

**SECTION 2: WORCESTERSHIRE AND HEREFORDSHIRE
(BORDER) MORRIS**

BORDER MORRIS

The term was coined by Dr Cawte in an article for JEFSS to cover the seasonal performance in the Welsh Border counties of Shropshire and Herefordshire, in England and not Wales, but extended to cover the non-Marches, non-Cotswold county of Worcestershire and even the dance from Steeple Clayden in Buckinghamshire. The tradition should include the dances mentioned elsewhere in the West Midlands, indeed the Lichfield dances can be considered a collection of pairs of dances like the Border traditions rather than a consistent set as in a Cotswold village. The available dance material is very limited and there is no consistency in style or movements. The teams should be thought of as existing for the particular occasion with an absolute minimum of practice, rudimentary costume and compensating for these deficiencies in artistic content by noise from the performers, a large band of percussion instruments and as many dancers as can be mustered. It is a classic example of a custom that is only as elaborate as is needed to be acceptable to its community.

Dances exist for from 3 to 12 dancers. The dance depends on the numbers available as at Brimfield. The dances collected from a particular place sometimes differ quite markedly between informants as at Pershore, reflecting the flexibility from year to year. Sometimes a gang would only ^{have} one dance, sometimes two, or as at Malvern an indeterminate set of figures. The common features are the rather short sticks and sometimes a stick and handkerchief version of the same dance, also usually a high single step akin to the local country dance step. Such detail as starting foot rules, phrase endings are notable for their absence.

The Silurian MM have interpreted the material and this is available in print. They have sought to preserve the traditional style and features as far as they can be deduced. An alternative image has been produced by the Kirkpatricks with the Shropshire Bedlams and Martha Rhodens Tuppenny Dish where the material has been consolidated and systematised, extended and new ideas developed using all the local titbits. Through them there is an image of the Border Morris - boisterous, more than usually exhibitionist, noisy dancers, rag covered jackets all of which seems to owe a lot to the spirit of the past but not the substance.

The limited dance material collected has led to much invention and to teams that are in the "style" but having entirely composed repertoires, some of which are very successful as dances. However it would be wrong to count such as "Border". Alternative descriptions are "Street Dancers", as used by Mary Rose and the teams from Maidstone, or "Dance Troupes" where they are more refined and artistic. Both extremes tap different elements in the English culture. Groups known personally are South Downs, Paradise Islanders, ISCA, Rogue Morris and Lord Pagets and Barley Morris from Penn, showing that the idiom translates to men, women and mixed teams. Many teams have a few Border or Border like dances to broaden their repertoire and exploit the contrast with the Cotswold jumps and capers.

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