

## **Chapter 2 – The style**

Cecil Sharp wrote “When he is dancing, the true morris-man is serious of countenance, yet gay of heart; vigorous, yet restrained; a strong man rejoicing in his strength, yet graceful, controlled and perfectly dignified withal.” Leaving aside the changes in language, the sentiment is right. In White Rose we have always sought to perform in a way that shows we are entitled to the space we occupy. There should be no apology for the dancing. It is there, in the street or outside the pub and nobody should seek to prevent it. The feeling should be, not confrontational but assertive and certainly not introspective. The audience are there to be entertained (whether they want it or not). As far as possible it should look effortless but not listless. Far too many sides are getting old and are content to merely shamle around. That will never produce the most rewarding moment in a dance performance when you see someone in the audience who is, for a moment, totally transported.

It does happen.

### **Three traditions**

Currently White Rose dance three main traditions and they are very different in feel from one another. The preceding general style points apply to all three but they each have their own character.

#### **Bampton**

The vast metropolis of Bampton in the Bush is one of the few villages where morris dancing has continued almost uninterrupted. Indeed, such has been the success of attracting dancers that they have had the luxury of being able to indulge in political infighting over exactly how a move should be accomplished resulting in the fragmentation of the sides into three or four separate groups (I lose count). This of course is heaven for those of us reinterpreting the tradition as almost anything you do can be justified by reference to the dancers from the village itself.

White Rose started dancing Bampton under the foremanship of Robin Shepherd and while details may have changed, the style is much as he taught.

The movement in Bampton dances is very much downward. It is as if you have misjudged where the floor is by a couple of inches and so drop that last bit. The movements should be fluid and relaxed but the handkerchief movements should be precisely together and over quickly.

#### **Fieldtown**

There is no such place as Fieldtown. You will not find it on any road map. What you will find is the villages of Leafield, Finstock and Minster Lovell. It is this area that gives rise to the dances of Fieldtown. In contrast to the Bampton tradition the feel of these dances should be as if the ground is only there as a launch pad. As far as possible the dancing should take place above the ground, only landing when absolutely necessary. Lionel Bacon in his Handbook of Morris Dances describes it as “more graceful but less powerful than most” and “call[ing] for a high degree both of individual control and teamwork”. I am not going to disagree with him.

## **Headington**

More accurately described as Headington Quarry, this was the tradition that started Cecil Sharp on his quest to collect the dances of the Cotswolds. He saw the Headington Quarry men on Christmas Eve 1899 and the result is you, dear reader. Rumour has it that the Headington Quarry side practised in a fairly small room and so their sets are tighter than most. The movements are snappy and precise but not prissy. Remember, these were men that worked in a quarry. It is unlikely that they were effete in their movements. There is less body movement in Headington than in the other two traditions. The torso stays upright throughout and the gaze should be straight ahead (certainly not at the floor which is going nowhere)