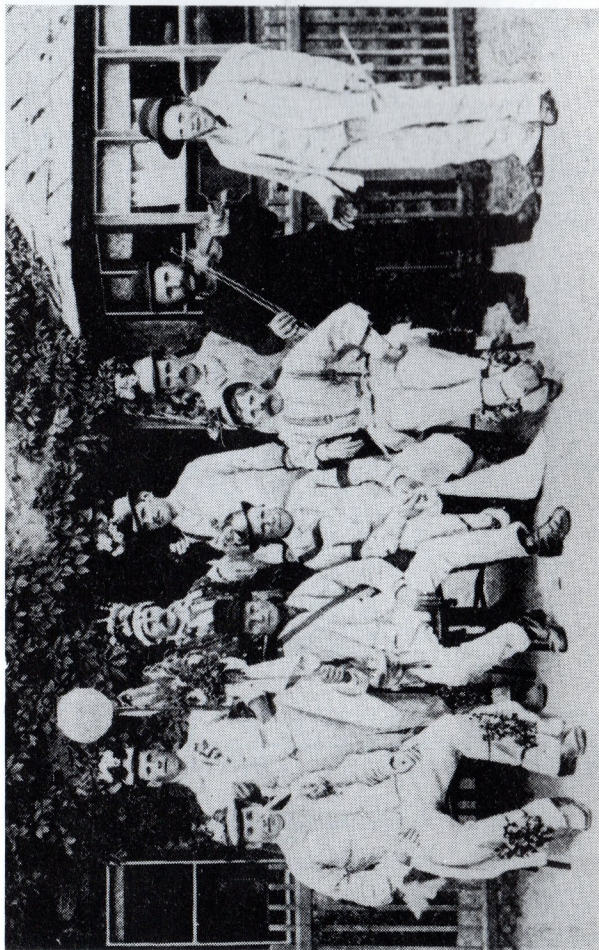
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THE BAMPTON MORRIS DANCERS 1887

THE BAMPTON TRADITION

by
Arnold Woodley

Bampton, or to give its older name, Bampton-In-The-Bush, is a very beautiful little village in Oxfordshire. The Bampton Tradition is over six hundred years old and, two hundred years older than Bampton Church Spire. Bampton was spelt in medieval times B-A-M-T-O-N. The Tradition has only survived by being handed down by closely knit families over the generations. The village was very isolated which accounted for families being so closely related. The Tradition is certain to have started as a result of this isolation. The roadways to and from Bampton were little more than cart tracks in those days. The dancing was a form of village entertainment which became an annual event each Spring and was held every Whitmonday, (now known as Spring Bank Holiday Monday). The dancing today is as much an entertainment as ever because of the increasing crowds which make their way to Bampton each Bank Holiday. The dancing is seen by many people as a fertility dance heralding the beginning of a new growing season.

BAMPTON MORRIS MUSIC

There is a certain Magic about The Bampton Morris Music. It is unique in its own right. It sets the toe tapping and sends The Morris Men to ever greater heights as they weave their way through the various complicated dances. The early Morris Music was played on a pipe or whistle and was known as Pipe and Tabor. +

The earliest Fiddlers for The Bampton Morris were the Butler family. Dick Butler was hardly if ever mentioned by the vast amount of people writing books and articles on The Bampton Morris, though he was a pioneer of Bampton Morris Music preceeding William (Jinky*) Wells. Not much is known about him because he left Bampton and went to London towards the end of Queen Victoria's reign and unfortunately was never heard of again, though his Fiddle still remains in Bampton. The photograph of 1887 shows Dick Butler as The Fiddler, The Squire, Thomas (Buscot*) Tanner is seated next to Dick Butler and William (Jinky*) Wells is in the back row, second from left.

In 1887 (Jinky*) Wells arrived from London where he had been working and was asked to play the part of Fool, this he did on the Whitmonday of 1887, he was nineteen years old then. After the departure of Dick Butler he then took over as Fiddler and carried on for sixty years. He did a great deal for Bampton Morris, he was a good Fiddler with very good timing for dancing. Another Fiddler of renown was Sam Bennett. He played for The Bampton Team many years, though coming from the small but picturesque little village of Ilmington, Warwickshire. He was a regular visitor to Bampton every Whitmonday for many years. Bert Clark was another Fiddler who sometimes accompanied Sam Bennett when they both played for the Bampton Morris Dancers. Sam is seen in the 1938 photograph and Bert is seen in the 1932 photo which was taken during a cloud burst which flooded Bampton that year.

(+small drum)

THE DANCERS

The Team consisted of six Dancers. Reserves were not encouraged and failure to turn up for a practice resulted in a fine of fourpence to sixpence. The early dress we know of was a white smock and billy cock hat. This later changed to white trousers, white shirts, (which were never worn open necked) white waistcoat and a set of bell pads which were worn on the side of the legs, to give more sound from the bells, this is clearly visible from the early photographs. The bowler hat completed the dress apart from the ribbons. The Traditional colours of which were, red, yellow and blue for the hat with flowers at the front made of stiffened cloth. Ribbons of red and yellow were worn on the arms. The dancers wore heavy nailed boots but, no dancer was complete without his handkerchiefs as they conveyed all the movement and purpose of the dance, without them the dance would lose all its magical meaning. The old photographs show the difference in dress then, compared with the dress of today. Ties are now worn and bell pads are worn on the shins at the front of the legs. The biggest change in the dancing from the early days has been the dance steps. These have now changed from a double to single step. This change came about in 1926 when a new Team was taught. Part of The Team did the double step, (which was the original) and the other a single. The reason for this was the single step was much easier to do. The Dancers of today do the single step.

THE FOOL, CLOWN OR JESTER

It is generally believed he came from the medieval past as The Court Jester in the days of Kings and Castles. There have in the past been countless arguments as to the proper name for him. The name of Fool most probably came from the term of Fool or village idiot. He carries a pigs or bullocks bladder which is blown up and tied to a stick. It is not unknown for The Fool to use a horses bladder in the past which was obtained from a knackers yard. Now-a-days, a bullocks bladder is used. Any Dancer who made a mistake when dancing suffered the indignity of a few whacks on the backside with it. The Fool with the aid of the bladder maintained the difficult job of keeping The Dancers together. To-day The Fool is still very popular following on from the days of (Jinky Wells and Dave Edgington) he attracts the crowds and plays up to them. He must be a good Dancer and very diplomatic.



1938



FLOOD 1932

THE CAKE CARRIER & COLLECTOR

A vital part of The Bampton Tradition and one that adds mystery is The Sword and Cake Tin. The Sword and Tin now carried are the original one's that have been handed down through the generations and they could never be replaced. The rim at the top of the Tin has a saw or crown edge. This was acceptable in the past but, in the present day it has an aluminium covering because it would be regarded as dangerous. The teeth or saw edge are razor sharp. The reason for the sharp teeth was to discourage people taking a large piece of cake. The cake is known as a fertility or good luck cake which represents the fruits of the earth. Maidens have been known to preserve the pieces of cake which they would put under their pillows, and dream of their sweethearts. Through the bottom of The Tin goes The Sword which impales the cake. At the top of The Sword is bound a bunch of flowers, a symbol of Spring and Prosperity. The Collecting Box is always carried for donations in return for a piece of the wishing cake. Over the course of time thousands, possibly millions of people have tasted a small piece of the cakes and wished. Without The Cake Carrier, The Bampton Tradition could never be complete.





THE RAGMAN

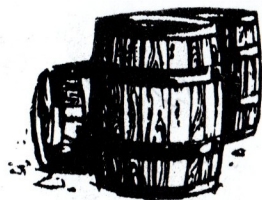
The Ragmans job was an important one, though it is not known when it first came about. His job was to carry The Dancers spare clothing, bladders, bacca pipes and the stick used to dance The Bampton Fools Jig. It is believed The Ragmans job started as a result of adverse weather conditions when in very hot weather The Dancers discarded garments which were carried by The Ragman. The best known Ragman was Charles (Cocky*) Tanner. He was a member of The Team for many years. He is seen on the extreme right of the 1887 photograph. The bacca pipes are a set of two clay pipes known as Church Wardens pipes and are almost twenty inches long. The pipes were placed on the ground in the form of a cross and The Dancers would dance over them. Great skill was needed on the part of The Dancer to avoid breaking the pipes, which, are now so rare a substitute is used.

(nickname*)

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Arnold Woodley*



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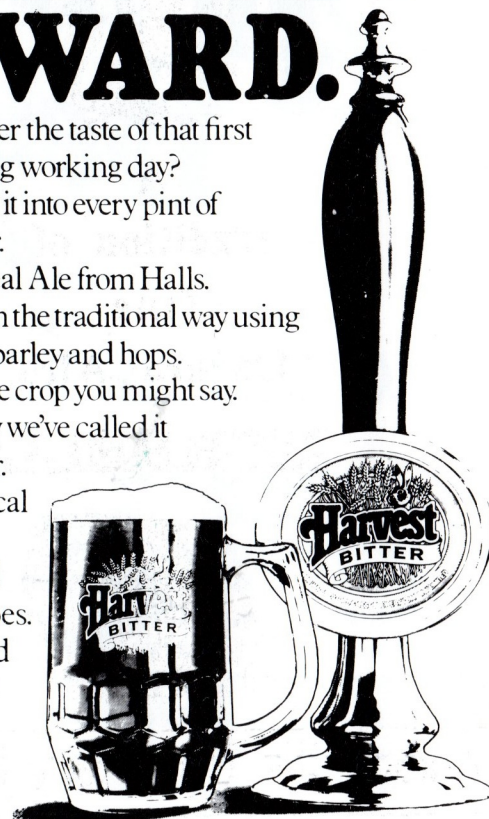
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ARNOLD WOODLEY, the Squire of the Bampton Morris Men, pictured in action at Saturday's Festival of National Dancing held on Church Green, Witney as part of the West Oxfordshire Annual Sports Week.