

# Manchester Morris Men



## The Early Years

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Manchester Morris Men  
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## CONTENTS

- 1 The EFDS Men's Morris Classes in the 1920s
  - 2 The Manchester Men's Morris team in the 1930s
  - 3 The North-west Morris dances in the 1930s
  - 4 The War Years, and beyond
- Appendix Ring Meeting Reports (1936-39)

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to John Tallis and Bill Chadband for permission to quote from their documents; and to Duncan Broomhead and Roger Bryant for providing photographs of the MMM in the 1930s.

This booklet contains extracts from :-

- i. John Tallis' booklet 'the English Folk Dance Revival in Manchester' published in 1972  
*quotes from this booklet are indicated by <sup>(TT)</sup>*
- ii. Bernard Bentley's recollections of how MMM started (audio recording : 1986)
- iii. Minutes of the Manchester Branch of the EFDS; morris related topics extracted by Bill Chadband in 1985
- iv. The First Log Book of the Morris Ring (published by the Morris Ring)
- v. Roger Bryant, who found what is probably the first known photograph of the Manchester Men's Morris team
- vi. Duncan Broomhead, (Morris Ring Photo Archivist), for providing the first known photograph of MMM dancing a North-west dance

### Note

In 1932, the English Folk Dance Society (formed by Cecil Sharp in 1911) merged with the Folk-Song Society (founded in 1898) to form the English Folk Dance and Song Society. This is why both of the abbreviations EFDS and EFDSS appear in the section for the 1930s.

## 1 The EFDS Men's Morris Classes (1921-29)

The English Folk Dance Society was founded by Cecil Sharp in 1911, and in the following year the Manchester Branch was formed. The main role of the EFDS was in providing teaching classes in country dancing, Cotswold morris and sword dancing; and the majority of members at this time were women.

During 1921, an EFDS Easter School was held in Manchester, which brought in new members to the Manchester Branch, and enabled the formation of Men's Classes in Morris and Sword. In John Tallis' booklet, members from that period recall that "for the first time ...the Manchester Branch... were able to include Men's Morris and Sword Dances in their demonstrations"<sup>(17)</sup> Bernard Bentley's recollections are that "these shows would be at private functions, or occasionally they would put things on in the parks. We used to get a brass band to play for the country dancing - most people in the branch would turn up and dance, bringing the crowd in if you could".



*EFDS Display Team c.1926*  
(from MMM Archives)

In 1926 other EFDS Branches remarked on Manchester's lack of interest in Festivals because they took no part in the competitions. And so in 1928, the Branch sent teams to the local (competitive) Festivals at Buxton and Alderley Edge, and after this regularly entered teams for Festivals.

Some of those early EFDS members recall that "after 1929, the more experienced dancers of the Branch were organised into definite demonstration teams ..... which gave displays to outside clubs and societies on request, and also participated in Folk Dance Festivals throughout the North of England - at Blackpool, Burnley, Buxton, Doncaster, Liverpool, Preston and York."<sup>(17)</sup>

## 2 The Manchester Men's Morris team in the 1930s

EFDS documentation, along with recollections of members, indicates that in 1930 the Men's Morris class was in fact an experienced team of morris men, who made their own arrangements and decisions. On this basis, Manchester Morris can claim to have been dancing since early 1930, initially as the Manchester Men's Morris team and by the end of the decade as the Manchester Morris Men.

- EFDS Branch minutes for Sept 1929 record that the Men's Morris class was led by Mr Heath, and in his absence, "the Morris hour would be taken by Miss Ledger, so that it would be a lesson rather than a practice". Which implies that the men's morris hour was normally a practice session, for an established team of dancers.
- The minutes in February 1930 record that "the Men's Morris Class was ..... allowed to make their own arrangements ....., Mr Duffy kindly offering the use of his Scout Room for the classes and also for the demonstration practices".
- Later in 1930, the minutes record that the Branch committee left the decision to enter a Men's Morris team in the Liverpool festival with the morris men, and that "Mr Heath should discuss the matter with the men next Friday". Although the Branch committee themselves made the decision to enter the Country Dance and Women's Morris teams in the Festival, without further reference to those two demonstration teams.
- Further minutes record "Mr Heath should approach the Men to see if a side could be raised to give a Men's Morris and Sword demonstration in Preston".



*Believed to be the Manchester Men's Morris Team at Flowery Field Cricket Club in June 1930.*

*(photo from 'The Reporter Pictorial Review for 1930')*

*supplied by Roger Bryant*

Recollections from local EFDS members at the time, were that “the Men’s Morris team, at its best, was reckoned to be as good as the EFDS Headquarters Demonstration Team. The Men’s Team at this stage, of course, danced only the Cotswold Morris, as the North-West Morris was still largely unknown”.<sup>(7T)</sup> In fact the Men’s Morris team was awarded a Distinction Certificate at the Liverpool Festival on 29 Nov 1930 and awarded First-Class Certificates in May/June every year from 1931 to 1939, at the Alderley Edge Musical Festival.

In the EFDSS minutes of 3 Feb 1936, “It was decided that the Men’s Morris Side should affiliate with the Morris Ring, the Branch paying the Annual Subscriptions and that Mr Hiley should be asked to be the Correspondent”. Later that month, the minutes state that “Mr Hiley had consented to act as correspondent for the Morris Side, which was now affiliated to the Morris Ring.”

In June 1936, at the Thaxted Ring Meeting, the Morris Ring Log Book records that the “Bagman announced the applications of four new clubs to become associated in the Ring – Bournemouth, Cheddar, Newcastle and Manchester, and their association was formally confirmed. ” And at the Grasmere Ring Meeting, later in the year, Manchester MM were presented with their staff of association.

During the 1930s, the EFDSS Men’s Morris team and the Manchester Morris Men were in all probability one and the same team. And in their role as the Manchester Morris Men, they attended all the northern Ring Meetings until the start of WW2 ; namely :-

- Grasmere (1936)
- Tideswell (1937)
- Manchester (1938)
- Longridge (1939)

Details of these meetings are recorded in the First Log Book of the Morris Ring, and brief extracts are given in the appendix.

The first known reference to the ‘Manchester Morris Men’ is in May 1938, when the EFDSS minutes record that the “Men’s Morris Class is to be held on Friday evenings next term taught by a Manchester Morris Man.”

### 3 The North-west morris dances in the 1930s

By the 1930s, interest in the North-west dances was growing in EFDS/morris circles, and Manchester Morris Men learned and danced the Godley Hill dance in 1937.

John Tallis' booklet has a section on the Lancashire Morris, based on information supplied by Maud Karpeles, Gladys Ledger, Edith Emmett and Bernard Bentley, and an extract is given below :-

*One of the best known local teams in the Nineteenth Century was the Godley Hill Team, but by the 1930's this was no longer in existence. Miss Maud Karpeles ..... noted down a version of the Godley Hill Dance in 1929, but this was not collated with the Crompton version (see below) until after the War. At about the same time she also noted down versions of the Royton Dance and the Bacup Garland Dance. ....*

*At the time of Miss Karpeles' visits (to Royton) there were only four dancers, but shortly afterwards a full team was revived under Jimmy Coleman, and danced twice in Manchester in 1929, though not in costume. A 'Royton Fund' was opened to raise money to kit out the Team and send it up to the Albert Hall Festival, and all Branch members were urged to contribute 6d.*

*The Royton Men danced at the Branch Christmas Party in 1929 in full costume, and subsequently at the Royal Albert Hall Festival in London in January 1930, and were a great success. Soon afterwards, two Royton teams emerged, doing slightly different versions of the dance, one under Jimmy Coleman and one under Bob McDermott, and the competition between these teams resulted in very high standards of performance. Later they amalgamated again. <sup>(17)</sup>*

EFDSS minutes record that Bob McDermott taught his version of the Royton dance to the Advanced Morris Class in Manchester in 1933/4. But the minutes do not say whether this was ever performed in public; and it may be that it was only learnt in class, as the team at Royton were still performing the dance in the local area.

John's booklet goes on to say :-

*Bob McDermott was also invited to teach the Royton Dance to the Manley village dancers. This he did, though, the dance was not shown in public by the Manley Men until after the War.*

*The Bacup Men were very averse to their dances being published, since they were afraid of other teams learning the dances and then competing with them. Eventually it was agreed that the Society would never teach the dances. Like the Royton Men, the*

*Bacup Men gave a public performance in Manchester at a Branch Party prior to their appearance at the Royal Albert Hall in January 1931. <sup>(JT)</sup>*

John Tallis' booklet goes on to say more about the Godley Hill dance :-

*Although the team no longer danced, memories and photographs, however, survived, and in 1937 a version of the dance was noted down by Mr Crompton of Hyde. This version was learned by the Manchester Men's Team, and first performed in public at the 1938 Alderley Edge Festival as an entry in the 'Traditional Dances' section ('open to teams performing dances which have been identified with their locality for at least 50 years'), in an attempt to break the supremacy of the Irish teams - it was adjudged of equal merit. Cotswold costume was retained on this occasion, but rudimentary flowered hats were worn. <sup>(JT)</sup>*

Note : the central part of the above paragraph is from an EFDSS viewpoint. The dance was actually performed in public 11 months earlier than stated, in June 1937 by the Manchester Morris Men at the Tideswell Ring Meeting. (*see text below and photos on next page*)

In March 1937, Harper Crompton and 5 other morris men (Messrs. King, Duffy, Hiley, Jones & Kirkbridge) met with about 8 or 10 old Godley Hill dancers at the Boar's Head in Hyde. (*Stephen Hiley and Harry Duffy are both known to have been dancing with Manchester MM at that time.*)

The MMM Archives has details of this meeting, in a copy of the letter written by Harper Crompton to the Ring Squire, Kenworthy Schofield :-

“A team of local girls who had been taught the dance by some of the old dancers were also present, and they danced first. After they had danced, the assembled old men “were unanimous that the girls did it properly”.

After this, the old ‘hands’ were itching to ‘have a do’, but having had no rehearsal the pattern of the figures was rather muddled.

To give them a rest, the 6 visitors danced some Headington and Adderbury dances, after which, the old men were keen for them to learn their dance. After watching the Godley Hill dance again, the old men and girls instructed the visitors”

The MMM Archives also contain what appears to be an original copy of Crompton's notation for the dance.

Three months later, in June 1937, the Morris Ring Log Book for the Tideswell meeting records that a feature of the tour of the surrounding area was :-

“... a display by some of the Manchester men, and Harper Crompton of the Godley Hill dance, interesting not only to the audience but to the rest of the dancers, to most of whom it was quite new.

.....

And on the Sunday morning there was “more instruction in the yard of the inn, particularly about the Godley Hill dance”

*The photographs below are from the Morris Ring Photo Archive, and used with permission. (They originally came from Walter Abson, and were probably taken by Arthur*



*Peck).*

The upper photo shows Harper Crompton and 4 Manchester men dancing the Godley Hill dance. It is believed that Crompton is in the ‘replica’ Godley Hill kit. (Note. Crompton was born in Hyde, but in 1937 was dancing with the West Yorkshire MM, as he lived in Halifax.)



The lower photo shows an instructional session in yard of The George, at Tideswell



## 4 The War Years, and beyond

The only recollections of MMM in the 1940s are from Bernard Bentley, and during his chat with Roy Battersby, squire of MMM at the MMM Jubilee celebration in 1986 (celebrating 50 years membership of the Morris Ring), Bernard recalled that “we kept a team going right through the war .... as teachers over a certain age were not called up, and technical people were drafted into factories”. Bernard himself was drafted into the Ford factory at Trafford Park, where they mass produced Merlin aero engines, which had previously been made individually at Rolls-Royce. At this time he was still living at home in Manchester, and apart from Home Guard duties one evening a week, had the remaining evenings and weekends free. As well as Bernard, there was Stephen Hiley, a headmaster called Bowkridge (? see note below) and others in engineering who made up the Morris Men’s numbers. And Bernard recalled that “one of the older Holy Name scouts (who danced with Harry Duffy’s team of scouts) could always be relied on to make up the 6<sup>th</sup> man, if necessary. And there were also any morris men from other parts of the country who were ‘passing through and working in Manchester’ as part of the war effort.”

Bernard also recalled that, after the war, “Ian Browne came up to Manchester, as he was involved in building the telescope at Jodrell Bank. Ian was a keen morris dancer, having danced with the Cambridge men and was very insistent on the difference between traditions.”

*(Note. A ‘glitch’ on the tape recording makes it hard to make out the name of the headmaster. It could be that the name is Kirkbridge, who is listed as one of the EFDS men present in the pub in Hyde in 1937, when they met the old Godley Hill dancers.)*

In 1949 the Morris Ring celebrated its fifteenth anniversary by publishing a booklet describing the background of the organisation, and short accounts from some of the forty-three clubs that had been admitted to the Morris Ring at that time. The account for Manchester Morris Men, written by Bernard Bentley stated :-

"The Club was a small one, having only seven or eight members, under the leadership of Stephen Hiley, but was able to continue its meetings until about the end of the war, and it was still possible to get together a side after Stephen Hiley left for South Africa. At present there is not a complete side (and the club is not holding regular meetings) but it is hoped that some new members may be forthcoming before long."

*[extracted from the Morris Ring booklet "Fifty Years of Morris Dancing 1899-1949"]*

## Appendix A

### Extracts from Ring Meeting reports in the 1<sup>st</sup> Morris Ring Log Book

#### **Meeting at Grasmere Sept 18th - 20th 1936**

The seventh meeting of the Ring was held at Grasmere, the first meeting to be held in the North of England. Several men were able to meet on Friday evening and danced in somewhat restricted space in the Dale Lodge Cafe; on Saturday morning more men arrived to make a total of 21, representing the following clubs:- Cambridge, East Surrey, Edinburgh, Lakeland, Liverpool and Manchester.

.....

The minutes of the last meeting were read by the Bagman, and confirmed .....  
Regrets for absence were read from many clubs, and staves were presented to the Lakeland, Manchester, Liverpool and Edinburgh clubs. ....

#### **Meeting at Tideswell 1937**

The tenth meeting of the Ring was held at Tideswell, Derbyshire on the weekend of June 12th 1937. The following clubs were represented:- Cambridge, East Surrey, London Pride, Liverpool, Manchester and St.Albans, about 20 dancers being present. The headquarters for the weekend was the George Hotel, Tideswell, and a few men arrived there late on Friday evening. On Saturday morning the main party arrived, and a rehearsal was held in the large upper room, and also out in the courtyard of the inn when the weather permitted. .... we set off with high hopes to Ashford. Here our first show was a great success, and a number of people had gathered to watch, some even following us after the show to Great Longstone. A feature of these performances was a display by some of the Manchester men, and Harper Crompton of the Godley Hill dance, interesting not only to the audience but to the rest of the dancers, to most of whom it was quite new.

.....

The following morning we had more instruction in the yard of the inn, particularly about the Godley Hill dance, and had discussions again with old men of Tideswell who could remember the dancing and its ceremonial from their earliest days. Lunch was our last meal together, then men dispersed to their own places, carrying very vivid memories with them of a momentous weekend.

### **Meeting at Manchester 1938**

The fifteenth meeting of the Morris Ring was held at Manchester, on Saturday October 29th.

About 20 men were present, representing the following clubs:- Manchester, East Surrey, Greensleeves, London Pride, St.Albans and West Yorkshire.

Dancing began at the Birch School, Rusholme, at 2.30p.m., under the direction of the Squire. .... This proceeded, with a break for tea at the Platt Cottage Hotel, until 7.0p.m., when the men returned to the hotel and sat down to the Feast at 8.0 p.m.

.....

A good deal of discussion took place about the local traditional dances, and Harper Crompton described the contacts he had made with several teams. The possibility of a meeting in a year's time was discussed, at which some collaboration with traditional dancers could be made. Some singing then followed, and about 11.0 p.m. the men dispersed, after a most enjoyable day.

### **Meeting at Longridge 1939**

The seventeenth meeting of the Morris Ring was held on the weekend of May 13th 1939, at Longridge, near Preston, Lancashire. 22 men were present, representing the following clubs:- Bedford, Cambridge, Manchester, Liverpool, St.Albans and West Yorkshire.

.....

The Feast then followed, at the Dog Inn; .... In the absence of the Squire, Kenworthy Schofield was in the chair, ..... A letter from Harper Crompton was read, regretting his inability to make arrangements this year for a South Lancashire meeting, it was felt that such a meeting would be impossible without his local knowledge and enthusiasm. The whole question of dancing in industrial towns was discussed and it was agreed that any shows given there would have to be of a high standard and very thoroughly rehearsed. ....

On Sunday morning there was a little dancing in the Dull (*sic*) Hall and then the men dispersed after a very successful meeting in an entirely new part of the country.