

The discovery of the Lichfield Morris Tradition

by Jack Brown

tune two days previously, over the 'phone, and (being no musician) had kept the tune in his head until it could be written down. The tune had been played over the 'phone on a whistle and the unknown musician stated that it was "The Wild Rose," and was the tune for the dance, the question was, which dance? However, next day Tony Phillips received instructions for "Milleys Bequest," danced to the tune of "The Wild Rose."

When we had practiced the dances up to a reasonable standard, the next thing to consider was dress. This was finally copied from an old photograph someone managed to obtain and consisted of white shirt and trousers, a yellow or red sash and waist-band, bell pads and a green beret.

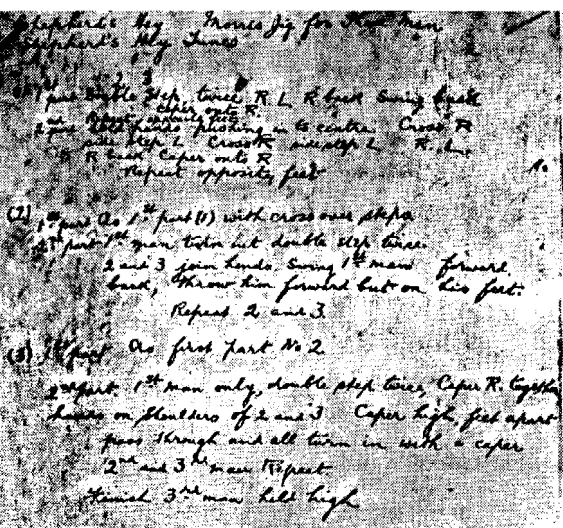
During the summer of 1955 the "Men of Mercia" Morris team was rent in two by an unfortunate and unnecessary incident, the details of which I will not go into here, the outcome of which, was that there emerged "The Lichfield Men" and "The Burton on Trent Morris Men." It was the year of the Lichfield Ring Meeting, during which we danced in the Cathedral Close on the Sunday morning. This event produced the last of the Lichfield dances we were to receive, a jig called "All the Winds," which is danced to the rattle of bones and has no official tune. This manuscript was sent to me, Jack Brown, Morris Dancer, c/o 20 Beacon Street, Lichfield (Tony Phillips' address). The stamp, as usual stuck on the bottom left hand side of the envelope and I also found written on the back of the manuscript a note which said, "I trust you will not defile the Sabbath by further dancing on that day . . ."

A note in the instructions for "Castlering" stated that there were five major dances using the "gallay over" step, so "All the Winds" was the fourth of these major dances and to this day the remaining dance has not come to light. Was it called "The Abnalls" I wonder? All the names of the dances have some connection with Lichfield, changed from the original, I would suggest, by happenings in the history of Lichfield over a period of 700 years or more.

Upon the formation of "The Lichfield Men" I was given special permission by the EFDSS to be their Squire. We recruited some young men from the Sutton Coldfield area and for the next five years, until 1960, we practiced regularly at Tony Phillips' home, dancing only Lichfield. These were the years of the real development of the Lichfield Tradition. Every part of every dance was studied in detail and as we were only working on one

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One of the recovered manuscripts. The instructions seen from the other side of the paper are for "Nuts in May."



tradition our standard of dance improved by leaps and bounds. To be dancing in the team gave one a great thrill. The costume too was studied again and altered, thanks to the discovery of two line drawings in "The Illustrated London News," dated May 25th, 1850, which showed quite clearly the dress worn by the Morris men of the period.

Both the "Lichfield" and "Burton" Morris clubs are no longer in existence but fortunately the Lichfield dances are still being performed by other Clubs in the area.

Lichfield Dances

STICK DANCES: Ring 'o Bells; Vandalls of Hammerwich; Milleys Bequest; Nuts in May.

HANDKERCHIEF DANCES: Sheriffs Ride; Barefooted Quaker; Castlering; Shepherds Hey (3-man jig); All the Winds (solo jig).