

Yateley Morris Men and the Eynsham Morris Tradition



Eynsham Dances – fast, furious and energetic !

Yateley Morris Men have always enjoyed this tradition and this article has been produced to share that pleasure by explaining a bit more about the Eynsham tradition.

The Eynsham dances have very distinctive hand and arm movements which give the dancers a very upright dancing stance. It is made up almost entirely of sidesteps. It is one of our most vigorous traditions and is showy, loud and flamboyant - much like the dancers! The tradition does not have a great complexity in foot or hand movement, is relatively easy to learn and thus is a good beginners tradition. The renowned folklore collector Cecil Sharp was also much impressed by them for his account of a meeting with Eynsham Morris Men see below.

The music for Eynsham really helps the dancers and adds immensely to the flamboyance of the tradition. Marches fit the style of dancing very well. Add this to the upright stance and crisp movements and you have an almost military flavour in the dance. The picture shows YMM doing the figure eight figure in 'figure eight'.....All well off the ground and in full flow!



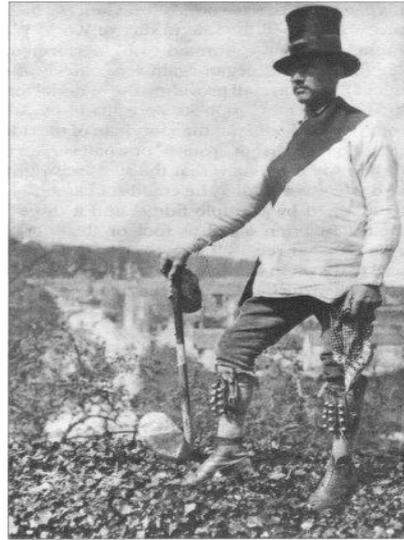
Eynsham today and a few years ago

The Eynsham morris tradition is very much alive and well today in Eynsham. We have enjoyed many good evenings dancing and singing with Eynsham and we know then to be very good company. If you are fortunate enough to see them perform, you will notice plenty of differences in the way Yateley and Eynsham have interpreted the dance tradition. Such diversity is good, it ensures that the morris tradition will continue to adapt and grow. (

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Yateley Morris Men have provided their own unique contributions to the Eynsham tradition. The dance 'Feathers' (named after 'Feathers' Russell – the cool gent on the right) has been completely re-designed and now only shares the name and the music with the original. It is, I say most immodestly, a cracker and Yateley have taken it to their heart. To be honest, I lost the notation to the original dance and had to remember (very badly!) what the original was like.....and wonderfully we ended up with a new dance!

The dance '20th September' was created from scratch. The dance has a number of new figures and a nice showy central figure. The music 'Heights Of Alma' is a piece of pure 19th century jingoism picked up from an old Donovan LP that fits the Eynsham style excellently. It commemorates the battle of the Alma in the Crimean War which took place on the 20th September.



A lot closer to home, the date is also personally significant to Yateley Morris Men. It was on this day that a member of Yateley Morris Men died suddenly and we often remember him when we perform this particular dance.

I do hope that this brief article has whetted your appetite to see and appreciate this tradition. Want to know more? Ask.

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Practice Notes – Eynsham

Eynsham is a particularly vigorous tradition and unlike many other traditions the dance is broken into groups of 6 bars rather than 4.

The stepping is a standard morris step (1,2,3 hop) but is a closed side step. All dances start with a break comprising hopping on the left leg for six bars while the right leg goes in front of the left leg then out to the right then behind the left leg ending with a kick forward. The right leg is then in the air to start the stepping onto the right leg with the left leg coming up close behind the right.

The hands in the break come up to cross over above the head on the first beat then out on the second, on the third they touch the chest and are flung out in front and at 45 deg on the last beat. As the stepping starts they come down by the side then they are flung up to a high stretch above the head for the first bar, fitting into one bar of stepping to come down again to cross over below navel and then up high again for the second bar. This is repeated for the third, fourth, fifth and sixth bars.

Some dances have a Gatepost figure where the set opens up into line. In this case if the turn is 180 deg turn down, if it is 270 deg turn up to form the line that rotates round an end into a straight line.

Turns to face a different direction are done are on the break and are smart

FU - Foot Up, FD - Foot down, BB - Back to Back, Spts - Spots, WR - Walk Right, IO - Dance In and Out, Cst - Cast, UIL - Up in Line, UITL - Up into Line, WH - Whole, Hey, Cnr - Corners, AU - All up, DIS - Down into set, DITL - Down into Line

Dance	Sequence	Distinctive Figure	Comments
Eynsham Morris Eight man dance	FU, FD, (CNR, SPT, BB,)x2 WR, IO	None	A fairly straight forward Eynsham dance featuring most of the main Eynsham figures. Finish in circles sometimes hoisting a guest or dancer
Figure Eight	FU, WH x 2, FU, Spts, FU, Cst, FU, UITL	The whole hey is the figure that gives the dance its name and must be large and showy, Cast figure	Standard figures mainly except the cast. This is done sharply, 1 bar to line up with first pair, 1 bar on the spot, 1 bar to line up with back pair 1 bar on the spot, 1 bar to drop into line as other 4 dance up and 1 bar on the spot in set. Repeat for each couple. In the Hey the bottoms face out 45° before dancing
Maid of the Mill	IO, Cnrs, Spts, Round Houses, WR, IO	1st corners is a back to back with maid between, round houses odds face maid as they dance round her evens dance round set.	Start in set and open to circle when music starts. Walk round is a spiral in, break, then spiral out into circle, dance in then out dance in lift maid, watch where your hands go!

Dance	Sequence	Distinctive Figure	Comments
The Poacher	Song, FU,	The poacher figure: 2	Two important points. The poacher

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<p>“ Three Eynsham laddies”</p>	<p>FD, BB, The poacher figure, WR, IO</p>	<p>and 5 dance to meet as do 1 & 3 and 4 & 6 , 2 bars to meet 2 on the spot 1 to pass left and 1 to get back into set. Then dancers in position 1 and six meet as do 2 & 4 and 3 & 5, same sequence to end in set. Finally the first sequence is repeated, followed by a crossover back to place</p>	<p>figure described here is done so using dancing positions not individual dancer position numbers. When dancing to meet the set must be formed up on the diagonal before dancing to form set up in original line. A way to remember perhaps. Based on starting position and Eynsham corners. 1st CLL, 2nd RRC Mdl RCL: R=turn right, L=turn left. C= corner</p>
<p>The Keeper “ Jackie Boy”</p>	<p>Song, FU, FD, The Keeper fig, BB, The Keeper fig, Cnrs, The Keeper fig, Spts, The Keeper fig, Dance round. Dance in and turn out</p>	<p>The keeper is different from normal stepping in that it is done to 4 bars of music. Dance forward to meet and break on 4 1,2,5 and 6 then continue and pass left shoulder and 1 meets 5 and 2 meets 6. 3 and 4 rotate clockwise and back out to form a set at right angles to starting set.</p>	<p>In the dance round make it showy then on the break, dance in, break, turn left and dance out to end facing audience with showy break then hats off and grab some dosh off the crowd.</p>
<p>The 20th of September 8 men in a line facing up. “Height of Alma”</p>	<p>Song, dance 6 bars DIS, Swagger up Swagger down, wheels x 2, BB, the Alma figure, break down and out, UIL</p>	<p>Swagger is normal stepping with exaggerated swagger left then right. Wheels is a round in 4, right first. The Alma figure: 3,4,5 & 6 meet left shoulder in middle facing anti clockwise, 1,2,7 & 8 form up large star, 1 and 8 move forward, 2 and 7 fallback dance 6 bars break dance 6 bars into set.</p>	<p>This again is showy so pay attention to the Alma and your position, it needs concentration</p>
<p>Cock of the North</p>	<p>FU, FD, Cnrs, BB, Cocky, Spts, WH,WR. IO</p>	<p>Cocky figure: 1 and 2 cast out to dance forwards down outside of set to form in behind 5 & 6 for 4 bars. Meanwhile 3,4,5,&6 stand still for 4 bars then starting right foot all dancers walk forward and break. Repeat for 3 & 4 and 5 & 6.</p>	

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Dance	Sequence	Distinctive Figure	Comments
Feathers	FU, Fe, BB, Fe, Cocky, Fe, WR, IO	A pleasant more gentle dance. Feathers figure is 1,4 & 5 dance round right while 2, 3 & 6 come into middle and dance left facing in. Set is formed up after one dance round when 2, 3 & 6 dance round while 1,4 & 5 go in to meet	Pay special attention to the large circle of three in the feathers figure. Remember to always turn out when going outside in feathers figure
The Pheasant Plucker	FU, R in 2, BB, R in 3, cast R in 2, WH R in 3 WR, IO	A very vigorous dance with lots of rounds. Make sure that you keep with other pairs or triplet in hands around	Rounds are done in pairs, left hand first for two rotations then right hand. For round in threes No 3 moves to 1 and 2 while 4 moves to 5 and 6. Cast is danced by moving pair for all 6 bars
Jockey up Finishing dance, start in line facing up	Dance 6 bars, DIS, FU, FD, DITL, UIL dance off weaving		Watch lines they are long and concentration is needed. This dance will often follow Figure Eight or the Alma
Shambles (the Eynsham Stick Dance)	FU, DIS, Walk Across, 1-stick, Hey x 2, Walk Across, 2-stick, Hey x 2, Walk Across, 3-stick, Hey x2, UIL	The Walk Across is very pronounced, banging stick butt at each pace for 4 steps across and clash partner backhand on 5 ^h then clash floor in front on 6 th then turn to clash with partner tips forehand/backhand/fore hand; then repeat whole process back to place. Sticking chorus (1, 2 or 3) with emphasised up-and-over clashing of next stick. Hey figure involves clashing either forehand or backhand with each person being passed; 5 & 6 start facing down into the hey	Emphasis needed on stick banging while walking across the set. Exaggerated stick raising for sticking chorus. Clash in the air during Hey if not passing by someone!

Cecil Sharp's Account Of a Meeting With Eynsham Morris in 1908

'Eynsham is in Oxfordshire, and is an important village about eight miles west of Oxford. In days gone by it supported a Morris side of its own which danced regularly year by year in Whitsun week. As an annual event, however, the dancing ceased many years ago, though happily Morris dancing has never entirely been given up in the village and there is even now, I believe, a well-constituted Morris Side which will on occasion don their ribbons and dance in public.

It was this "scratch" side that I saw in 1908 under conditions, however, which were far from ideal. The dancers met me, I remember, one dull, wet afternoon in mid-winter, in an ill-lighted upper-room of a wayside inn. They came straight from the fields in their working clothes, sodden with rain, and danced in boots heavily weighted with mud to the music of a mouth-organ, very indifferently played. The depression which not unnaturally lay heavily upon us all at the start was, however, as by a miracle dispelled immediately the dance began, and they gave me as fine an exhibition of Morris dancing as it has every been my good fortune to see.

I shall not readily forget the spirit they put into the opening figures nor the extreme delicacy and restraint with which they danced the succeeding corner-movements, their delightful swaggering gait in Whole-rounds, nor the tense, gathering excitement of the concluding ring-figures when they gradually closed in upon the "victim" (if this is the right interpretation), seized him in their arms and with a barbaric shout threw him up into the air. I wish those who question the ability of the English peasant to dance had been with me that afternoon to be cured of their scepticism. I found that this dance was their only one, although for variety's sake they performed it to several tunes - Brighton Camp, The Nutting Girl, Constant Billy, Cock of the North etc. If the dances they have forgotten were as fine as the one that has survived, it is not difficult to understand the reputation which in the old days the Eynsham Morris won and which is still locally accorded to it.

The traditional costume consists of a short smock of white holland down to the hips, with pleated front and broad turned-down collar; high hat, breeches, blue-gray stockings, ribbons tied round the upper arm and wrist and affixed to various parts of the smock, a rosette on the outside of each knee and a bell-pad of eighteen bells on each leg. The Fool* - known as "Feathers" - wore a short smock, a large hat covered with flowers and feathers, and odd-coloured stockings. The dance is remarkable not only for the great beauty of its movements and the unusual and effective form of its construction, but also and from the historical point of view perhaps chiefly, for its climax, the sacrifice of the victim, which, though common enough in the Sword dance, is not so far as I know to be found in any Morris dance other than this'.