



A History of the
Whitchurch Morris Men
from 1948 to ~~2018~~ 1997

by Rev. Leonard Pepper

Years from mid-1997 to 2018 not included as
the history was never completed.

In the beginning this book was envisaged as a record of the life over fifty years of a Morris dance club. It also became something of a social history. It is interesting to probe into this and ask why a Morris club is in some ways more of a social barometer than, say, a model railway club or a club for stamp-collectors, or even an amateur football club. Presumably this relates to the claim that Morris dancers have always made that they are not just pursuing an interest, but are actively perpetuating and nourishing a tradition. Over the fifty years of the Whitchurch Morris Men's existence there has been a great deal of research into the origins of the dance. At the time when the Whitchurch side began it was almost universal to look for an origin in pre-Christian religion and to see it as a fertility rite of some kind. There was no evidence for any of this. It was pure speculation, but also a longing for something immensely old and rooted in a life of the soil which was impervious to change. The careful investigation which has been practised over the last twenty years or so has come up with a more prosaic, but equally interesting story of the origin of what we know as Morris dancing. The end of the fifteenth century in England saw the establishment of a period of relative peace after troubles at home and abroad and provided the circumstances for the emergence of a rich and cultured aristocracy. Entertainments at the great houses introduced troupes of professional dancers and acrobats, often from continental Europe. These entertainments would be observed by servants and thus transferred into the world of the common people. The Morris dancers would usually appear at the rare occasions when a village community was able to down tools all together and celebrate a task finished, whether it was the harvest or whatever. The Morris dancers carried something central to the community's identity and focused it. Interestingly, it has proved all but impossible to separate that identity with times of communal celebration, and even license, from the Morris movement. In fact, every occasion of Morris dancing becomes a celebration, and is incomplete without beer (and food when possible). It does not just happen to be the case that Morris dancers are rarely seen without a pint of beer at hand; it points back to the origin of the whole practice. The public perception of Morris Dancing has changed over the fifty years of the club's life. Perhaps it was true that in the fifteen years or so after the Second World War there was a more general search for stability and tradition in the wake of such

widespread destruction and upheaval. It was also true that village communities were more isolated and self-contained. In more recent times Morris dancing has been seen in isolation from specific communities and occasions, and has become more difficult to assess as a cultural fact. The response to this isolation has been ridicule. The Morris Ring has been concerned to re-establish this serious context of dancing, emphasising not only the need for quality in dancing itself, but also seeing the Ring Meeting, and particularly the Feast at a Ring Meeting, as an opportunity to draw the local community, through its representatives, into the Morris movement. Responding in 1970 to complaints about behaviour at Feasts the then Squire, John Venables, wrote,

It is as well to remember that most members of the public have no idea what the Morris Ring is, and local officials will place us in importance according to the way we approach them and treat them. If stories of rudeness and lack of manners toward local officials are passed around, local government and police authorities will become less sympathetic and co-operative in the future.

CHAPTER 1

In 1948 there was a country dance group who practised in Whitchurch and in Princes Risborough. Some of the men in the group had heard of something called Morris dancing, but they were not really sure what it was. They were able to obtain a copy of the Morris Book and they were also able to find some gramophone records of Morris tunes. With these aids the men started to teach themselves the Headington Quarry Morris dances. This cannot have been easy. Sharp and Macilwaine are as clear as they can be in their descriptions of different steps, but without having seen a Morris dance it must have been very difficult for the Whitchurch pioneers to be sure that they were doing what was intended. It was also a problem for them to know what to do with the Morris steps they had learned. After a few weeks they were spotted slipping Headington cross-back steps into country dances at a country dance party in Luton by a man called Fred Hamer. This was an important intervention because Fred Hamer was a member of the Bedford Morris Men, whose club had been founded in 1935, and had himself been the Squire of the Morris Ring. Hamer asked the Whitchurch men what they thought they were doing. He was told with some Buckinghamshire truculence that it was 'Morris dancing', that quite a few people 'did' it, and that these people who did it were gathered under 'a Pope or something'. Hamer took it on himself to channel this enthusiasm in the right direction. He invited the Whitchurch men to a meeting of the Morris Ring at Cecil Sharp House, the London headquarters of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. There was an opportunity here to see a range of Morris dances performed and to talk to the members of the other sides. The most important contact that was made was with Dr. Lionel Bacon. Bacon was a member of the Cambridge Morris Men and the London Pride Morris Men, but was also a diligent student and collector of dances who would eventually put all his material together to produce 'A Handbook of Morris Dancing'. Most fortunately for the Whitchurch enthusiasts, Bacon had recently been appointed as Deputy Medical Officer of Health for Buckinghamshire and had come to live near Princes Risborough. He generously offered to instruct the Whitchurch group if they could find a hall in which to practise and could also find a

musician. It was clear that no serious instruction would be possible using only the gramophone records.

The pioneers took Bacon at his word, and by November 1948 they had found both a room and a musician. Practising began on November 5th. in the Queen's Park School in Aylesbury. The initial group consisted of Charles, Ted and John Hogston, John and Peter Alderman, Jack Newton, Hiscock and Fred Bushby, who was a milkman in Monks Risborough. Mrs. Newton was the musician, playing the piano. Bushby dropped out quite soon, and Hiscock left after Christmas, so there were really only just enough men to make up a side, with Lionel Bacon both dancing and instructing. After a short time, too, Jack Newton was unable, through illness, to continue dancing. Instead he developed his talent for playing the violin, becoming a very competent Morris fiddler and thus, of course, giving the infant side the capacity to get out and dance away from the practice room. This was something still a little way in the future, however, for despite a winter of regular practices the side as such did not appear in public during the summer of 1949. Farm work took up most of the men's time and when they were not working cricket was the preferred summer activity. Nevertheless, that summer of 1949 did see the Whitchurch Morris Men admitted to the Morris Ring. Lionel Bacon took the Alderman brothers to the Ring Meeting at Thaxted in Essex at the end of May, where they all camped in the Vicarage garden. Not being able to make up a side of their own, the Whitchurch party gained valuable experience when invited to dance with the Cambridge Morris men and the Headington Quarry Morris Men. (The Headington Quarry Morris men were admitted to the Morris Ring at this same meeting.) The new side needed a Squire. (It had been discovered that this was the correct term rather than 'Pope' !). John Alderman was chosen. He should have been given a staff of office at Thaxted, but there was no spare staff available and he had to wait. Later that year the same three attended the St. Alban's Ring Meeting.

All this experience helped when the men returned to Morris training in the autumn of 1949. Both Alderman brothers remained in the side, and at one stage there were four Hogston brothers involved - Charles, Ted, John and Owen - but Charles had to drop out of the side for a time. It is interesting that the backbone of the first side should have

been provided by two families, the Aldermans and the Hogstons. By coincidence it reproduces that pattern we find so often in nineteenth century records of Morris dancing of there being certain 'dancing families' in villages. There were two new recruits. David Eales joined, who had already danced with the Morley College Morris Men, and so did Harry Doncaster. Jack Newton continued to provide the music and Lionel Bacon resumed his tuition. The previous year the emphasis had been on dances of the Brackley tradition, but Bacon now began to develop their acquaintance with the Fieldtown dances.

On November 26th. 1949 the Headington Quarry Morris Men held a celebration (a month early) to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the meeting on Boxing Day 1899 between Cecil Sharp and the Headington Quarry Morris Men, led by William Kimber, which had been so central to the revival of interest in English folk music and dance. William Kimber was still playing for the Headington Quarry Men at this Jubilee Meeting in 1949 and the side also included Harry Kimber, Fred Kimber and Arthur Kimber. The Whitchurch Morris men were invited to attend and this would turn out to be the new club's first public performance as a complete side with their own musician. The day started with the Headington Quarry side dancing at Sandfield Cottage, where Sharp had been staying when the Morris dancers came calling in 1899, and the visiting sides joined in later on. The Whitchurch men were satisfied with the response to their display dances and considered themselves 'launched'

The spring of 1950 saw the Whitchurch men attending another Ring meeting at Cecil Sharp House, when John Alderman at last received his Squire's staff of office, and turning up in force at the Bedford Morris Men's Feast, five of them in Lionel Bacon's car and the other *three* on Harry Doncaster's motor-cycle. The meal which was put in front of them consisted of cold meat, salad, trifle and jam tarts, followed by cheese and biscuits and coffee. This was a generous meal if we remember that rationing was still in force at that time. Beer was not rationed and there always seem to have been friendly breweries or 'anonymous donors' ready to provide. The return from the Bedford Feast was, for the party in the car, accompanied by Lionel Bacon's singing 'all the way back to Whitchurch'. The club was represented again at the Thaxted Ring Meeting at the end of May. This time five

men and all their camping equipment squeezed into Lionel Bacon's car. It should have been six but Ted Hogston had wrenched his knee playing football, an accident which at least gave the others room to breathe.

Although the side was made up of men from the Whitchurch area (apart from Lionel Bacon), it had not yet performed publicly in Whitchurch itself. This changed in June 1950 when the club performed at a country dance party on the evening of the church fete. They had been unable to do a show earlier as several members had been busy playing cricket. The programme for that performance is interesting. It began with the Wheatley Processional Dance, to get the team onto the arena, and continued with the Headington dance 'Getting Upstairs' and the Bledington dance 'Trunkles'. The Squire and Lionel Bacon performed the two-man jig 'Lumps of Plum Pudding', and the whole side came on again to dance the Adderbury dance 'Black Joke' and 'Constant Billy' from Sherborne. Lionel Bacon danced another jig 'I'll go and enlist for a sailor' before the others came on for the energetic Bledington dance 'Leapfrog' and ended with 'Bonny Green Garters'. It is a very impressive programme for a group of dancers who had started from nothing only eighteen months before and it is a witness not only to their enthusiasm and fitness but also to Lionel Bacon's skill as a dance teacher. This performance at Whitchurch was the start of a busy summer with the club appearing at fetes and other events around Buckinghamshire. . A local newspaper records how the public saw them:

Down the street in full regalia came six jolly Morris men, dressed in caps and bells, rosettes of flowers, and brilliant braces. Not the least spectacular was the attached fiddler in a multi-coloured jerkin.

The same newspaper also records that on this same occasion the dancers were in dispute with the Salvation Army band over the occupancy of the village street, a confrontation which was solved by the Squire's diplomacy. He went off with the band while the others danced, and then brought the band back so that Salvationists and Morris men could sing a hymn together ! In another small village the side's arrival quickly exhausted the resources of the tiny village pub. During this summer, too, the club adopted most of the kit which still distinguishes it today. The blue and green baldrick with the rosette

bearing the outline of Whitchurch church tower was adopted; the waistcoats came later. The club appointed a bagman to handle the details of events and bookings, and also found itself with a Fool, a role filled by Ted Hogston. Perhaps most important of all, the club set up the event which has remained the centre-piece of its life ever since - the Day of Dance, which has since grown into a Weekend of Dance. The first Day of Dance was held on Saturday, July 8th. 1950. It brought visiting dancers from Bedford (including the Squire of the Morris Ring, Fred Hamer), London Pride, Oxford, Ravensbourne, Morley College, Headington Quarry (complete with William Kimber) and St. Alban's (with another noted musician, Kenworthy Schofield.). The pattern of the day mirrored the Ring Meetings to which the side had already been and it is the pattern which continues today. Starting from Whitchurch in the morning the dancers were taken (in cars belonging to the Vicar of Whitchurch and the local doctor) to the nearby villages of Oving and Waddesdon before being returned to Whitchurch for lunch. The afternoon tour took them to North Marston and then to Winslow, where advance publicity had brought two hundred people out to watch the dancing. The whole party returned to Whitchurch for tea, and after that, with a brief stop in two villages on the way, the teams made their way to the county town, Aylesbury, to perform in the Market Square. Again the publicity had been good. Both local newspapers, 'The Bucks. Advertiser' and 'The Bucks. Herald' , had carried news of the coming event, and consequently over four hundred people turned out to see the dancing. The men returned to Whitchurch for a Feast. The Menu for the Feast lists the familiar 'cold meat, salad, trifle, cheese and biscuits' and a hungry voice in the club's archives asks the question 'What, no Aylesbury Duck and green peas ?' Most of those attending were happy enough with the simple food and the beer that went with it. Speeches at the end recognised the progress the club had made and the help it had been given, in the first place by Fred Hamer and then by Lionel Bacon. At the end the patriarchal figure of William Kimber rose to announce 'The family is still growing, you see !' Later, long after official closing time at the nearby 'Crown and Thistle' Kimber was enthroned in the doorway with his concertina and an apparently never-empty pint pot, keeping the men dancing in the road outside.



Thaxted - May 1950



The Thaxted Ring Meeting. May 19-21, 1950.

Top. Whitchurch men watch while Alec Hunter dances the Shepherd's Hey jig. This may be Saffron Walden.

Bottom. The Whitchurch side, plus two helpers, dance Bledington Leapfrog - perhaps at Audley End.



The club's progress in its first two years was affirmed by the invitation which was issued later in 1950 for it to be one of the three Morris Dance sides who would perform at the English Folk Dance and Song Society's New Year festival at the Albert Hall in the following January. The other two sides would be Bedford and Ravensbourne. Fred Hamer, who was still the Squire of the Morris Ring, keeping an approving paternal eye on the young men from Whitchurch, was instrumental in this. Hamer was the guest of honour at the first Whitchurch Autumn Feast, held at the *White Lion Hotel* in Waddesdon in November, when he was full of praise for the Whitchurch side, calling it 'one of the best clubs in the Ring'. (The Autumn Feast, like the Day of Dance, would become a fixed point of the club's year. Within a year or two, other sides were attending and many years later it became the focus of a series of instructional days for Morris musicians.) The link with the English Folk Dance and Song Society was strengthened when the Whitchurch men put on a show at a Country Dance Evening organised by the Windsor branch of the Society. The music for the country dancing that night was provided by Miss de Jersey and Miss Elsie Avril, who were two of the Society's leading musicians and would be accompanying some of the items at the Albert Hall. They were full of praise for the Whitchurch men's performance and no doubt reported back to Douglas Kennedy, the Director of EFDSS that a good choice had been made.

The practising that winter had the Albert Hall show very much in mind. The club had decided to perform the Bledington dance 'The Gallant Hussar'. This was already something of a showpiece for them; they had danced it as their show dance at the Ring Meeting at Cecil Sharp House earlier in the year. According to the club log:

Every evening our show dance for the Albert Hall was practised, taken to pieces, put together, done in slow time, quick time, called for, uncalled for, and torn to shreds. Basic Morris steps, hook legs, straight lines, timing and anacrusis. But it did a world of good to our dancing as a whole.

Other work went on in preparation. When the men went to the Albert Hall they would be wearing new hats, and arm bands with ribbons would be added to the costume. The Fool was going to be decked out in a new, 'traditional' costume, and, for the first time, the side would be

taking a hobby-horse with them.

The weekend of the Festival came, January 5th. and 6th. 1951. A week earlier, when the men were performing at the Technical School in Aylesbury, on a floor newly polished for ballroom dancing, Jack Newton, the musician, had slipped and fallen, but had fortunately done himself no damage. All the seats had been sold at the Albert Hall. Television was still a novelty and people still generally went out to find their entertainment. It was, in any case, a time of buoyant interest in folk tradition. The young Princess Elizabeth had been photographed joining in at a barn dance with her husband, a picture which was printed in all the national newspapers and magazines. The club log is very laconic about it all, but it must have been some challenge for the seven men and their musician, more accustomed to dancing in front of quiet Buckinghamshire village pubs, to walk out and perform on the famous London stage. The programme began with two sea-shanties sung by the Revd. Kenneth Loveless, who would be Squire of the Morris Ring one day, was followed by the Flamborough Sword Dance and a Northumbrian country dance. Then came a Yugoslav dance team, some hand-bell ringing and another country dance, and after that the three Morris sides came on to close the first half of the evening. The Whitchurch men were pleased with their performance on both evenings and proud to have confirmation of their success in a letter from Douglas and Helen Kennedy.

Some inescapable process of anti-climax seemed to set in for a few months after the triumph of the Albert Hall, however. It was a very wet spring and summer, which discouraged both dancers and watchers. Some of the side were discovering other commitments; Ted Hogston was planning to be married, for example. There were accidents, illnesses and transport problems which often prevented the side from attending Morris events with a full complement. The club's records for that year are punctuated with expressions of frustration and disappointment. These were only shadows, though, and the sun frequently managed to break through. . What was now called the 'Annual Day of Dancing' was held on June 30th. and the usual visitors from Oxford, Headington Quarry, Bedford, St. Alban's, Ravensbourne, Cambridge and London Pride turned up to tour the villages on what developed into a rare very hot day in that wet summer. Again, the

dancing ended with a mass display before the 'hundreds' who gathered in Aylesbury Market Square. The club also took part in what was billed as 'the first Morris gathering held in London' and was also meant to be a component of the Festival of Britain celebrations. This was organised by the Ravensbourne Morris Men. It began with dancing in front of St. Paul's Cathedral and moved on to the Tower of London, which was hot and uncomfortable. This was followed by an Underground journey back to Piccadilly, marked by dancing on the platform and in the train ! The club log records that:

An indeterminate 'Saturday Night' was also danced in one long column down the carriage. Peter (Alderman) found an accommodating lap during one lurch of the train.

There was a good display in what is still the lovely forecourt of St. James' Church in Piccadilly, after which the dancers moved on to St. Martins-in-the-Fields. At the end of the display here there was a spontaneous and unauthorised move into Trafalgar Square, but the arm of the law was quickly brandished and the Morris men were sent packing . They were due to move on to their Feast in any case.

There was, though, a genuinely serious cloud coming up over the horizon. As the summer went on it became clear that Lionel Bacon would soon be moving away from Buckinghamshire, and that this would be a crisis for what was still a very young side, and one which had depended on his guidance and enthusiasm. The men said farewell to him at the end of July 1951 at the conclusion of a day when they had been taking part in a council-sponsored Sunday Evening Entertainment in the Vale Park in Aylesbury. The Squire, John Alderman expressed their thanks while also betraying the anxiety they felt about the future:

We have done just as well as we can as a clumsy lot of so-and-so's. We hope we have not disgraced you and we'll hang together. We'll do something anyway, not half as well as we have before.

Bacon, in reply, emphasised that the secret of the club's success so far was that there was 'a side there who wanted to dance' and Fred Hamer, who had come over for the farewell, underlined the fact that although this was a turning point, there was no need for the tide to wash everything away. This was quite hard for the club members to accept. They had clearly had an enormous respect and affection for

Bacon, and he represented their connection to the whole Morris tradition. As the summer went on and the autumn came they recorded in the club log their regret that Bacon had been unable to join them for events, such as the rainy Oxford Ring Meeting in September. (At this meeting, though, they did find another 'mentor'. Morris Sunderland, who was a noted and formidable figure in the Ring, took the Whitchurch men under his wing.) When they made public appearances they worried whether 'Doc' would have thought it good enough. At the same time, however, they took steps to consolidate their future performance, one of the most interesting of these being the decision taken that each man should be responsible for learning and teaching a particular tradition. Looking at the list of these responsibilities indicates the breadth of the traditions being learned (which might even put the club to shame fifty years on.) John Alderman took on the Sherborne dances while Peter Alderman was responsible for Brackley and Longborough traditions. John Hogston looked after Bledington and Adderbury dances and Charlie Hogston those from Fieldtown. Harry Doncaster would oversee Headington and Bucknell and David Eales was the Bampton and Badby tutor. Jack Newton was still the musician. Ted Hogston, who was now living in Little Horwood, some miles away, did not figure in this list, but there was great satisfaction that he was still prepared to cycle over and dance with the side. To some extent, then, Lionel Bacon's parting gift to the side was this very democratic and communal spirit. Since there was now no 'guru' to turn to, each man was going to have to pull his weight. They were still very pleased to welcome Bacon back to the Feast in November 1951, along with Fred Hamer. According to the club log:

Dancing got under way about 6 o'clock to the tune of Highland Mary (Bampton) under the fatherly eye of 'Doc' who, to our relief, expressed satisfaction and pleasure.

At this feast Charlie Hogston was elected as the second Squire of the Whitchurch Morris men and the hope was expressed that under his leadership the club could find desperately needed new recruits. There was praise for all the existing and continuing officers, and especially for Jack Newton, whose fiddle playing was picked out for its 'rhythm, punch and timing'.

The beginning of 1952 brought much hilarity into the lives of the club members. In January they were persuaded by the formidable but fallible Miss Harrison, the head teacher of Swanbourne Church of England School, to do a display in the village's old people's home:

Miss Harrison had brought her shooting-brake to assist with our transport from Whitchurch, and with this and the Alderman's car we should have travelled in comfort if the shooting brake had had sufficient petrol. It so happened that the supply petered out just beyond Whitchurch and its occupants had to push it back to the nearest supply pump for refuelling.

The following month the side were invited to demonstrate Morris dancing to the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society in the County Museum in Aylesbury:

A section of the museum had been cleared of its cases of relics fossils and what-nots, giving just enough space in which to dance a set at one end of the room. At the other end, huddled up together, sat an audience of about fifty intellectual-looking people. Space was so limited that the 'Processional On' almost came to a standstill when Peter's long arm knocked Jack's bow out of his hand.

The men were quite glad to finish and get out of the museum and continue dancing in the street outside. They were still there when the museum audience came out. Most of them stayed to watch, and the climax of the evening is laconically recorded in the club log:

The bagman received a nice letter of thanks and appreciation from the president of the Society, Sir Alan Barlow, which was very nice of him considering that he got knocked down by a car while watching us in Temple Square.

The dancing of the club members was also featured in a BBC radio programme, Country Magazine, in March 1952, and this may have had some influence on the recruiting programme, which produced four new members during the spring of 1952. These four were all at the club Ale in May, which was another opportunity for a reunion with Lionel Bacon, and yet another recruit joined at the very end of May. The new members, who had had only a few weeks practice, or less, were quickly integrated into the club's performances that summer. The programme of dances, understandably, was often less adventurous than it had been in the preceding seasons.

The third Day of Dancing went ahead at the beginning of July 1952.

Visitors came again from Headington Quarry, Oxford, Bedford, St. Alban's and Ravensbourne, and there were guests for the first time from Northampton, Letchworth and the White Horse Morris Men. A total of sixty-four men were there at the height of the day, making it the busiest event the club had put on yet. To everyone's delight, Lionel Bacon was able to join them for the day, and the fears that had been expressed about losing touch were proving to be unfounded. There were appreciative audiences at all the places where the dancers disembarked from the fleet of cars which was carrying them round. At least, this was true until they arrived for a fête in Aylesbury. Here the dancers were held up while a parade of decorated vans was judged and the Fire brigade gave their display. They then had to perform in a massive arena with an audience scattered thinly round the edge, too far away to hear Jack Newton's fiddle. Perhaps there was a lesson to be learned there about the setting of Morris dancing. It did not work so well as an isolated display event; it needed the interaction with the audience which came so naturally in front of public houses and in other fairly intimate settings. That thought may well have been on the minds of the club's members that summer because they began quietly to shift the focus of the regular summer dancing away from fetes and festivals towards visiting local villages. The first experiment in this direction was a tour round Long Crendon and Cuddington, south of Aylesbury, in July. This was something of a struggle, because Charlie Hogston, the Squire, was in hospital, and other members were on holiday, but, with some frantic rushing of people to and from stations, a side was brought together for a pleasant (and profitable) evening, which would give the blueprint for the club's future summer activities.

Illness and other pressures were to continue through the latter half of 1952. It would be hard to find more than the minimum of six men to dance at some events, and there is a rather disconsolate note in the log about the Abingdon Ring Meeting in September. (Only three men were able to go - one with a sprained ankle - although they were again joined by Lionel Bacon.)

A year ago the Whitchurch club stood in the minds of many as a well-drilled team used to dancing at a faster-than-usual tempo. Our failure to produce a team at various meetings since Lionel's departure has resulted in us falling to the category of useful individual in-fillers.



OUTSIDE THE WHITE HORSE IN
WHITCHURCH.
TOP. WHITCHURCH DANCING
BLACK JOKE, ADDERBURY
BELOW. L TO R. ST ALBANS,
BEDFORD, WHITCHURCH



OUTSIDE THE CROWN AND
THRISTLE, WHITCHURCH
WILLIAM KIMBER PLAYS
FOR WHITCHURCH



**July 8th, 1950.
The first Whitchurch
Day of Dance. Ted Hogston,
the side's Fool, was much in
evidence.**



**July 8th, 1950. Whitchurch
Squire, John Alderman,
Dances a Jig, accompanied
by William Kimber outside
the Crown and Thistle**

The Abingdon Ring Meeting opened with the sad news that Fred Hamer, coming to the end of his two years as Squire of the Morris Ring, had been very ill and had lost his sight. Remarkably, Hamer recovered sufficiently to not only attend the Whitchurch men's Feast in November of that year, but also to dance a jig on his own. Called on to reply to the toast to 'the visitors' at that Feast, Hamer affected indignation saying that he counted himself not as a visitor but as a founder-member of the club. The Feast was also the occasion of the club's Annual General Meeting, and the minutes of the meeting record the growing concern that the club needed to pull itself together and commit itself more enthusiastically to its own events and to taking part in Ring meetings. Charlie Hogston was re-elected as Squire for the following year - 1953, which was also to be Coronation year - and members and guests went on to enjoy a convivial evening before stumbling out into the ten inches of snow which had fallen during the evening.

The spring of 1953 saw the club taking on a programme of village tours, with occasional extra efforts for a special cause. On May 2nd. they travelled to Flackwell Heath near High Wycombe to perform at a country dance party in aid of 'Coronation funds'. This was presumably to fund a local street party or similar event. It was a long way to travel, but the Whitchurch men were still the only Morris dancers in the area. The process of assembling the side was surrounded with complications:

On Cup Final Day, in glorious weather, two cars traversed the Vale of Aylesbury carrying Squire, Harry, David, Jack, John Hogston, Richard and Graham to Loudwater, intending to make a rendezvous en route with Noel and Stan, one of Harry's students who dances with South Berks. and who was spending a weekend as an ATC (Air Training Corps) cadet at the RAF station at Booker. The meeting did not materialise - due not only to our late arrival, but also to the activities of some fifth columnist who had removed the sign at the agreed meeting place. 'To Booker or not to Booker ?' - that was the question. Having decided in the affirmative, our arrival at that destination was made even more problematical by Harry's famous, or should it be infamous, navigation. We finally made it only to find that our bird had already flown a short time before. Here it must be recorded that the pupil outshone the master and proved his superiority in the navigational sphere by ending up in Marlow.

The lost aviator did join the party eventually. (He turned out to be something of a concertina player, a gift which was to be very useful the following week when he made the effort to join up again, at Stoke Mandeville, with a Whitchurch side who had unaccountably left their Squire and musician marooned back in Aylesbury. He was able to keep them going with Headington dances until the rescue party brought Charlie Hogston and Jack Newton out to join them) After the Flackwell Heath display the men found themselves a suitable public house to dance at, out of which interlude came this verse:

Beneath the spreading chestnut tree
The Whitchurch Morris danced.
The Squire a vigorous man was he
Whose breath came in short pants.
They danced to Jack who fiddled loud
From Beaux to swaggering Boney,
While Richard capered round the crowd
Raking in the money.
A car that ventured to intrude
Provoked the wrath of David
Who with righteous mien and phrases shrewd
Reduced that man to an aphid.

The benefit of these more regular weekly outings was felt in the dancing, and the regular commitment seemed to inspire more men to turn out more often. By the end of May it was no surprise to see ten dancers and a musician out around the Buckinghamshire villages. The club was, accordingly, feeling quite confident when it came to Coronation Day, June 2nd., and a full day supporting both the local celebrations in Whitchurch and the large civic event in Aylesbury. It was, as history records, an unseasonably wet and blustery day, which rather spoiled the planned sequence of events in Whitchurch (and drove the men to take refuge in the *Crown and Thistle*.) It was no better later in the day when they arrived in Aylesbury for the display there, although there was a large crowd waiting ! The Whitchurch side opened and closed the evening's programme, ending in time for the assembled crowd to hear broadcast messages from Sir Winston Churchill, who was then the Prime Minister, and the newly-crowned Queen Elizabeth. (While they were waiting to go on the men not only had to contend with the bad weather *and* with a Scottish piper warming



Day of Dance, June 1951



Day of Dance, June 1951



Ivinghoe - May 1953



up, but also found they were receiving a rather strained welcome from the Women's Voluntary Service, who were in charge of the cakes and sandwiches, tea and beer. It turned out later that someone had warned them about the gargantuan appetites of the Whitchurch Morris men. At the end of the evening, however, the WVS found that they had been over-protective and, with slightly red faces, had to call on the men to finish the left-over mound of sandwiches and beer. They did their best, but the women had been so zealous at 'keeping something back' that it was only when the dancers were joined by the police and the Mayor that the mountain of food and drink was cleared.)

The following week-end, riding on the wave of confidence that this successful spring programme had produced, Whitchurch were for the first time able to send a full side to the Thaxted Ring Meeting. After a miserable Friday night, when a wandering pony was trying to get into their tents throughout the hours of darkness, the men had a good day touring on the Saturday with a Thaxted side. They were satisfied with their show dance - the Fieldtown *Shepherd's Hey* - but impressed by the dash and energy of some of the other sides present. The Thaxted meeting that year was an unusually large one. The Feast had to be split between two sites, the two groups meeting up again later before dispersing into Thaxted's public houses for a very late night. After church on the Sunday, the Whitchurch men packed up quickly and set off home, having planned to dance in a couple of villages on the way with the aim of recouping some of the expenses of the trip. Noel Taylor, who was now living in Essex, but still managing to join the club when he could, was able to pick some profitable dancing spots. This brought to its end 'a most pleasant weekend, full of good dancing, good comradeship and good liquor.'

A month later sixty-seven men sat down to join in the Feast at the end of the Fourth Day of Dancing. There had been appreciative crowds at all the dancing venues and the sun had come out half way through the day. The irruption of the northern tour into the little market place in Buckingham seems to have caused havoc with commerce with vegetables 'lifted', as the writer of the log puts it, from the stalls replacing handkerchiefs and sticks. The heat generated here led to thirst later on, and to the surreptitious passing around of out-of-hours pints supplied by a Padbury publican who was not too observant of the

then much more restricted licensing hours. After a day of touring the villages the men danced over tea back in Whitchurch, and then went straight to a massed session in the Market Square in Aylesbury before retiring to the King's Head for their Feast. With rationing now over, the Feast was a much more substantial meal, offering Tomato Soup, Roast Chicken and Apple Pie and Cream. This menu was clearly popular because it re-appeared in identical form at the Annual Feast in November, when Charlie Hogston retired and David Eales became the third Squire.

There was a different fowl on the plates later in November, though, when the Whitchurch men had the honour of dancing in the 'guest of honour' at the first Aylesbury Duck Dinner at the *Bull Hotel* in Aylesbury. The event was recorded in the '*Daily Telegraph*',

At what was described as an "inaugural Aylesbury duck dinner" in the Buckinghamshire market town last night, 200 guests toasted the breed which for nearly two centuries brought fame to Aylesbury. Prime duck was brought into the dining room with due ceremony. A chef with a silver platter, preceded by Morris dancers, presented the dish to the mayor. In return Councillor Sage handed over a set of Coronation year coins in a scarlet purse. Sir Norman Birkett, proposing the toast of "the Aylesbury duck", caused amusement when he said he was not quite certain whether he should toast the "health" of the Aylesbury duck in view of the fact that 60 of the breed had been sacrificed for the occasion.

Some of those sixty duck were eaten by the seven Whitchurch men who attended, who later danced through most of their repertoire in the hallway as the other guests left. Most of the departing diners were clearly too full of duck to pay much attention to the dancers, but a small audience kept them going until eleven o'clock. At this point, says the log, 'rounds of drinks poured in.' It was clearly an important step for the Whitchurch Morris Men to be invited to take this part in what was meant to be an important event in the county town. It was recognised that what they were doing was part of a tradition, and perhaps like the Aylesbury duck, part of a tradition which would be lost if it was not nurtured. It was a recognition, too, of the seriousness with which the still-young club had approached their public performances. That seriousness and dedication would be tested the following year when for the first time they hosted a meeting of the Morris Ring. The year's engagements ended with a happy evening at the first Annual

Feast held by Lionel Bacon's new creation, the Winchester Morris Men. Charlie Hogston, David Eales and Jack Newton attended, and because Ken Deer, who had been intended to do it, was sitting miles away with a broken down car, it was David Eales who was honoured to offer the toast to 'the Winchester Morris Men'.

CHAPTER 2

The Whitchurch men had so far been very fortunate with the first weekend in July and so they chose it as the date for their first Ring Meeting. There was no saving themselves for the big weekend, however. The six weeks preceding were very full. There was an excursion to the Thaxted Ring Meeting early in June, 'through pouring rain'. They were spared the familiar misery of putting up tents in the rain. The Thaxted men, finally accepting the unreliability of the English summer, had put a converted barn at the disposal of their guests. Back home again, extraordinary events punctuated one evening tour of village inns.

An attack of spring fever or joie de vivre caused Jack [*Jack Newton, the fiddle player*] to forsake the realms of music for those of athletics, but alas his ankle informed him that his steeplechasing days were over and thereafter he had to do penance on a crutch. [*Later*], the Squire, becoming afflicted with Jack's disease, proceeded to play Romeo to a couple of Juliets. Towards the end of the dancing it was noticed that Les was also becoming afflicted with the prevailing contagion, bursting forth with such unheard of things as 'Swaggering Boney'.

The last outing before the Ring Meeting offers an interesting window onto the concerns of the time. At the end of June the Whitchurch Morris Men danced at a National Savings Rally at Ascott House, near Wing. On the back of the programme there was an almost Churchillian call to arms from the Chairman of the National Savings Movement. He wrote of 'a heroic outburst of endeavour in our great Campaign.' 'The Savings tide is turning' he continued, and he concluded by calling on his readers to 'send a resounding call to the whole country.' The rally was being held at Ascott 'by kind permission of Mr. & Mrs. A. De Rothschild', whose name alone must have been an incentive to accumulate savings ! The presence of the Morris dancers was no doubt viewed as giving a suitably patriotic gloss to the event.

It was a brave decision to offer to host a Morris Ring Meeting. To begin with, it would be spread over three days and would require the club to find accommodation for two nights for those who came. They knew they might be entertaining as many as two hundred people. (In fact, one hundred and seventy three attended the Saturday Feast.)

These numbers had to be fed each day (and provided with beer), and transported around the countryside. The club's organisation was efficient, and they were fortunate in their support from the local authority. This was perhaps the reward for the side's willingness over the years to support the events organised by the council. The Town Hall was opened to receive the visitors when they arrived on the evening of Friday, July 2nd. and a buffet meal was laid on there for them by the School Meals Service. The School Meals Service also provided lunch at the Town Hall on Sunday. The Borough Council had also made a camping site available at the Friarage, right in the heart of Aylesbury. Men who preferred to sleep under cover were put up in the social club belonging to Hazell, Watson & Viney, the large printing firm which was then one of the town's principal employers.

The dancers presented themselves to the public on the Friday evening with a display in the town's Kingsbury Square. The strain of organising the event was evidently weighing heavily on the Whitchurch men because the club log is very apologetic about their standard of dancing that evening.

...some indifferent and some downright bad. In the latter category we have to include our former showpiece - Shepherd's Hey, Fieldtown. How are the Signposts fallen !

However exhausted some men may have been feeling, the Squire, David Eales, who was also the Fool that night, was determined to put on a show.

The spectators...were highly diverted by the antics of David, getting rid of a lifetime's repressions in one evening and building up a credit balance for some time to come.

No fewer than six tours around the villages were organised for the Saturday. This was a complex transportation exercise, using only private cars and no coaches. Nothing is recorded about how the Whitchurch men managed to bring together the required number of cars, especially cars which were relatively reliable. The roads, of course, were much quieter than they are today, and the various convoys appear to have kept more or less to their plan. The only factor beyond the control of the club was the weather. No-one could have predicted that out of the otherwise sunny skies would come a torrential downpour which would send some of the tours scuttling damply back

to an early tea break. The only person seriously disappointed, though, was the Bagman, who had been relying on the public to come out and enjoy the sunshine and the dancing and then fill the collecting boxes. As summer downpours do, the rain cleared in time for a huge massed show in Aylesbury's Market Square in the early evening. The event was cleverly stage-managed, with dancers converging on the Square from three directions with the help of an obliging police force. The local newspaper was enthusiastic.

Saturday evening saw the climax of the meeting, when the dancers massed in the Market Square for a public display. They seemed tireless, jigs, reels, shouts and the waving of handkerchiefs. The merry tunes from the fiddle and concertina. It was more than a hobby, it was philosophy.

It was estimated that there were about two thousand people watching the display. The population of Aylesbury at that time was only 15,000, which shows how much interest the Ring Meeting had generated. The Bagman was no doubt relieved as the coins showered into his boxes.

After the massed show came the Feast, in the *Bull's Head Hotel*, with the Mayor and other civic dignitaries, and the Vicar of Aylesbury, attending. It was apparently a very good meal, with one 'old dancer' claiming that it was the 'best that had ever been served at a Ring Meeting'. To everyone's regret, the one face which was missing was that of Lionel Bacon, who was away on holiday, but he was toasted as the man without whose efforts on behalf of the Whitchurch club there would not have been this Ring Meeting. When the Feast was over the dancers poured out into the town's generous provision of public houses until the constabulary re-appeared to close everything down dead on the stroke of 10.30 p.m. Saturday nights in England came to an early end in those days !

Sunday morning began with a short business meeting of the Ring. Afterwards, the sides assembled for a procession to Aylesbury's ancient parish church of St. Mary. 'This was not the spectacle of Thaxted' says the club log, but it was still a novelty for the sedate county town congregation. As the Vicar dryly commented 'It is not every Sunday that a hobby-horse is present in the congregation of this church.' After the service, there was dancing in the square outside the church before the men drifted away to another helping of school dinner

in the Town Hall and, for most of them, the start of the journey home. The day ended finally with a country dance party in the grounds of Barclays Bank, when the Whitchurch men who had put so much energy into the weekend were able at last to relax with their families and friends.

There was a continuing relationship with the Headington Quarry Morris Men and a certain gentle rivalry, too. Whenever the two sides joined up to perform together, as they did in Long Crendon later in July, it made the Whitchurch men think hard about the quality of their dancing. In preparation for this visit the Vicar of Long Crendon had blown the dust off the parish records and announced that it was seventy years since the Headington Morris Men had last danced there. This was an occasion when many of the younger members of the Headington side turned out. 'It was a joy to see the vigour and freshness with which they executed their repertoire' noted the Whitchurch log. The music for the Headington side was still being played by William Kimber. Jack Newton was not intimidated by Kimber's fame, and attempted to teach him one or two new tunes. Kimber, with a few beers inside him by that stage of the evening, eventually took this in the intended spirit, although the club log hints at some ruffled feathers. The latent rivalry between the two sides dissolved away as the warm summer evening faded and the party proceeded from one public house to another. It was noted with some amusement that the Crendon village policeman had been sent reinforcements on that evening, who loomed up out of the twilight in their helmets as closing time drew near.

The autumn of 1954 brought another invitation to perform at the Aylesbury Duck Dinner, where the distinguished speaker was the writer Sir Compton Mackenzie. A month later, at the end of November, the club met for the Annual Feast with a certain satisfaction. There were new members to be issued with their baldricks, and Peter and John Alderman had come to an understanding with their new brides and rejoined the side. There was a surprise for the assembled guests, who included Lionel Bacon and Don Cassells, the current Squire of the Morris Ring. During the autumn the men had been trying to learn longsword dancing and now demonstrated it for the visitors, hoping for their helpful criticism. No criticism came, but whether that was

because it was so good or because it looked so dangerous, no-one would say ! In his speech the re-elected Squire, David Eales, indicated that the club intended to make the tours round the villages their priority for the coming year, although he recognised that the special shows that had been put on for local societies and so on had done a lot of good and built up considerable goodwill with the local authorities.

Once the Feast was over there were no commitments or excursions until the following February. The winter of 1954-5 brought a good deal of snow, and the club's debut in the new year involved a long drive through steadily deteriorating weather to Bedford for the Bedford Morris Men's Feast. This was a large gathering, and the tightly packed hall seems to have generated its own heat in the face of the almost arctic conditions outside.

When dancing got under way it was notable for its clamour and vigour. The stick dances especially needed no musician, the music being taken by the nose and led a merry dance by the sticks drumming on the floor, and no doubt on knuckles, too.

A short trip out to a local inn revealed that the weather was becoming steadily worse, and a cheery publican narrated alarming stories of impassable roads. The men returned to enjoy the meal all the same. The only real shadow hanging over them was cast by the poor quality of the beer, which was 'murky, the sort that is endured rather than enjoyed.' A difficult journey home followed, but there was satisfaction that even in these conditions the side had been able to repay some of the support that the Bedford club had been giving through the years.

April, in contrast, brought unexpected hot sun, which caused some problems for the side who went to a Ring Meeting in Cambridge. This, curiously, was the first time that a Whitchurch side had gone out without any of the Hogston brothers or the Alderman brothers in it. The club was keen to take part in this meeting, as it was the first of the events planned to mark the 'coming of age' of the Morris Ring, from its foundation in 1934. It was a long, hot journey to Cambridge. The men broke the journey with an impromptu dance spot at Ashwell in Hertfordshire, where their performance reminded a long-time resident that he had seen Morris dancing in the village twenty years earlier. It was impossible to find out who had been dancing then. The two cars

then pressed on to meet the Cambridge side at Granchester, where everyone's eyes flew at once to the church clock. Disappointingly it read five minutes to eight ! There was a surprise when Noel Taylor, who had not danced with Whitchurch for some time, appeared out of the ranks of the Cambridge men wearing his blue and green baldrick. The Whitchurch and Cambridge sides mixed themselves up cheerfully in the course of their tour. It became apparent that the Cambridge men had had little chance to dance together in recent times, and the dancers were able to meld together quite light-heartedly through the afternoon. The day was meant to end with a massed display in Cambridge before the Feast, but the long day took its toll, and the Whitchurch side absented themselves from the final dances, taking refuge from the chilly winds which had supplanted the day's warmth in the 'Eagle' - a well-known Cambridge public house.

From May onwards, the side went out touring villages around Aylesbury. The visit to Haddenham and Cuddington suffered from a rare coincidence. Coach loads of people from both villages had roared off to hear Billy Graham preaching at Wembley. The Morris men found ghost villages waiting for them, apparently populated only by noisy children who threatened to drown the music. It was unfortunate that there were two new musicians playing for the first time that night in the absence of Jack Newton.

While taking part in a fairly informal Ring Meeting organised by the Oxford University Morris Men at the end of May (which seems to have concluded with an al fresco Feast near Burford), the Whitchurch men visited Bucknell, one of the homes of the Cotswold Morris and were shown the original tabor which had been used to accompany the dancing in the village in the late nineteenth century. A search had been made for the pipe which was meant to go with it, but it turned out later that this had already been safely lodged at Cecil Sharp House.

The resolution of the previous year's Annual General Meeting, that the club's main effort should be put into evening tours round the villages, was carried out with enthusiasm through the summer of 1955. It was not always easy to keep to the programme. The club still only had eight or nine regular dancers. It only needed one or two to be ill or away on holiday to make it a very busy night for the six who could attend. One night in June, at the end of the summer term,

schoolmaster Harry Doncaster was so besieged with marking that, while he was happy to drive the side to Tetsworth and Chinnor, he could not dance with them and sat in his car going through his pupils' books. He was finally able to join in a drink at the end, the log records. As well as those two villages and Haddenham and Cuddington, the men danced in Wendover, Great Missenden, Chesham, Amersham, Quainton, Long Marston, Cheddington, Botolph, Middle Claydon, Steeple Claydon, Little Kimble, Whiteleaf, Speen and Prestwood. Most of these villages and small towns remain on the list of places visited by the club today. A kind of informal territory was being mapped out on those generally sunny summer evenings of 1955. Wider connections were being maintained as well, and most of the side travelled to Winchester in June for the Winchester Morris Men's Day of Dancing, camping in Lionel Bacon's garden.

The Aylesbury Duck Dinner seemed to be creeping earlier into the year each time, and this year it was held on October 5th. The Morris Dancers were now definitely established as part of this ritual, rather overshadowing the Duck itself in the photographs which appeared in the press. There was an illustrious line-up of speakers that year, including three members of Parliament and the journalist and sportsman Norris McWhirter. When all the toasts and speeches were over the dancers entertained the diners briefly.

When the Annual Feast was held at Stoke Mandeville at the end of November there were no less than seventeen members of the club who sat down with their guests. Three new members danced themselves in, and there would have been a fourth had he not landed himself in hospital with an injured hand. This injury had nothing to do with Morris practice, fortunately. The numbers were swollen by all those whose other commitments had kept them out of the summer tours and other activities. Lionel Bacon was able to attend, along with Fred Hamer and Donald Cassells, the current Squire of the Morris Ring, and Arthur Walmsley. Arthur Warland was elected as the new Squire in succession to David Eales, who was sadly soon to be moving away to Herefordshire. The opportunity to say farewell to David came on Boxing Day evening when a joint celebration was held with his colleagues from the County Council.

Perhaps it was confidence in the gentle Hampshire climate that

SATURDAY, MAY 29, 1954
WHITCHURCH AT THAXTED,
PHOTOGRAPHED IN FRONT OF
THEIR CONVERTED BARN
ACCOMODATION AND GLIMPSED
IN A MASS DANCE





**Annual Feast
November 1956**

Oxford Ring Meeting. 28th May, 1955.

APP
44



at Bucknell.

Jockey to the Fair - Brackley.



at leaffield [Field Town]

29th May (Headington)



office of Squire of the Ring. During the day, however, the Whitchurch men had again felt at a disadvantage compared with some of the large club parties on the tours, who had the best of the dancing. Lionel Bacon was at the meeting, and he introduced to the Whitchurch men Walter Newall, a singer and musician well-known in the world of folk dance, who had recently moved to High Wycombe, and whom Lionel was encouraging to join the Whitchurch side.

Walter Newall was one of three new members admitted at the Annual Feast in November, along with Bob Haines, another musician (a fiddle player), and John Bennell (who could be called on to sing and play the mouth organ). Another musician, accordion player Alan Robertson, was a new recruit. Including all the new members and recent recruits there were sixteen Whitchurch men at the Feast, with two Hogstons and one Alderman among them still. Arthur Warland was re-elected as Squire. The evening ended with several songs and dancing, and it is clear that at the end of the evening the club felt revived after a difficult year and ready to make an impression on 1957.

CHAPTER 3

Even the weather seemed to be better in 1957. Nine men set out to the Bedford Feast in February, in tolerably good conditions for once. They joined a large assembly of Morris men who were able to celebrate without worrying about steadily mounting snowfalls outside. Walter Newall was a celebrity, warmly welcomed by the Bedford Squire, Fred Hamer and invited to sing not once but twice after the Feast.

May Day had not traditionally been a great occasion for showing off by Morris sides. The Whitsun holiday had been the usual time for the local dancers to turn out and entertain the village. All the same, May Day, already known for popular celebration in places like Padstow and Oxford, was gradually pushing Whitsun aside. There had been no tradition of the Whitchurch men performing anywhere on May Day, but on the first Saturday in May 1957 the club stood shoulder to shoulder with the labour movement and danced at the Beaconsfield Trades Fair. Forty years on, the idea of a Trades Fair in Beaconsfield sounds incongruous, but it was a well attended affair and the Whitchurch Morris Men joined with two boys' sides from Slough who had been trained by Harry Doncaster. The Whitchurch transport jinx was still active. One of the three cars taken that day had to be left broken down at the roadside before reaching Beaconsfield and another ran out of petrol later that night on the way home ! The audiences were large, large enough for the then Bagman Graham Tincknell to rue the fact that they were dancing for a fee and not collecting. From Beaconsfield the three sides moved on to give an evening display, once again to a fair sized crowd, in nearby Burnham, where Harry Doncaster lived. The club log recorded satisfaction with the day.

Consensus of opinion after this outing was that the Whitchurch men were shaping into a good team, in spite of so many changes during the winter, and that much praise was due to Walter for his able instruction.

Later in May the evening tours began again, beginning with the familiar territory of Wendover, Aston Clinton and Weston Turville, to the south-east of Aylesbury. Two weeks later, on Ascension Day, the side was at Hardwick, north of Aylesbury, and there was a vague word

passed down from the Vicar that he wanted them to delay their start until the service in the church was over. They were unable to find out when this would be, the Vicar being very elusive, so they danced at the advertised time. Unfortunately, the service was still on, and, this being the 1950s, most of the village population were in church and there were only a few people to watch. Moving on a few miles to North Marston, however, they found a much larger audience. The little village was perhaps an early centre of secularisation ! Arthur Warland's performance as the Fool seems to have driven a flock of local children wild while earning him some frowns from Jack Newton who was finding it difficult to play his fiddle above the over-excited screaming. The final stop in the hamlet of Granborough brought very few people to watch, but it raised a moral issue for the dancers, who ran out of money before the pub closed. It was agreed to take ten shillings out of the collecting bag to buy last drinks for the nine men.

There might have been some tension expected between Walter Newall, coming to the club with an established reputation as a musician and singer, and Jack Newton, who had been the sole provider of the club's music for so long. In fact the two men got on well together. Too well, some might have said on a night in June 1957, when the two men spent so long singing folk songs together in the pub that the start of dancing was delayed. The tour that night went again up to the north of Aylesbury, to Quanton and Waddesdon, but a week later there was a long journey south to meet up with some of Harry Doncaster's boys in Marlow, carrying on beside the Thames to Cookham and then to Wooburn Green, south of High Wycombe. It was close to the longest day of the year, still and warm, and people were out late in the evening down by the river to watch the dancing. They saw the debut of a new musician when John Bennell accompanied the dancers on his mouth organ while Jack Newton replaced a broken string. The Squire rewarded the efforts of the side with six-pennyworth of chips (between them, that is) in Wooburn Green, but this was only to tide them over until they reached Walter Newall's home in High Wycombe, where coffee and cakes were waiting.

Lionel Bacon's 'new' club, the Winchester Morris Men, had now decided to run a Morris Ring Meeting. Seven from the Whitchurch side

went down there on the last weekend of June, taking Harry Doncaster and a couple of his boys with them. As usual, they were preparing to cook themselves a late snack on arriving but found they had forgotten the primus stove. Some improvisation with a handy incinerator saved the day. Saturday brought scorching weather, and Whitchurch were on a tour with the London Pride Morris Men, whom they found 'a little stand-offish'. In many ways the day was disappointing. It was very hot and humid, and dancing was draining. In the villages which they visited people seemed to be keeping under cover, away from the heat and the threat of thunderstorms. A storm broke over one stopping place just as the men were waiting for the guests to come out of church after a wedding with the prospect of a good collection. Back in Winchester, however, there was a huge turn out of watchers in front of the Castle for the massed display, and a fine Feast in the Guildhall. Unusually there was a woman as Guest of Honour - the Mayor of Winchester, whose speech was applauded. There was applause, too, when she left, though not, of course, because she was leaving. From the Guildhall the dancers spilled out into the streets around. 'It was the most vigorous and lively dancing I have ever seen' said the writer of the Whitchurch log. It only ended at 11.30 p.m. when the police decided that everyone had had enough. The next day, the Whitchurch men joined the other participants in the service in the Cathedral before beginning the long journey home, thankful that the current petrol shortage had not made their trip impossible.

Only one week later, it was the Whitchurch Day of Dancing, under the same cloudless skies. It was far from ideal weather for energetic dancing, but both tours kept going without flagging. The generosity of pub landlords helped to achieve this. Mrs. Cox at *The Cock* in Wing was credited with having put on enough food to satisfy a hundred men rather than the twenty-five who were on the northern tour. She was closely rivalled by the publican at Stewkley who placed a large jug of free beer out for the dancers - and then refilled it as often as needed. The inn-keeper at Cublington who provided an ample supply of free lemonade instead of beer may have disappointed some, but he may have saved lives. The sword dance which was performed in his car-park by a combined side was reportedly dangerous enough even on lemonade ! There was an amusing incident when the two tours met

up again in Whitchurch.

I was waiting for sufficient dancing to have taken place before taking the bag round when I noticed a stout lady, leading a small boy wearing a cloak with a horse's head, making a collection. It looked so much like begging that I felt unable to join in with my collecting box. The same thing occurred at Aylesbury later on.

After such a hot day it was perhaps half to be expected that there would be a sudden heavy shower of rain just as the massed show in Aylesbury began. Luckily there was enough cover round the Town Hall for the dancing to continue. Afterwards it was much cooler, and this probably aided the enjoyment of the Feast in *The King's Head*.

The weather which broke that night remained broken through the rest of July and effectively washed out the rest of the side's programme for the year. There were often other frustrations as well. Morris dancing worked better in some places than it did in others. When the men went to a British Legion fête at Princes Risborough they were expected to dance in the middle of a huge arena, dozens of yards away from the crowds. Jack Newton refused to play with a microphone (it did not work very well, anyway), and so the dancers could be seen but no music heard. It was a Saturday, and they went on that evening to dance at a pub in the large village of Prestwood, near High Wycombe. People in numbers went in and out, but never stopped to watch the dancing. They clearly had set ideas about their Saturday night entertainment. The worst of it was that the men were committed to a further appearance for the British Legion at Newport Pagnell a week later. The club log marked it down as another mistake. The weather was bad. It had been a struggle to get a side together, and it was clear that the small audience had lost interest very early on. It was a wasted day. The local paper, however, seemed to report a different event.

A novel feature of the Fete was the exhibition of traditional dances by the Whitchurch Morris Men, making their first visit to Newport Pagnell. With fiddler Jack Newton playing the merry tunes, they entertained the small but appreciative crowd with dances that brought a breath of real rural charm and humour.

The weather continued to dampen activities right up until the end of the season, and it was depressingly rainy again when the club turned

out on the first Friday in September to 'dance in' two new public houses - the *Greyhound* and the *Steeplechase* - in the new Southcourt housing estate in Aylesbury. The town was in the process of an enlargement which would change its character for ever. Calling in the Morris dancers was perhaps a forlorn attempt to show that it was still the old, traditional place it had always been. At the *Greyhound* it was dismal, with a photographer and reporter from the local paper the only audience at first. When the word went out that the landlord was offering free drinks there was some improvement. It was later when they went on to the *Steeplechase* and a crowd, already charmed by free drinks, was waiting. The evening became extremely convivial, especially when heavy rain drove everyone inside and the men danced in the packed bar until closing time. This event rescued what had become a fairly dismal summer of dancing.

Early in September, too, the club received a letter from the St. Alban's Morris Men which said that they were proposing Lionel Bacon as the next Squire of the Morris Ring and invited the support of the Whitchurch men. As it turned out, this was not to be Lionel's turn. Jim Phillips of the Headington Quarry Morris Men was elected as Squire for 1958-1960, but Lionel Bacon was indeed elected for 1962-1964. The Whitchurch men themselves were to have a new Squire after the autumn's AGM, and it was to be Walter Newall. This was a tribute to his enthusiasm and capability. Charlie Hogston was to be the new Bagman, and he was now the only member of the original side who was still able to turn out regularly.

There was an unexpected early engagement for the side in the spring of 1958. The Aylesbury Duck Dinner had been brought forward to April 15th. The Clerk to the London County Council was there as the principal speaker, proclaiming rather ominously that "Aylesbury will soon become the back garden of London." There were a number of people from the sporting world there as well - Dorian Williams, the show-jumping commentator, Peter Dimmock from the BBC's 'Sportsview' and Gillian Sheen, the 1956 Olympic fencing Gold Medallist, for example. When it came to photographs in the local newspapers, however, it was the Whitchurch Morris Men who shared the spotlight with the unfortunate duck. The club had acquired a splendid duck effigy which was carried in the procession at these

events.

In the summer the Day of Dancing went ahead as usual. One person who was unable to attend this was the Archdeacon of Buckingham, then living at Whitchurch Vicarage. Summoned instead to Lambeth Palace, Archdeacon Savage wrote an enthusiastic letter of apology, adding,

I am sure that the revival and practice of these village customs is of great value in the life of the villages and of the nation; and I write to say that if ever I or my church can be of service to you in your work you only have to say the word.

In 1959 transport problems prevented one or two clubs, including St. Alban's from sending a side to the Day of Dancing. A Whitchurch side managed to get to the St. Alban's Day of Dancing in September, invited by the St. Alban's Bagman, one Michael Chandler, who would later join the Whitchurch club.

The club continued to make the effort to get to the Thaxted Ring Meeting each year, and was there again in June 1960. For the 1960 Whitchurch Day of Dancing trouble with transport afflicted the St. Alban's side again, but Michael Chandler was able to borrow his father's car (trusting father !) and bring the St. Alban's colours of blue and gold to the meeting. As he was in the process of moving to Tring (he used a convenient space during the Day of Dancing to arrange for his electricity to be connected) he decided to join the Whitchurch club as well. He brought new musical sounds into the club as he had learned to play the traditional instruments of pipe and tabor under the guidance of the noted musician, Kenworthy Schofield. In September the club was represented at the Ring Meeting at Reigate, put on by the East Surrey Morris Men, one of the founding sides of the Morris Ring. The Duck Dinner reverted to its November date, and once again it was the Whitchurch Morris Men whose faces filled the photographs in the local newspapers.

Early in 1961 the then Bagman, Alan Robertson, was finding it difficult to put sides together for dancing engagements. Harry Doncaster, for example, wrote back from Burnham apologising for being so tied up with work and explaining his transport difficulties. John Alderman also wrote with his regrets at not being able to do more because of illness.

In June, though, the club was able to respond to an invitation from the Oxford University Morris Men to attend their Day of Dancing. The Whitchurch men met up with a few men from the host club in Thame and made their way to Oxford by way of Shabbington and Wheatley. There they joined up with the Oxford City Morris Men and moved on to a lunchtime Feast at the Lantern Restaurant in Oxford. Everyone was remarkably able to begin dancing again in the afternoon. Whitchurch danced with the Bampton Morris Men outside St. John's College and then, after tea, set off for a long evening tour through the Vale of the White Horse before finishing in Abingdon at 9.00 p.m. They were perhaps less worn out than the University Morris Men, who had started their day with a cycling tour, but it must still have been a very tired group who made their way back to Buckinghamshire ! Their own Day of Dancing two weeks later must have seemed sedate in comparison. A pleasing number of clubs attended this Day. Among them was a small group from the Guildford Morris Men, a fairly new club in which Arthur Warland, the former Squire of the Whitchurch men was now involved. Arthur had written apologising for the fact that his new club 'had only done Adderbury, Headington and a little Bampton'. July 1961, a fortnight after the Day of Dancing, the club found itself on new territory, attending the Ring Meeting in Birmingham organised by the Jockey Morris Men. It is an interesting sidelight on social history, or perhaps economic history, that the Jockey Morris Men, as part of their invitation to other clubs, were able to list fourteen breweries which operated in the city of Birmingham. Later that month the club was able to take part again in one of the series of Sunday afternoon entertainments promoted by the Borough of Aylesbury in the Vale Park. It was apparently a success. The Borough authorities were pleased and sent a cheque for five guineas, although the accompanying letter does call it 'a display of country dancing'. At the beginning of September a party from Whitchurch went to the Bedford Ring Meeting, touring on the Saturday with Rumford Morris Men, Monkseaton and King's College, Newcastle. Their tour leader was Peter Rollason, who would later join the Whitchurch side.

At the very end of 1961 the club would have heard the sad news that William Kimber, that link with the very beginning of the Morris revival had died. The curious coincidence was that he died on Boxing Day,

sixty-two years to the day after he had woken Cecil Sharp with his music under the windows of Sandfield Cottage in Headington Quarry. Sandfield Cottage itself would soon come under sentence of demolition, to be replaced by a block of flats.

Most of the activities which had now become fixtures for the club were repeated in 1962. The Day of Dancing went ahead. Again the club earned its five guineas from the ratepayers of Aylesbury by performing a 'country dance' display on a Sunday evening at the Vale Park. The Feast went ahead as usual in October. Arthur Warland, who brought a couple of Guildford colleagues up with him, wrote saying how enjoyable it had been. Alan Robertson was elected as the new Squire, and Michael Chandler who had been doing the same job for St. Alban's was elected as Bagman.

1963 brought in the usual crop of requests to dance at village fetes, and the annual invitation to perform for one of the Aylesbury Borough's Sunday evening entertainments. Later on the club would receive the fee of five guineas as in previous years. There was a disappointment to come over the Day of Dancing. In the first place it was discovered that the London Clubs of the Morris Ring had planned a Ring Meeting for the first Saturday in July, which had been the traditional date for the Day of Dancing - a tradition of fifteen years' standing, anyway. Many people who might have come to the Whitchurch Day had booked for this Ring Meeting. In the event, it poured without remission that Saturday and the club was spared the problem of coping with dozens of wet Morris Men. The alternative plan had been to hold the Day of Dancing a week later, but many clubs had other plans for that day, and in the end the 1963 Day of Dancing was cancelled. This was the only occasion on which this happened in all the club's first fifty years.

The struggle to keep a full programme continued despite the shortage of men. There were tours during the summer, dancing, for example, at the Monument on the Ashridge Estate near Tring. Two members were able to attend the Chichester Ring Meeting in September, feeling that it was important for the club to keep in touch with the wider scene in this way. It was never entirely satisfactory when only an incomplete side could attend, and in fact, at an important meeting of Ring representatives in 1964 there would be some criticism of the practice.

For the Whitchurch men, however, at this point, there was no alternative.

After the disappointment over the Day of Dancing it must have been gratifying and encouraging to have such an enthusiastic response to the invitations sent out for the Whitchurch Feast, which was held on October 19th. that year, at the King's Head in Aylesbury. In the end there were more than twice as many guests as there were Whitchurch men. Lionel Bacon, who was mid-way through his term of office as Squire of the Ring was there (as was the Ring Bagman) and later wrote,

It is pleasant to see that the Whitchurch Feast is still such a 'draw' - it reflects the undoubted success of your previous meetings - and I hope this will stimulate your men into more continuous activity next year !

Another new face at that Feast was that of Charles Whitlock, one of two Coventry Morris Men attending, who would play an important role in the Whitchurch club in later years.

It appears that the many other claims on people's time made it difficult at this stage to practise regularly through the winter. Practising for the 1964 season began only in February.

The Day of Dancing was back to its usual place on the first Saturday of July, and the side had also committed itself to giving its annual display for the Borough of Aylesbury the next evening. There was a programme of summer tours, including a return to the Monument at Ashridge.

Later, in mid-September the club was relieved to be able to send a full side to the Winchester Ring Meeting, the second which that club had hosted in six years.

The Feast was held in October once again. Walter Newall's letter tells the story,

Dear Mike

We had a better turn out last night than we had dared to hope with all the missing links. Seventeen all told (five of us and the rest visitors) so we were only three short of our booking. The bill was £11.16.8... The meeting went off very well, all things considered. The only snag was

the music. It wasn't a case of 'what shall we dance' *but of 'what can the musicians play ?' We missed Jack's fiddle and your pipe. However we managed and all hands had a good time.

All the best, Wallie.

There is a witness to changing times in the letter from the manager of the King's Head hotel which arrived a few days after the Feast.

After your party a small amount of silver was found on the bar counter which we are holding in the hope that it may be claimed, but we too look forward to your next gathering here, and if this cash is not claimed in the meantime, we can have a small round of drinks.

In 1966 Mike Chandler was Squire of the St. Alban's Morris Men, while still keeping his connection with Whitchurch, but Walter Newall took over as the Bagman at Whitchurch, with Graham Tincknell as the Squire.

In 1967 the club was involved in a pioneering National Folk Week promoted by the English Folk Dance and Song Society. On Saturday, April 29th. there was a tour which covered Whitchurch, Wing and Aylesbury, and then Amersham and Chesham in the afternoon, before meeting up in Wendover with the Datchet Morris Men who had been dancing their way up from the south. The dancing in Wendover was followed that evening by an extremely well-supported ceilidh.

Wendover really didn't know what had hit it. More than 200 dancers and singers from all over Bucks. thronged the streets, and the Memorial Hall was jammed.

The side that day was reported by the local paper to include 'among its enthusiastic members a builder, a banker, electricity board official and a "tax-gatherer".'

Walter Newall was also the Morris Ring's Correspondent for Unattached Dancers, a position he had been occupying since 1937. This role was unofficially known by some people as 'The King of the Bastards'. In 1968, though, he laid down this responsibility, arguing that it was unnecessary now that there were so many more clubs. At the Ring Representatives' meeting in February that year. Donald Cassells, a Past Squire of the Ring, said that Walter's work over the years 'aroused feelings of admiration and warm gratitude for that fine

Morris man.' Walter continued to attend Ring representatives' meetings on Whitchurch's behalf and in 1972 had the pleasing opportunity to argue forcefully for the admission of another Buckinghamshire side, the Towersey Morris Men, into the Morris Ring.

In 1977 Michael Chandler was nominated for the post of Squire of the Morris Ring. There were three other candidates and Michael was not to be successful on this occasion. His moment would come in 1991.

In October 1969 there was sadness for everyone connected with the club when Jack Newton died after a long illness. Among the tributes there came a moving letter from Fred Hamer.

Dear Wally,

I was saddened to hear of the death of my old friend Jack Newton, but he had suffered too much and too long. When Whitchurch began to form around Lionel Bacon and the Aldermans Jack and his wife came over to see me several times and we returned the visits to his house. These were not merely friendly visits for Jack was anxious to learn as much about the Morris as possible. He was, of course, chiefly interested in finding out exactly what a Morris side needed from a fiddler and he wanted me to give him the dancer's point of view and as much about the dancer's feelings and reactions that I could give him. This, he said, was the best substitute he could think of as he was not able to dance himself. I was always deeply impressed by this professional (and passionate) search for perfection and I always considered him to be the best Morris fiddler in the Ring and was always glad to hand over to him any tunes he needed if I had them for no-one ever made better use of them. I have always (been) proud of my association with the Whitchurch men, and Jack, I felt, was closer to me, particularly after I went blind, than any other W. M. man. Once again, may I join with W. M. M. In their grief at the passing of Jack - a magnificent Morris fiddler and a firm friend.

Yours sincerely,

Frederick B. Hamer.

In August 1970 Whitchurch teamed up once more with Datchet Morris Men and joined in a Day of Dance organised by the Datchet men. Sides from Hammersmith, St. Alban's, Woodside and Standen

took part as well, about forty dancers altogether. The tour began in Aylesbury and ended on Datchet village green, and was followed by a Feast in the Women's Institute. The reporter from the High Wycombe newspaper, The Bucks. Free Press, was slightly overcome by the novelty of seeing Morris dancing in that town, one of the stops on the tour.

I don't suppose many people, pausing in their shopping in Frogmoor on Saturday when the Morris Dancers, with bells on their legs and gaily coloured braids and hats, cavorted to the sound of music from an equally bedecked fiddler, knew what it was all about....They must be keen these Morris Men. Not only is their pastime strenuous, it is also quite expensive. They have to provide their uniform and equipment themselves. It costs on average about £10 to fully equip a Morris Dancer. One of the youngest dancers was 15-years old David Price of Towersey. In these days of long-haired weirdies, it was refreshing to see young men taking part in a healthy outdoor pastime for the enjoyment of others.

There was a new face among the guests at the Feast in 1974. The club had invited for the first time the Reverend Kenneth Loveless, who stood firmly in the Church of England's tradition of eccentric priests and was at that time the Rural dean of Hackney. He was a noted concertina player and would be elected as Squire of the Morris Ring in. He was delighted to be invited to the Feast, just being able to fit it in between the Executive Council of the Church Lads Brigade on the Saturday afternoon, which was fortunately being held close to Marylebone Station, and the Trafalgar Day parade in Trafalgar Square the next morning. (Father Loveless had served in the Royal Navy, kept up his naval connections enthusiastically and would, despite all obstacles, be buried at sea after his death in 1995.)

In 1975 the Whitchurch club was once again to host a meeting of the Morris Ring. Twenty one years had elapsed since the last time and it was well overdue. First, though, there was the Day of Dancing. Walter Newall was on the point of retiring as the Whitchurch Bagman, and it was a becoming climax to his years as a club officer when one of the tours was able to stop and dance in All Saints' Churchyard in High Wycombe at the end of his youngest daughter's wedding ceremony.

The event in September had been conceived from the start as a smaller-than-usual Ring Meeting. There was, nevertheless, a good response. Sides attending were Forest of Dean, Herga (from Saffron Walden in Essex), Kennet, Dolphin from Nottingham, Offley (Morris Sunderland of the Offley Morris Men was the Squire of the Ring at the time.), Oxford City, Plymouth, St. Alban's, Stafford and Hearts of Oak from Uttoxeter. Three tours set out on the Saturday morning. In the main they went to familiar places, but one tour stopped at the recently opened Shopping Centre in the new city of Milton Keynes. The Bagman for the Ring Meeting was Mike Sandford. The Feast was held in the village hall at Wilstone, near Tring, which had become the regular venue for the Day of Dancing and the annual Feast. Michael Chandler's wife oversaw the preparation of the meal with a group of able helpers. They had taken on the catering a few years earlier, but it was, of course, a different prospect to cater for a Ring Meeting. Everyone rose to the challenge, needless to say. On the Sunday morning the gathering went to Wilstone church. The parish magazine recorded that the service 'where a team danced in the nave was something long to remember.'

Cheered up by the success of the Ring Meeting, the club began 1976 with an appeal in the local press for new members, accompanied by a fine photograph of the side performing Bean Setting from Headington Quarry. The appeal was for 'young men with stout legs and a persevering spirit.' A tribute to the power of the press, this appeal worked and several new faces appeared at practices. Leslie Nichols of Greensleeves Morris Men had been training the men through the winter at the Memorial Hall in Stoke Mandeville, near Aylesbury. The first public show of the year came early, at the beginning of March, when a side of the more experienced men danced in High Wycombe during the Arts Festival. A full programme had been arranged for the early summer, with no fewer than five shows in the ten days between May 30th. and June 8th. There was also a trip away in May to the Derby Morris men's Day of Dance. In June five men took their families with them to the Forest of Dean and enjoyed the Family Weekend organised by the local club. The Day of Dancing was now established as a Weekend of Dance, still on the first weekend in July and based on the village hall in Wilstone. In 1976 it was supported by Forest of

Dean, St. Alban's, Wilsthorpe Boys, Datchet, Leicester, Towersey and Derby. It was pleasing to be able to welcome Morris Sunderland back again, as well. There were one hundred and sixty men there in all, making it another mammoth catering challenge for Sally Chandler and her helpers. The weather was perfect and there were good crowds for all the stops on the tours and for the massed show in Aylesbury on the Saturday lunchtime. Many of these watchers were very generous, so much so, in fact, that it was possible to cover all the expenses of the weekend from the collections and there was no need to charge the dancers at all. There were two more outings later in the summer before the school holidays, one of them unfortunately catching the only wet day in a summer of drought ! There was a business meeting at the beginning of September. Mike Chandler was re-elected as Squire and Mike Sandford as bagman. The following Saturday the side turned out for the wedding in Amersham of one of the men who had recently joined, Dick Moorhouse. After that there would be one more public outing, at the Offley Day of Dance, before the Feast in mid-October. There were about seventy men at the Feast, including David Weltje, the new Squire of the Ring, Morris Sunderland, Lionel Bacon and guests from Derby, Forest of Dean, Offley, St. Alban's and Winchester. There had been a plan to show some of the archive film of Morris Dancing, some of it taken by Lionel Bacon, which the Morris Ring had recently been transferring onto modern film-stock, but at the last moment John Wells, the Ring Bagman, was unable to come.

This had been a much more active year than many in the recent past, and in order to consolidate the new beginning, and to encourage the new members a prompt start was made to practising, once again under the guidance of Greensleeves Morris's Leslie Nichols. It is interesting to see a new inclusiveness towards families developing in the events of these years of the late 1970's. We have already seen a good-sized party going down to the Forest of Dean for the Family Weekend there, and just before Christmas in 1976 there was a social gathering at the Half Moon in Wilstone, which was becoming the base for the club's main events. It was a modest beginning; there were nine men and three of their wives on that occasion, but it would become a fixture on the programme in future years and become more generally supported.

After Christmas, almost before the turkey had been digested, the training programme began again almost at once. This was a brave commitment in an English January with many men having some distance to drive, and not surprisingly there are soon complaints in the log about poor attendance. It picked up again, however, and the practices led into a fairly busy summer programme with the side out dancing at least once a week right through from May until the end of July. It was not a good year for weather. An outing to Amersham and Chesham at the beginning of May had everyone in the side shivering and few turning out to watch. Few putting their money in the bag either. A fortnight later it was not only cold but raining as well. This pattern was to continue through until the end of June, but at last the sun came out when the club danced in the churchyard at All Saints in High Wycombe. Not only was the weather good and the crowd correspondingly good, but the appreciative dancers were feted with snacks and home-brewed beer. Despite the beer they were fit to go on to Penn House, a little way outside High Wycombe, where Earl Howe was entertaining the Women's Institute. Here there was again a good crowd and a beautiful setting, a fee of £15 and a collection of another £12. Much cheered up the men moved on to Wendover to drum up another crowd. There was only £6 in the bag this time, but there was free beer provided by the landlord of The King and Queen and an invitation to come back at any time. A few days later, disappointingly, the rain was lashing down again, reducing the side who went out for an evening tour to Little Kingshill and Butler's Cross to dancing inside in the bar, and raising fears for the forthcoming Weekend of Dance. When the weekend came, though, it brought beautiful weather and the gathering of some sixty men, including a side from the Leeds Morris men for the first time, went ahead without a shadow. These Weekends of Dance had now settled into a firm pattern, with tours going out by coach to the north and south of Aylesbury and coming back for a massed show in Aylesbury Market Square in mid-afternoon. The whole assembly would then return to Wilstone for tea, and after tea the visitors would be taken off to dance at nearby public houses while the Whitchurch men rolled their sleeves up and peeled as many sacks of potatoes as Mrs. Chandler and her team deemed necessary for the hungry crowd. The Feast would begin at 8.00 p.m. and, with singing and dancing afterwards, would run through until midnight. Sundays

followed the pattern which had become customary at Morris Ring Meetings since the Second World War; the participating clubs would process to the church, where one of them would perform a dance during the service. Afterwards, there would be dancing outside the Half Moon followed by a light lunch before the visitors left. After that, of course, came the clearing up of all the remains of the weekend's activity.

In September the club took part in an extraordinary event ! A side went up to Stowe School, near Buckingham, and launched the pre-dinner entertainment at the 'Pineapple Ball'. This appears to have been a social occasion of some lustre, put on to raise funds for the Boys' Club which Stowe School supported in West London. There had at one time been something of a rash of such clubs founded in London and other cities by some of the most exclusive public schools. Essentially a flowering of Victorian philanthropy, it was a late flowering in the case of Stowe's 'Pineapple Club', which was founded in 1927. The ball in 1977 was thus the Golden Jubilee celebration and was planned to be an especially glittering event. The Queen Mother, the Duke of Gloucester and the Prime Minister had all been invited, but were not able to attend, sending congratulatory letters instead. The Whitchurch log is fairly laconic about it all,

'...a very County affair. Champagne at £4.75p. We danced by floodlight under the portico at the south front. Very enjoyable. The very posh audience didn't appear enthusiastic. We had the opportunity of looking around the state rooms and exploring the basement. We were given a good feed with wine and beer ad lib. in the servants' hall - same menu as the guests upstairs were paying high prices for.

There were to be two or three more public outings in late summer. The Oving village fete should have been a good day. There were many attractions besides the Morris men and it was all well-planned. Unfortunately the weather once again disappointed everyone and the men had to brave the bitter wind to dance for a very small audience. The weather did not matter in October, however, when the club danced at the Harvest Supper at All Saints Church in High Wycombe. They did two short shows and joined in the country dancing in between. There was a fee of £25 for this, which was thought to be very generous. It was £10 more than the collection the following Saturday, the day of the Annual Feast, when eighty men took part in a walking

tour of Aylesbury through the afternoon. It was another successful conclusion to the dancing year, with guests from St. Alban's and Offley among others, and another triumph for Mrs. Chandler and her increasingly expert team in the kitchen.

The writer of the log seems to have been very contented with the winter practices,

This term's meetings have been well attended, though greater punctuality would have been welcome. We have always had a full team with musicians, and usually several spares to change round. Several new members, all beginners. We have concentrated on Adderbury and Fieldtown.

Not surprisingly 1978 began in good spirits, with a new Bagman, Nigel Cox, and a convivial business meeting, ostensibly to plan the coming year's programme, but also to celebrate Walter Newall's seventy-third birthday. What everyone was most looking forward to in these early weeks of the year, though, was the club's first Ladies' Night. Another sign of the club's recognition that its members had wives and families and friends, the inaugural event was held at the *Spinning Wheel* restaurant in Wendover on February 3rd. (Subsequent generations of club officers showed a more romantic face and moved the date nearer to St. Valentine's Day) Everyone was delighted that many of the older members of the side, Peter Alderman, John and Ted Hogston and Harry Doncaster, for example, who were now rarely seen dancing, were able to attend with their wives.

The family feeling in the club continued in the spring of 1978. For the Bank Holiday weekend at the end of May a large party set off northwards to join the Leeds Morris men for their excursion to the Yorkshire Dales. The entire Chandler family went; there were also the McKeggie and the Sandford families, John Warren and Andrew Main with their wives and Joe Ward and his son. (Nigel Cox joined them later, once his livestock had been settled for the weekend.) This proved to be quite an efficient communal arrangement, letting those who were not so keen on dancing to take a break, knowing that their children (or husbands) were being well looked after. The Whitchurch men were surprised by the gritty northern endurance of the Leeds men. Even at the end of a long hot Saturday of dancing, Andrew Main records,

Leeds seemed indefatigable, happily embarking on 'Saturday Night' watched in bleary disbelief by Whitchurch who returned exhausted at a late hour to the campsite and lime crusher !

The lime crusher behind the campsite at Cracoe, which operated non-stop through the weekend, along with the malodorous public toilets in Skipton, next to which they had to dance both on the Saturday and the Monday, and the cannily avaricious farmer in Burnsall who charged the men to park in his gateway, alone marred a happy and busy long weekend. The sun shone all the time, bringing out enormous crowds to all the beauty spots where the dancers performed. This sometimes made driving difficult but swelled the collections at each spot. Not everyone in Yorkshire downed tools for the Bank Holiday and at Hellifield the men found their 'Lads A Buncham' being gleefully mocked by a team of building workers using spades and pickaxes. Luckily, this variation never found its way into the club's repertoire. The Sunday was set aside as a quieter day when the families could spend time together. The enjoyment of this weekend helped found a tradition of attending this Leeds event which continues down to the present day.

A month later many of the same Whitchurch group were at the Forest of Dean Family Weekend as well. Andrew Main, who wrote the report on the event for the log, was reminded of a scout camp when he saw the different sides grouped with their little clusters of tents, but that was as far as the resemblance went. The Forest of Dean turned out to be something of a wilderness for beer-drinkers, one or two members were afflicted with stomach upsets through the weekend, the audiences for the dancing were small and often lacking in interest, and yet, despite all this, the warmth and enthusiasm of the hosts made this a memorable excursion and left everyone keen to go back another year.

The summer of 1978 proved kinder to dancers than the previous one and the club were able to dance at all their chosen spots instead of glumly looking out of public house windows at the rain. Looking over the list of places where the club had arranged to dance that year it looks as though the 'centre of gravity' has shifted. Most of the places visited were to the south-east or south-west of Aylesbury - Edlesborough, Ley Hill Common (which was shared with a St. Alban's

side), Long Marston, Cheddington, Penn, High Wycombe, Little Kimble and Butler's Cross. Both tours on the Weekend of Dance headed away to the south as well.

The Weekend of Dance was the one occasion in 1978 when the weather let the club down. Even so, in the gaps between the outbreaks of drizzling rain it proved possible to dance at all the places which had been booked. There were visiting contingents from the Forest of Dean (who had earlier welcomes five Whitchurch families to their Family Weekend again) and their near neighbours, the Lassington Oak Morris Men, from Leeds, London Pride and, adding variety of style, the Wilsthorpe Sword dancers from Derbyshire. Morris Sunderland was also in attendance and his expert fooling caught the attention of the crowds. The *Bucks Herald* has a vivid picture of him performing nonchalantly on a borrowed bicycle. The press coverage of the Weekend was excellent. The High Wycombe based *Bucks Free Press* devoted almost a whole page to the club and the Weekend's tours. Beneath some fine photographs the page gave a short history of the club and noted some of the personalities dancing at the Weekend. As always, the reporter allowed himself to become carried away by the excitement of it all !

The cobbles of Aylesbury Market Square and Wendover's Manor Waste echoed to the merry tap of their feet, the ring of the bells, and rang to the tune of the pipe, the tabour and the concertina... What does it all add up to - jollity, colour, lively music and letting old traditions continue. Long live the Whitchurch Morris Men !

Walter Newall, who was by far the oldest member of the side was described, inevitably, as 'sprightly', but the reporter also noticed the two youngest members, Chris. Ward and Richard Stroud, twelve and thirteen respectively. Both of the boys' fathers, Joe Ward and Ken Stroud, were also out dancing.

Most of the regular dancing took place on public house forecourts, but there were occasional outings to special events. The visit to Penn in July, for example, was to a Conservative Fete at Penn House. 'A spiritless occasion' it is called in the log. Luckily, the men were also booked to go on to High Wycombe to appear once again at the fund-raising event for foreign missions at All Saints' Church. Here there was a good crowd, and the Bagman, Nigel Cox, going round with a bucket,

made a good collection for the cause. The men were rewarded with 'free eats and good home-brewed ale.' This was to be a long day. After satisfying themselves with the food and beer at All Saints' Church the team headed into the hills, and into the drizzle, to perform at Nigel Cox's home village of Bledlow Ridge. There was 'a very good tea' provided here, and, perhaps to dance off all this food, the men made their way home via two more dancing engagements, at Wendover, and at The Lee, nearby.

This July took the club on probably its longest journey yet to attend a Morris event when eight men, including two 'guests' - Alan Hart from St. Alban's and Jim Gent from Redbournstoke - travelled to Plymouth for that club's Weekend of Dance. The account in the club log returns again and again to the theme of the inadequacy of West Country beer, but is otherwise deeply appreciative of the generosity of their hosts and the organisation of the Weekend. One of the Plymouth side gave the Whitchurch men a communal sleeping space in his house, which was better than sleeping in a draughty hall, although various members of the side are accused of snoring, talking in their sleep and otherwise disturbing the night's peace. After an 8.45 a.m. start and an arduous Saturday of dancing, the Feast was held in the restaurant on the fourteenth floor of the Civic Centre, inducing vertigo in some of the men (though presumably not in the case of Squadron Leader (later Air Vice-Marshal) Tony Stables, who wrote up the account of the weekend !) and a sardonic comment from the Squire that most of the dancers had never got that far off the ground before. On the Sunday morning the Whitchurch side felt very honoured to be asked to perform the dance during the service in St. Mary's Church at Tamerton Foliot, and chose to dance 'The Rose Tree' from Bampton. No dancing was possible after the service, so, after bravely downing more of the mass-produced beer which they complain about so plangently, the group returned home.

At the end of August the club returned to its old home ground north of Aylesbury, dancing in Whitchurch at *The White Swan*, where, the log notes, 'Mrs Alderman was among the spectators', and at Oving.

The Black Boy was a very pleasant spot. It was dark and we danced in the floodlighting of the old half-timbered pub with the white tower of the church on a rise behind.

In September Aylesbury duck was back on the menu and on the club's agenda. The Whitchurch men had last attended the Duck Dinner in 1958. Then had come the lean period in the club's history, during which the tradition of dancing in the Duck had lapsed. The Dinner itself had ceased after 1969, when the Bull's Head Hotel in Aylesbury had closed. In 1973 the then Mayor of Aylesbury had decided to revive both the Duck Dinner and the Aylesbury Club, a kind of exclusive dining club for local worthies which had been founded in 1810 originally. The new Duck Dinner was the central event on the calendar of the new Aylesbury Club and it had been held at the Bell Inn in Aston Clinton, outside Aylesbury. The opening of the new Civic Hall in Aylesbury (and rising prices at the Bell) brought about a decision to bring the Duck Dinner 'home' to Aylesbury and an invitation to the Whitchurch Morris Men to once again dance in the Duck. It was something of a close shave, with only five dancers to perform to Mike Chandler's music, but as in the earlier days the Whitchurch men stole the best of the press coverage. Or rather, they shared it with the Duck, laid out on its silver dish and surrounded with lettuce and slices of orange. Fittingly, in one large photograph in The Bucks Herald, Mike Chandler, in what would be almost his last public appearance as Squire of the Whitchurch Morris Men (for the time being), raises a large glass of wine to his lips. September also brought the invitation to what was now becoming another regular appearance, at the Harvest Supper at All Saints' Church in High Wycombe. Writing to Walter Newall afterwards, the Assistant Curate at All Saints' was enthusiastic about the dancing. 'It really makes the evening' he said, and added a personal note to Walter. 'I am always amazed at your agility and enthusiasm for folk dance and song.'

At the beginning of October Mike Chandler stood down as Squire after nine years in the job. There were two candidates proposed to replace him - Mike Sandford and Joe Ward. Mike Sandford was elected. A week later winter practices began again. The setting for these had shifted from the draughty village hall at Stoke Mandeville to the newly opened Civic Hall in Aylesbury. There had been some concern about the greater expense, but with the club now boasting of a substantial membership and the finances being correspondingly in good order it seemed safe to make the move. The new practice room

was certainly more comfortable and convenient. The men responded well to the move and there were usually enough people there for two full sets to dance side by side. An assault was to be made through the winter on Bampton, Adderbury and Bledington dances. First, though, came the Annual Feast, on Saturday, October 21st. This had steadily grown to be a miniature Day of Dance. Visiting sides came from Leeds, the Forest of Dean, St. Alban's, Lassington Oak and Towersey. There was dancing at the Aylesbury Civic Centre before a ploughman's lunch inside. The afternoon was occupied by massed shows in the centre of Aylesbury, and after tea the dancers went to entertain residents at a local home for elderly people. The person who welcomed them here was so confused that the log unkindly wonders whether she was one of the staff or one of the inmates ! Afterwards everyone returned to the familiar setting of the village hall in Wilstone for the Feast. This was a large gathering, with the Offley Morris Men arriving to join the other guests, and the celebration went on late into the night. Walter Newall's enthusiasm for singing showed no sign of fading away, with him contributing 'Blow away the morning dew' and 'The wild rover'. Many of the men attending the Feast were staying overnight because on the Sunday Mike Chandler was leading a musicians' instructional day for the Morris Ring. This would become a feature of the Whitchurch Feast for many years to come.

It had not gone unnoticed that the club was approaching its thirtieth birthday, and on November 7th. sixteen men sat down to a celebration dinner at the *Russell Arms* at Butlers Cross, between Aylesbury and Princes Risborough. Some of those sixteen had been with the club from the beginning - Peter Alderman, Charlie Hogston (still regularly appearing in his Whitchurch kit) and Lionel Bacon - and some, like Graham Tincknell and Walter Newall, had come along a little later, and they were able to fill all the gaps between eating with reminiscences of the early days. After the meal, dancing went on until midnight, and, looking at the wealth of talent and enthusiasm that the club now enjoyed, there was much confident looking forward to the fortieth and fiftieth birthdays. While most of the current members of the side were at the dinner, one or two had to send apologies. Squadron-leader Tony Stables was several thousand miles away.

Dear Nigel

I started this letter sat in an aircraft on the ground in the heat and humidity of Ceylon at 4 o'clock in the morning. I am completing it, however, sat on the balcony of my room at Set Kong in the Hong Kong New Territories.

My very best wishes for a successful and enjoyable evening for the 30th. Birthday. I'll drink the odd few pints of San Miguel (local beer) and wish you well. Must conclude to sleep before night flying tonight.

Best wishes, Tony.

Once again, the press took great interest in the event and a long article, with a photograph, appeared in the *Bucks Free Press*. There was a good historical sketch, noting the contribution made by Lionel Bacon. Once again, oldest and youngest members were contrasted (although Richard Stroud had lost two years since the summer, now being described as only eleven years old.) The reporter became a little lost when the intricacies of the different Morris traditions were explained to him, inventing the rather Japanese sounding Hai Bampton tradition ! The Bagman, Nigel Cox was given space to say what it meant to be a Morris dancer, and also gave some indication of what it might involve when dancing on the mean streets of England's market towns.

I suppose you can say that we are extroverts. We have to be. But we enjoy what we are doing because what we are doing gives pleasure to others. I reckon we can tackle almost anything. When we were dancing at Hereford, a gang of rowdies started taking the micky. There was only one copper present, so he could not do much. But we got control of the situation and we certainly showed the members of the public that we knew what we were at.

The article was headlined 'Now the tap of the clogs may follow the Morris Men' and at the end the reporter explained that 'the wives and sweethearts' of the Whitchurch men, under the guidance of Christine Main, had started a Lancashire clog dancing workshop.

At the beginning of 1979 the club listed the dances they felt competent to perform for the coming season. It was a strong list with no less than ten Bampton dances and six each from Fieldtown and Bledington as well as some from Adderbury and one each from Brackley and Ducklington. With another successful and slightly less crowded Ladies Night behind them the men had their first opportunity to display the winter's hard work in public on April 17th. at Great Missenden, outside

the *Cross Keys*. The musicians were late, the log complains, but when they did arrive there were two full sides ready to dance, and the show went on until it was dark. A week later the same large company was at Oving. 'A pleasant spot, but no audience' is the plaintive record in the log. In the event this was treated as a kind of dress rehearsal and a chance to try out the most recently learned dances. Another week later it was May Day of course, and perhaps there were visions of a balmy English May about when the team visited the *Elephant and Castle* and the *King's Arms* in Old Amersham. As happened with the visit to the same public houses at the same time two years before, the rain fell in torrents and there were few people hardy enough to come and watch. Unfortunately, the weather was not much improved by the following Monday, the May Bank Holiday Monday, which saw the revival of the Whitchurch May Feast and Market. The organisers claimed to be reviving the Whitchurch market which had been established by charter in 1245. Competitors in the team games in the afternoon ended up 'extremely wet and muddy' according to the local newspaper, but it sounds to have been a little better in the morning when the Whitchurch men performed on their adopted home ground immediately after the crowning of the May Queen, a Miss Yvonne Taylor. The Whitchurch Fete became a fixture on the club's calendar and remains there today. For once, the Morris men were unable to capture the photographic pride of place in the press. They had to give way to what looks like a group of medical students in kilts !

May went on. There were regular evening tours, some blessed by fine weather and enthusiastic audiences, others not. The return to the Yorkshire Dales for the Leeds Weekend of Dance was slightly dampened by the weather, but the club's enthusiasm and commitment was not. The next weekend no fewer than ten men, including Jim Gent and Charles Whitlock, now firmly established in the Whitchurch side, went to the Ring Meeting at Thaxted. This was possibly the largest contingent ever sent to a Ring Meeting. Although the Essex night came down like a blanket before they had found their very rural campsite the company stayed in touch with each other, and were up fresh and early on the Saturday (thanks to a nearby cockerel) ready for their tour with the Dutch Morris side, Helmond, and the Faithful City Morris men from Worcester. Their tour took them out to the south and

east, to Harlow, and then eventually back to Thaxted for the massed show, where the Whitchurch side performed the Bampton dance 'Step and Fetch Her' as their show dance and came away feeling fairly pleased with themselves. After a crowded Feast, enlivened by the singing of the Dutch visitors, and after watching the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance, which concluded the dancing in the High Street, the men retired to their village home of Great Barnfield to dance at the pub there. Sunday followed its usual pattern. After the church service and an early lunch the Whitchurch men headed home, clearly buoyed up by the experience of having been at a Ring Meeting with such a strong team.

For some, there was scarcely time to unpack and wash their kit before they were off to the Welsh border for the Forest of Dean Family Weekend. Even after that June 1979 continued to be a hectic month - out one week at Quanton and Waddesdon, north of Aylesbury, with really good crowds (and free sandwiches) at both spots, and then heading south a few days later to High Wycombe for the Overseas Fete at All Saints Church once again. This was to be an extraordinary day. After a relaxed show in High Wycombe the team had to rush to Bierton, north of Aylesbury, to perform at the Fete there ('on grass, exhausting' notes the log) and then back into Aylesbury for the Walton Faire. Inevitably, the timetable was slipping. There was no option other than to dance while another set country dancers were in action. Their music was louder than Joe Ward's concertina which was the Whitchurch men's accompaniment and it was a frustrating experience. The reason for needing to hurry on was that the side were due to take part in the ceremony of the Ock Street Mayor-making in Abingdon, more than thirty miles away. This ceremony was a rare survival of a widespread fifteenth century practice of appointing a Lord of Misrule or a mock-Mayor, usually to oversee an extended May holiday. In Abingdon the occupant of the office was now usually a member or past member of the Abingdon Morris Men, and for some years it had been a man called Charlie Brett, who had been one of the members of the revived Abingdon side back in the 1930's. He was elected again in 1979. By the time the Whitchurch men arrived in Abingdon he had been already been invested with his regalia, which included the famous Ock Street Horns, but they were able to take part in the

'chairing' of the Mayor. They helped carry him up and down Ock Street, Abingdon's main street.

Took our turn at chairing the Mayor - very heavy and the bearing poles rather hard on the shoulders. A long show in the Market Place then on to the Railway Hotel for food in the upstairs room. The grub was lavish but late. Some of the Whitchurch men got involved in a rival celebration at the Abbey and had to be prised away with great difficulty. One man began a jig and was too drunk to finish it. Another had to be rescued from the arms of a designing hussy. (No names, no pack drill) We got away late after a very eventful day.

Needless to say, the men recovered quickly from the indulgences of Abingdon and were able to fit in two more evening tours before the Weekend of Dance. This was well supported and the side had now had enough practice in the routines to ensure that all ran smoothly for the visiting teams. August was left as a time for members to enjoy holidays with their families, but the first day of September saw Bagman Nigel Cox organising a large ceillidh at the farm next to his home in Bledlow Ridge, near High Wycombe. 'An ambitious affair' says the log, noting that over a hundred people came to dance in the cleared out cow-shed. There was a professional band and M.C. and food provided for all. The Whitchurch men showed off a few of their dances 'to great applause'. It was a good preparation for the last major outing of the year, which was a fairly arduous one. The team danced through most of the evening at the Fete at the *Old Crown* at Little Horwood, using almost all the dances in their repertoire. There was free beer and free food for the dancers, always an incentive to extra effort. There was also a full moon, notes the log, but the effects of this are not spelt out !

With great enthusiasm practice sessions began again in mid-September. This was the second year of using the new Civic Hall in Aylesbury. This was now becoming a popular entertainment centre and the Whitchurch men found that the beginning of their practices coincided with one of the performances of 'The Merry Widow' by the local amateur operatic society. The Morris practice room was part of the route between one side of the stage and the other and the practice was interrupted by sudden irruption of 'lovely ladies and stalwart gents' in nineteenth century costumes. The log suggests that the Whitchurch men were quite amused by this, but says nothing about

the effect on the opera of a thunderous 'Young Collins' from below the stage. 'Orpheus in the Underworld' might have been a better choice for the opera. Early in October the club were busy two nights running. First of all, there was the Aylesbury Duck Dinner again. Joe Ward was called in at the last moment to be the musician, but he had never played the Wheatley Processional Dance which traditionally ushered in the Duck. Michael Chandler gave him a tutorial over the telephone an hour before the performance and Joe was able to carry it off perfectly. The following night the side turned out at full strength for the Harvest Supper at All Saints' Church in High Wycombe again. 'Great applause. A good show' was the verdict in the log.

When it came to the A. G. M. a few days later, Whitchurch Morris men proved themselves to be in the forefront of employment trends by appointing Ken Stroud and Dick Moorhouse to share the job of Bagman. This was partly because these two were both fairly recent recruits to the side, but it was also an indication of how active and busy the club had now become. Ken and Dick danced themselves in as joint Bagmen shortly afterwards at the Annual Feast. With visiting sides present from Lassington Oak, Redbournstoke, Leeds and the Forest Of Dean and various other guests, the Feast was a packed occasion, coming at the end of a good day's dancing in Aylesbury. The catering was safe in Sally Chandler's hands as usual. People were not so sure about the gleaming electric carving knife which Nigel Cox was brandishing in the kitchen but eventually pronounced it a success. The Feast was especially memorable for the two youngest members of the club, Christopher Ward and Richard Stroud, who were admitted as full members and presented with their own 'white church' badges.

The decision had been taken that with so many men now turning up regularly to practise it would be useful to separate the less experienced dancers from the more practised. This became the pattern for the winter, with Michael Chandler looking after the newer men and Walter Newall supervising the 'old hands'. All noses remained firmly locked to the grindstone through the winter until Christmas was nearly upon them. The one distraction came when nine men went down to Warminster in Wiltshire, where Andrew Main was now living, to dance at the Christening of his first child. They danced in the church, much to the surprise of the family of the other child who

was being baptised at the same time. At the large party afterwards, Peter Rollason danced the 'Bacca Pipes' jig from and accumulated quite a large sum of money which was laid down as a nest-egg for the infant Dominic.

Practice began early in January after the Christmas break. As usual, January was cold, wet and icy. On the second-to-last Tuesday in the month Walter Newall set off after practice to drive home to High Wycombe, but his car crashed on the exposed road at Bledlow Ridge. He was seriously injured and died four days later in hospital. The funeral was held at All Saints' Church in High Wycombe on February 1st. Most of the Whitchurch men were able to attend, and there were representatives from Greensleeves Morris Men, Letchworth and Foresters as well. Walter had in fact been the first Squire of Foresters Morris Men, from Nottinghamshire, and had long been a member of Greensleeves. Shortly before the accident the Whitchurch men had sent out the invitations to the 1980 Weekend of Dance and they received in return several moving tributes to Walter. The letter from the Abingdon Morris Men was typical.

The Abingdon men were very sorry indeed to hear about the sudden and tragic loss of dear old Wally and we extend our deepest sympathy to his family and friends. We know Whitchurch and the whole of the Morris fraternity will be that much the poorer at the loss of such a kind and gentlemanly person. Let your future dancing pay tribute to his efforts on your behalf.

The shock of Walter's death obviously numbed the other members of the side in the following few weeks, but they eventually pulled together and presented a full programme for the season. The revived Whitchurch Fete, in its second year, was now a regular fixture. The writer of the club log yearns for a public holiday on May 1st., but has to accept the 'politics' of Bank Holiday Monday, and also reports typical Bank Holiday weather - cold and blustery. This was an encouragement to vigorous dancing, in the tradition of Cecil Sharp, but left the dancers eager to retire to the warmth of the *White Swan* for lunch. After lunch came a performance on the other side of Aylesbury at a well-attended Wendover Fayre. The theme of the 'Fayre' was mediaeval, and the Whitchurch men came on after 'The Knights of the Fettered Swan and their Ladies - Pageantry Combat and Longbowmen' This must have indeed been a difficult act to follow, and

it was made no easier by having to perform in the middle of a large arena, separated both from the audience and also from Mike Chandler's music. He had to stand close to the microphone, twenty yards or so from the dancers, so that the crowd could hear him, but this interrupted the musician's close rapport with the dancers. The men were glad to get their show over and move on. At least the side had their name spelt correctly, unlike local M. P., Timothy Raison, who was listed as 'Timothy Raisin'. Too many people with baking on their mind, perhaps ! With Wendover and its mediaeval atmosphere behind them the men went on to a tea party at their co-bagman's house, and, thus revived, to an equine evening, dancing both at the *Black Horse* and the *White Horse* outside Chesham.

Undeterred by the efforts of the previous day, the club went out the next night, only to find that, because it was the Tuesday after Bank Holiday, the chosen spot, the *King's Arms* in Amersham, was serving no food and was almost empty of customers. Such was the impact of this on the collecting bag that at one point former bagman Nigel Cox was seen scaling scaffolding in an attempt to collect some coins being offered from a second floor window in a neighbouring house. This was the first of a series of slightly disappointing evening outings. There were changes taking place in the local public houses. Landlords were keen to keep customers inside eating and drinking and the dancers had to compete with juke-boxes and television in the bar. The weather was no ally. Suddenly, though, at the beginning of June, everything changed. The club were visiting the villages of Swan Bottom and The Lee, tucked in the Chilterns above Wendover.

It was that special night of the year. The one that shouldn't end and nearly didn't. It was the night of the year it stayed warm and the dew and damp didn't fall until nearly midnight. With an appreciative audience in shirtsleeves, with toddlers playing on the swings, and with a beer on the house, the hardest thing was to remember to dance....At 9.30 we still danced; they turned the lights on. Some late-comers - Americans - arrive. We start again after 10.00. The bag speaks for itself. We have never had such a response. A night to savour in the cold evenings of winter.

The euphoria did last a surprisingly long time, despite the return of some cold drizzly weather later in June. At the end of June the club was pleased to be asked back to All Saints' Church in High Wycombe

for their annual Fete. The church had been so much part of Walter Newall's life that this visit was a kind of memorial to him. Those who were not dancing took plastic buckets round and were able to help the fund-raising effort considerably. A slightly different charitable act followed when the side moved on to the newly-re-opened *Harrow* public house in Bishopstone near Aylesbury. The village had been rather indifferent so far to the new attraction, but a vigorous performance from the Whitchurch men had a good crowd taking their first steps over the threshold. The day ended with a display at the Hedge Fayre in Aylesbury itself, but only after a visit to the stall mounted by the Campaign for Real Ale. After this the dancing was described in the log as 'boisterous'.

The Weekend of Dance in 1980 was a major event, with over a hundred visitors attending.

In preparation for the Weekend of Dance the club had been industriously talking to the local newspapers, and some good publicity had resulted, for future events as well as the Weekend. In consequence there were better audiences than expected at a number of dancing spots. The encouragement of the audience often tempted the side at the end of the evening to launch into dances 'that would have been better left in the cupboard', as the log puts it. There were disappointing evenings, of course. At one public house it was reported that 'even the lovely dog and a tethered mule turned their backs'. In the middle of July the club were dancing at the Chandos Arms in Weston Turville, near Aylesbury, with two full sides out for once, when they were surprised to see Charlie Hogston's wife, Kathleen, arrive. This was a rare event, explained when Charlie blushing revealed that it was their wedding anniversary. The landlord had provided a huge spread of black pudding, sausages and hot potatoes for the dancers, who were thus able to celebrate with the Hogstons. The end of July illustrated the extremes of an English summer. On the 22nd. the men were drawing enormous audiences at Hawridge Common and Botley, near Chesham and dancing late into the hot evening again as the people asked for more. On the 29th., however, the dancers gathered in Whitchurch against the backdrop of a huge approaching thunderstorm, which eventually broke over them and made dancing outside impossible. As it was equally inadvisable to set out for home,

they danced indoors instead, but the low beams of the traditional country inn made this rather dangerous, and a very careful performance resulted.

When the Annual General Meeting was held at the end of September, Joe Ward was elected as the new Squire. There was some heart-searching, too, when a question was asked about a Squire's right to ask a member not to dance. This followed an incident earlier in the year when a fairly new recruit had been told that his dancing was not good enough and that he should drop out for the rest of the evening. He and another recent recruit had left as a result. It was agreed after discussion that the Squire not only had the right but the duty to monitor the standards of dancing, but equally it was recognised how important it was for the Squire and all the members to build up the confidence of new men. The decision was also taken at the meeting to elect Morris Sunderland as an honorary member of the club. Morris had been coming regularly to the major events for some years, and had always been a supporter and friend of Whitchurch. He was presented with his badge at the Feast in October.

Almost immediately after being elected as Squire, Joe Ward unfortunately had to go into hospital for a major operation. (Much the same thing happened to Charlie Hogston when he was elected as Squire in 1951.) He was unable to contribute to the club's winter preparations but Michael Chandler had been appointed as Foreman of Dance at the Annual Meeting and he was there to oversee the practices.

The club's first outing in 1981 was a most unusual one. At the Easter Bank Holiday weekend Jim Bartlett of the Ravensbourne Morris Men set out to dance all the way from Orpington in Kent to Worcester, a distance of 202 miles, in a week. He was attempting to break the long-distance Morris dancing record (allegedly set up by one Will Kemp in 1599 !), but also hoped to raise a substantial sum for the Multiple Sclerosis Society. He had arranged for various Morris sides to join him for sections of the journey, and Whitchurch had agreed to dance with him from Stokenchurch to the Oxfordshire border, about two miles, on Easter Monday. By the time the men arrived in Stokenchurch, Jim, who had the advantage of being a former Royal Marines officer, had already been and gone. The Whitchurch men managed to catch him,

making a hurried house to house collection through Stokenchurch as they did so. A planned stop at a public house was cancelled so that the momentum could be kept up, but the Whitchurch men were supplied with glasses of beer from an accompanying car, rather like cyclists in the Tour de France. They had more or less recovered from this unexpectedly energetic start to the season by the Thursday of that same week, when they turned up for the St. George's Day celebrations at *The Hare* in Linslade, near Leighton Buzzard. This was known widely as a convivial occasion and the men were looking forward to their first appearance at it. Several families had decided to go as well. Unfortunately, they arrived to find that the landlord had been rushed into hospital and that all the festivities were cancelled. In view of the situation very few customers had turned out and were, the log says, 'outnumbered by the Whitchurch party'. It was a desperately cold night and the musicians complained that their fingers were too frozen to play. After a very short programme everyone took shelter in the pub.

Whitchurch May Day Fete therefore saw the real start to the season. The weather was kind in the morning with the side on their 'home' ground, but the afternoon brought heavy rain to West Wycombe and the second appearance of the day. The rest of the village Fete had retired under shelter, but the men tried to dance outside on the waterlogged gravel during a lull in the rain. The result was more like a water-polo match than Morris dancing and the small audience splashed away quite quickly. The team moved up onto higher and drier ground outside the local stately home, west Wycombe Park and performed for a small audience there. West Wycombe was a long way south for many members of the side and it was surprising that they should be back just a mile away, at the *Red Lion* at Bradenham the following week. What was not so surprising was the poor turn out. Seven dancers and a musician laboured for forty minutes in front of a small audience, took very little in the bag and retired somewhat despondently to the *Red Lion*. Despondency was in the air the following week, too, after a shaky start at the newly-reopened *Five Bells* in Weston Turville. Trade had not really picked up after the new start and those who were there had little time for the dancers. The evening was saved when the men moved on to Bishopstone to see

how things were going at the *Harrow* a year after its new opening. The party which the Whitchurch men had launched the previous year still seemed to be in progress and the evening ended with everyone in good heart. These years seem to have been the peak period for Whitchurch's involvement with the Leeds Morris Men's Dales Weekend, and fourteen men and some of their families set off to the north at the end of May. Much of the weekend was spent dodging showers. Early on it looked as though the Whitchurch side might have the gift of turning the rain off when they began to dance, but before the first day was out the rain had demonstrated that it was subject to no-one. Some ingenious solutions were found to the problem of the rain - dancing under trees and dancing in anoraks, for example - but the best answer was always the simplest, to take refuge in the nearest public house.

Then it was June, which began, as it had in 1980, with a perfect hot summer evening, and the team were at Hawridge Common, dancing in the tree-shaded garden of the *Full Moon* in front of an even bigger and more appreciative audience than the year before. The club often seemed to be performing as the unofficial arm of the Campaign for Real Ale, and that night, after Hawridge Common, they moved nearer to Chesham, to the *Blue Ball* at Asheridge, a public house which had once been closed by the brewery which owned it but had just reopened as a free house, serving real ale. Here too they found a large audience enjoying the hot evening, and, inspired both by the numbers and the ready supply of ale, danced late into the night. The June spell continued. There seemed to be new landlords all over the place, all ready to fill jugs of beer for the men and butter round after round of sandwiches for the end of the evening. (Not everyone was so enthusiastic about the jar of pickled eggs thrust upon the men by one welcoming host !). It was only disappointing when, as happened on one evening in the middle of the month the side moved on from an enthusiastic audience at one spot to find a mere handful at the next. There were, fortunately, few evenings, if any, when both spots were disappointing.

As the Weekend of Dance approached it looked as though there would be a definite contrast to the previous year's record attendance. In the few days before, though, there was a sudden rush, and in the

end there were eighty men sitting down at the Feast. It was easy enough to hire another coach and to rustle up more food, but it was not so easy to have more beer delivered in a hurry. Nevertheless, the weekend was generally successful and good-humoured. There were generous crowds at most of the stopping places, even when one of the tours managed to dance at the wrong church in Amersham. Aylesbury itself was the only mild disappointment, the crowd 'thinner and less responsive', as the log puts it. This was made up for by the larger audience who turned up for the dancing in Wilstone on Sunday morning. Perhaps the club was seeing the movement in social trends which shifted people's main leisure time from Saturday afternoon to Sunday.

The evening dancing through the rest of the summer was blessed with good weather and we hear over and over again that the men danced 'late into the gathering darkness' or 'past the usual curfew'. There were some pleasant surprises when a new landlord proved to have turned a formerly forbidding pub into a welcoming oasis. There did seem to be a tendency for relatively undeveloped village pubs to attract better audiences. Where effort had been put into building up a wide reputation for food, for example, there usually proved to be plenty of people around but little interest in the dancing. Unaccountably, the relationship of Morris dancing to village communities seemed to be holding on. Where there was this sense of local occasion - the older people bringing their own chairs to sit on, for example, at the *Black Horse* at Dunsmore - the dancers felt encouraged and cherished and generally showed it in the standard of dancing. As the writer of the club log noted, however, when people carried on sitting at the bar or at their tables and ignored the dancing the men were often tempted not to concentrate and standards slipped.

There was no dancing during August, but the side re-assembled after the school holidays for a last evening out on the first Tuesday in September, at the *Boot* at Soulbury, north of Aylesbury. The statistics make interesting reading. There were four musicians on hand, all playing the pipe and tabor, and six dancers. The audience numbered four and that included a dog. No-one minded; this was simply an excuse for an evening out before winter practice began in earnest. There were one or two performances to come. In mid-September ten

men went to demonstrate Morris dancing at the Harvest Supper held by the Women's Institute at St. Leonard's, up on the edge of the Chilterns above Wendover. Foreseen as an evening of fairly dull duty, the visit of the Morris men appears to have tapped into a vein of lightly buried priapic humour up among the beech woods. In the interval between the two forty minute demonstration sessions (they had been planned at twenty minutes, but grew) two WI members were asked to step forward and were incorporated into the Broomfield stick dance, 'the ladies' sticks increasing in size during the dance.' This, the log, adds 'appears to have got all the audience fairly excited.' At the end of the evening there was a 'best vegetable' competition, judged by Joe Ward, the Whitchurch Squire, and inevitably, in the circumstances, the winner was 'the most enormous marrow'. The raffle was drawn by the Bagman, Ken Stroud, who allegedly exacted a kiss from each prize-winner. As the name of Whitchurch new recruit John Killman appears in the published list of prize-winners this may need to be taken with a pinch of salt. The evening finally closed, it is said, with a massed can-can by the hosts ! The Aylesbury Duck Dinner was on the club's agenda again later in the autumn. The men were no doubt delighted to see themselves described in the local press as 'the athletic Whitchurch Morris Men' - more delighted, one would imagine, than the prominent main speaker at the dinner whose racist joke also found its way into the press report.

In early October there was a successful gathering of members and visiting clubs for the Autumn Feast. The weather, unfortunately, was indifferent and made the afternoon of dancing round Aylesbury a dampening experience. The men were able to dry out around the fires of carefully chosen public houses in time for the evening's celebration. There was a swift elevation for new member John Killman, who was given his Whitchurch badge and simultaneously installed as the new Bagman.

In 1982 the club seemed set for an especially successful year. The weather was good right from the start of the dancing season. 'We were again all in party mood' records the log at the end of May. The Yorkshire Dales weekend, to which the club again sent a party of twelve, with families in addition, enjoyed temperatures in the upper seventies. This did cut down the men's vitality for the apres-dance

activities. One person who was experiencing something very different, however, was Tony Stables, who was sent to the Falkland Islands with his helicopters when war broke out there in the spring of 1982. He was very much in the club's thoughts and at the end of June he sent them a message.

Just a note for everybody to say that I survived the war, no thanks to the Argentinian Air Force. We did, however, wallop the Army here on the Islands, but are now awaiting a recall across the 8,000 miles of sea to home. Tell Mike Chandler that I've stood on the runway at Stanley but need a musician before I can dance down it ! Think of you all, especially on Tuesday evenings, enjoying the good weather and English beer. Here, it's a few cans then the sleeping bag. Bloody cold, too. Beautiful landscape, though, and abundant wildlife - seals, penguins, whales, albatross, geese, ducks. Ideal shooting and fishing. Hope to see you soon. Enjoy the summer.

Regards, Tony.

Back in England, though, the mood of the summer suddenly changed. It seemed on Tuesday nights as though everyone was glued to the nearest television set. The World Cup was being played in Spain and no-one wanted to go outside and see a group of men doing Morris dancing. Just to make the men more miserable, that was the week when the weather broke. In the end, though, the World Cup was won and lost, and the sun broke through the clouds again. The two or three disappointing weeks did seem to have damaged the men's morale, though, and the log through the rest of the summer records several late starts, one evening when the performance had to start with only four men, and some poor dancing. Things came back together for the Weekend of Dance. This was not quite on the scale of the two previous years, but there were still two tours sent out on coaches.

It was unfortunate that this year the Aylesbury Carnival was held a week later than the Weekend of Dance. The club was still keen to be involved in the Carnival and with a great effort managed to bring two other local sides, Aldbury and Long Crendon, in with them to support the event. On the day of the Carnival the *'Daily Express'* sent Richard Gordon, the author of *'Doctor in the House'* to Aylesbury with a photographer to give a diagnosis of the state of health of the English summertime.

Aylesbury of duckling fame is a placid Buckinghamshire town consisting

mainly of multi-storey car parks existing on cleanly industries like life assurance, and so respectable that the skinheads wear bristles longer than anywhere else.

One weekend in summer it goes mad. It holds a carnival. The French have cooking, the Italians loving, but the British have fun.

While Mr. Gordon was having fun the photographer was busy, and the main photograph in the feature was one of Morris dancers in front of John Hampden's statue in Aylesbury Market Square. Unfortunately for the Whitchurch men it was a splendid picture of the Aldbury Morris Men.

Despite their very strong commitment to the Leeds Morris Men's weekend and the Forest of Dean family weekend for the previous years the club had not sent a side to a Ring Meeting since 1979. In August, however, a side managed to get to the Wessex Ring Meeting at Sherborne in Dorset. Fr. Kenneth Loveless was the Squire of the Ring that year. There is an interesting note in the information sent out by the Wessex Morris Men.

Loonies

The Sherborne Constabulary, the School (the meeting was based at Sherborne School 'the famous public school for boys'), the Chamber of Trade and many individuals in the town have been tremendously helpful in the organisation of this Ring Meeting. If you have any loonies coming with you, please try to minimise their more extreme behaviour in the interest of our future relations with the town.

This was an issue which had been raised before in Ring circulars. There was a tendency for a small number of people to use Morris gatherings as an opportunity to release their inhibitions and build up a public image of Morris men as a drunken rabble.

The Whitchurch men elected not to sleep in the hallowed, but crowded, precincts of 'the famous public school', and camped instead at Cerne Abbas, about twelve miles away. After a night-cap of hot chocolate and brandy they slept soundly, untroubled by thoughts of the over-endowed Cerne Abbas Giant on the hillside above them. The next day they were out on tour with the Sussex Martlets. It was a sober beginning to the day. They danced in two places before a public house could be persuaded to drag back the bolts on its front door. There was an unscheduled stop in one village to entertain the guests

arriving at a wedding. At the next stop there was an outbreak of excessive vigour (perhaps the unconscious effect of the Cerne Abbas Giant) when sticks shattered during a dance. After all that the two sides were ready for their two and a half hour lunch break. They were fed on steak and kidney pie and the general drift of good food and strong beer was to bring the two sides together and initiate a memorable afternoon of music and dancing. There was inevitably some reluctance to move on to the next spot, which was a wild-life park and zoo, a 'rather tatty' one, according to the log. The dancing showed the impact of the lunch break and must have been an interesting spectacle for the chimpanzees and gibbons and other wild-life looking on. The Feast was unusual. The 'public school' theme was explored further with the men queuing up in school dinner style for their food. The Wessex club's anxieties about 'loonies' were shown not to be unfounded during the Feast. The speeches were too long, according to the Whitchurch log, and 'some idiots decided to horse around'. The Whitchurch men were glad to escape into the town where dancing continued until midnight. Afterwards, some West Country sirens tried to lure one or two of them home with them, it is alleged, but the side stayed together (for a change) and returned to the welcoming embrace of the Cerne Abbas Giant ! On Sunday the whole complement of Morris men processed to the Abbey in Sherborne. The streets seemed deserted and the Whitchurch men feared that an anti-climax was coming on. They discovered on arriving at the Abbey that the entire population of the town, or so it seemed, was inside waiting for them. This proved a very satisfying end to the weekend.

Two weeks later the club was transformed into 'Die Whitchurch Morristanzer - Kostumierte Volkstanzer' when they travelled to Friedrichsdorf in Germany, near Frankfurt, to join in a celebration of the town's twinning with Chesham. This was part of a large migration as the Chesham Girls' Band also went, and they were met in Germany by representatives from towns in Austria and France, all part of a four-way twinning. It was the Whitchurch men's first trip abroad as a club, and there were early complications. They managed to board the wrong ship at Dover ! Luckily it was bound only a few miles up the French coast from their intended destination. They ended up in Boulogne instead of Calais, and after driving through the night, stopping only for

breakfast at an *autobahn* service station, were able to arrive with their German hosts only an hour or two later than intended. A look at the programme for the weekend revealed that they were down to dance only for two ten minute spots. It seemed a long way to drive for twenty minutes of dancing, and after some negotiation with the town authorities they were given permission to go out and dance in the streets of each of the small townlets which made up Friedrichsdorf. When they set out on this tour they were pleasantly surprised to find local shopkeepers coming out with small gifts of bread and fruit, and even the odd bottle of schnapps. Peter Rollason was busy with his decorated tray of 'fertility' cake and brought blushes to the faces of many passing *Frauen*. Some of them were even persuaded to hold the cake-tray while Peter danced a jig for them. Thus Friday passed, and ended in the German equivalent of a village pub. Saturday was busy. Temperatures were in the eighties and brought out large crowds to enjoy the entertainment provided by the foreign visitors. The Whitchurch men took part in a four-nation display of dance in the morning, which was followed by four twinning speeches and exchanges of gifts. The Morris dancers' contribution was certainly enjoyed, although the Chesham Girls' Band seem to have been the crowd's special favourites. 'They were so good I thought they must be a military band' one elderly man is reported as saying. There was a free afternoon, during which most of the visitors were taken by their hosts to enjoy a drink of reviving mineral water at the spa of Bad Hoffmann. 'All salt and minerals' was the judgement passed on the illustrious water, so it was obviously no substitute for English beer. They did find some revitalisation, however, and in the evening the four-nation dance programme was repeated for another audience. The Whitchurch men performed on a stage hung with the flags of five nations, and were fortunate to have a German speaking member in Peter Rollason to announce and explain the dances. At the end, the Mayor of Friedrichsdorf was presented with a Whitchurch badge and enrolled as an honorary member of the club. The next day the party set off in the morning and, after allowing themselves a generous ration of stops for refreshment, arrived back in England soon after midnight.

On October 8th. this advertisement appeared in the *Bucks Examiner*.

SECOND-HAND BOOKS

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We opened for business last Saturday in the pouring rain, and would like to thank: the Whitchurch Morris Dancers, who still came and danced for us (twice !), Victoria Rayner, for appearing as Alice from Wonderland, Mr. And Mrs. Smith for the use of their home during Alice's visit, everyone who very kindly sent us good luck messages and cards, and all our customers who braved the inclement weather to visit us on the opening day !

This told the whole story. It was just a pity that after a season which had brought so many opportunities to dance in excellent conditions the men's last appearance should be so emphatically underlined by the British climate. (There was a return visit to celebrate the shop's first year of business, and conditions were much better.)

October brought first the Aylesbury Duck Dinner as usual and then the AGM, which elected Mike Chandler as Squire and discussed, among other business, the wearing of hats and the club's fool. Mike danced himself in as Squire again at the Feast the following Saturday. The following Wednesday lunchtime the club succeeded in getting a side together, with a little help from the Towersey Morris Men, to dance for a United States Air Force reunion in Cheddington.

1983 started off with disappointing weather, and some of the evening tours early in the year were curtailed by showers. It did give the dancers valuable experience in performing in confined indoor spaces, but when a public house like the *Crown* at Little Kimble had gone to great efforts, putting posters up and organising a barbecue for the side's visit, it was a great pity when the weather spoiled the event. In this case, because the welcome from the landlord and the people in the village was so warm, the men voted to return in August, when the weather could be trusted more.

The weather cast something of a cloud over the Yorkshire Dales Weekend, which the club supported once again. It was so cold that one of the hardy campers had to go and buy some thermal underwear. Saturday ended, too, with a cold supper in an unheated hall. The memory of the weekend was dominated, sadly, by the sudden death of Derek Mallison of the White Rose Morris Men, while he was dancing at

Grassington on the Monday. The White Rose Men and Whitchurch were touring together; the White Rose Men naturally were unable to continue, and it was a rather subdued Whitchurch side which carried out the rest of the day's engagements.

In October there was worrying news. Lionel Bacon was unable to make his customary appearance at the Autumn Feast after he and his wife were involved in a serious car accident. Luckily, neither had been very badly injured, but were both very bruised and shaken and unable to travel far.

The winter practices went ahead as usual. There were no new recruits this year, but there was an attempt to include some sword dances in the repertoire. This was never worked up to the stage of giving a public performance, however, as irregularity in attendance made it impossible to practise consistently.

1984 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Morris Ring and it was celebrated with a banquet at the Metropole Hotel at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham. Ten men went to represent Whitchurch. The menu was exotic at first sight, but '*Contrefilet de Boeuf, Sauce Mader, Pommes Chateaux, Petit Pois a la Flamande*' was quickly revealed to be beef, potatoes and peas ! The drinks remained honest - 'Beer by Marstons, Cider by Westons'.

The build-up to the summer of 1984 was a little slow. The first evening out in May drew an audience of two and hardly more than that turned out for the second evening. The weather was largely to blame again. Weather was against the men the next week when they went to the *Bell* at Aston Clinton, but that was not the only provocation of the evening. The *Bell* was being turned into a prestigious eating place, catering for private parties more than casual drinkers. These aspirations did not fit smoothly with the Morris dancers' general demeanour. The landlord apparently asked the men not to wander about with glasses. One quick-witted man promptly whipped off his spectacles, but the landlord did not see the joke, and the evening was rather spoilt. The fact that no-one was bothering to watch the dancing hardly helped either. The side were asked, as they left, if they would come back in the summer to dance for a private party, but felt obliged to offer a polite refusal.

In another year the visit to the Yorkshire Dales might have lifted the men's spirits, but, according to the log,

'this ranks as the coldest, wettest tour to date. Usually we get one fine day on the weekend, but by the end of Monday this year all the families were decidedly unhappy.'

The theme of disappointment lowered over the side's visit to Thaxted in 1984 as well. The Thaxted organisation was as good as ever, and under the guidance of Jim Catterall the four men who attended had an agreeably bibulous afternoon touring some of the prettiest Essex villages. The disappointment arose out of the atmosphere in Thaxted itself. It suddenly seemed to have become the gathering place for a riotous assembly of well-off but ill mannered youths whose advent had spoilt some of the village pubs and spoilt the late night atmosphere after the Feast and the final massed dancing. The police were out in force, but even so were unable to prevent one or two nasty incidents. 'I don't know if I want to go again' is the final word in the account in the log. There were more problems, but of a quite unexpected kind later in June, at the *Prince of Wales* at Marsh, just outside Aylesbury. As soon as the men started dancing some horses in an adjoining field showed great signs of agitation. They were apparently scared by the bells, and the side had to move away to a safe distance and begin again. At least it was a response, and a response of any kind would have been welcome when they moved on to the *Harrow* at nearby Bishopstone, which had hitherto been such a successful booking. There was a new clientele at the *Harrow*, one of whom had to be carried out dead drunk through the astonished Morris men. Again, they had become witnesses to changing social trends. There remained a kind of enchanted circle high up in the Chilterns, however, where the weather was always perfect and the audiences huge and appreciative. The men were glad to make their way up there at the beginning of July, to the *Full Moon* at Hawridge Common and the *Blue Ball* at Asheridge. At the latter, as usual, they performed in the interval between two sessions of folk singing. The men were invigorated by the good response. A stick was broken in one dance and the broken stick was presented to a woman in the audience with the assurance that it was an especially potent fertility token. Quite why a *broken* stick should be regarded like this is a mystery ! It was, in any event, a

much-needed boost to the club's morale before the Weekend of Dance, which began the following Friday. The numbers were down. The wild youth of Thaxted may have had money to spend but Morris men had shorter purses and many had had to cut down on the number of events they attended. There were even fewer of the Whitchurch men on hand, but, as the log records, those who were there 'did more and helped more.' The Saturday tours went smoothly, the opening massed show in Aylesbury acting as a curtain-raiser for the Carnival as so often in the past. The newly-crowned 'Miss Aylesbury' was roped in to assist, much to the delight of those Morris men who had not fully absorbed current notions about sexual harassment ! At the end of the day the Feast was 'the best yet', according to the log. The relatively small group who sat down to it drank all the beer which had been ordered with a larger company in view and so the songs and dancing went on late into the night. This probably had no connection with the next morning's church service being rather on the quiet side. The dancing outside the *Half Moon* was a great success, attracting more people than ever, and was a perfect end to the weekend.

The Weekend of Dance saw the start of a spell of hot weather, but it was perhaps too hot at the end of July when the club put on a show at the opening of the 7th. World Wheelchair Games at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. The mission was to entertain the assembled athletes and spectators while the Prince of Wales was making his way round the arena. There was a very detailed rehearsal at the children's playground in Stoke Mandeville first, but this did not prevent the men arriving on the wrong side of the arena when they went to the stadium. This problem was overcome, and they were introduced to the public by the famous Esther Rantzen. The dancing went well, but it was hot and dry out in the middle of the arena, and the men were too far away from the spectators to have any real rapport. The administrator of the Games was pleased. 'I am writing to thank you most warmly for the great help the Whitchurch Morris Men gave us to make the opening of the Paralympics the best ever' he wrote. There is no record of what the Prince of Wales thought. The side returned to Stoke Mandeville, to the *Woolpack*, two days later. It was still very hot and the Aylesbury Camera Club were in evidence as well, looking for some good action shots from the dancers. The combination must have brought out the

prima donna who lurks even in the quietest Morris dancer, and the evening apparently ended with some bickering.

The heat of the summer and the big crowd at the opening of the Wheelchair Games were distant memories in September when there was an end of season outing, to the *Royal Oak* in Aston Abbots.

'Very cold and no audience. Truthfully, I did see one person looking out of the pub window.'

There were two well-supported trips away, to Days of Dance in Derby and Bedford in September and October, with eleven and ten men respectively at the two events. After that it was an appearance as usual at the Aylesbury Duck Dinner (the club grabbing the pictorial pride of place in the local newspapers again) and on to the Annual Meeting. At this Charlie Hogston was elected as Squire once again. It was thirty three years since he had last been Squire ! A rather dark photograph of Charlie appeared in the local press, insisting on calling him Charlie Hoggston and insisting that he had 'a wide knowledge of The Morris and The Hop' Charlie refrained from suing them. The Annual Meeting also noted the departure of Andy Main to go and work in Singapore. Andy had for a few years been providing an acute and pungent commentary on the club's affairs for the archives, and this important role was taken over by Cyril Blunden. Cyril cut his teeth on a brief assessment of the winter practice. It looks as if there was some lack of commitment, with a few members only arriving at the half-way point of the evening and then, apparently, diving in and criticising those who had been struggling all the way through.

Whatever problems there were appear to have been solved one way or another by the time the men appeared in public at the beginning of May 1985, at the Whitchurch Fete as usual. Thirteen men turned out, bringing many families with them, and enjoyed a sunny day and large crowds in Whitchurch. Charlie Hogston noted signs of change in his old home; the *Crown and Thistle* now boasted an inside toilet, but had lost a certain charm in consequence. The latter half of May brought the cold and rain back, and saw some bad habits surfacing in the dancing. The two things may have been related.

June brought two unequal contests. At Ashlyns School at Berkhamstead, where the men were described in the programme as

'The Whitchurch Side Morris Men', the musicians had to compete with a brass band which was playing in the background and the dancers were squeezed in between the Pet Show and the Dressage Display. Luckily they did not have to battle against the Fire Brigade Surprise. They moved on to Quarrendon School in Aylesbury to be greeted by 'a monkey, alligator, Indian python and kittens' The pet show was doing great business once again, and the Morris dancers had to compete with that, and with 'rhythmic dance/drama by pupils in the school hall.' Neither event was a great success, but they did bring money into the club's account. It was a summer of fetes. Two weeks later the side were out at Halton for the Buckinghamshire Girl Guides Carnival Day. Before they could perform the men had to trample down an suitable area in long grass sprinkled with animal droppings. Slightly indignant they began their programme, only to be hauled off half-way through by the announcer, who heralded the arrival of the steel band. The organisers were happy, though, and the log records 'an extra donation'.

With all these appearances there were fewer evenings out. A trip to Leighton Buzzard produced one spot with 'no audience' and then another where 'a young couple sat on the lawn and then promptly went inside and those already inside stayed there.' The same was true two weeks later outside the *Swan* at Ivinghoe and the disappointment made the dancing 'both sloppy and amateurish', according to the log. Some sharp words were spoken by the Foreman, Mike Chandler, and everyone had pulled themselves together by the time they arrived at the *King's Arms* in Tring, where a real audience and a barbecue was waiting. The evening was rescued, and so perhaps was the entire season.

It has always been difficult to persuade the press to take Morris dancing seriously. The Buckinghamshire papers reduced the 1985 Weekend of Dance to 'Knee-knocking and hanky-waving is all part of the fun this weekend'. There was a substantial attendance by other sides - King John's from Southampton, Leeds, Three Shires, Icknield Way, Forest of Dean, Thaxted and Faithful City - and the weekend was noisily launched in the *Half Moon* by Jim Catterall and the other musicians. It was a fine weekend and consequently there was a good crowd out in Aylesbury Market Square for the massed display which

started the Saturday tours. It was apparently a lively and well-presented show, and Cyril Blunden thought he had it captured on film. Needless to say, the usual law prevailed and the film had quietly jammed in the camera. Many of the people in Aylesbury must have been on shopping trips from the surrounding villages, because when the tours made their way out into the hinterland they found everywhere deserted. There were 'only two people' in one place, 'a few villagers' in another, and 'one customer in the bar and a couple sitting outside' in the next. It was almost a relief when the landlord's dog at the *White Swan* in Whitchurch turned nasty and drove the dancers out. At least it was a reaction !

The feast was the usual success, with its chaser of songs and speeches.

The summer which followed brought some interesting experiences. The Saturday after the Weekend of Dance brought the London Pride Morris Men down to dance with Whitchurch at the Aylesbury Carnival and then to share a tour round the area. Leslie Nichols of the Greensleeves Morris Men, who had helped with practices back in 1976 was able to join the side for a visit to Chipperfield in September - and ended up playing because of the shortage of men.

In September the club was able to field a side to dance at the wedding of Mike Chandler's daughter, Helen, in Toddington. The proud father arrived with the bride in a veteran Morris car, a nice touch. After the men had arranged for the bride and groom to leave the church under an arch of Morris sticks, they danced while photographs were being taken. It was apparently quite a strain for Mike to keep his wedding face on for the pictures and restrain himself from bellowing 'step, together' and other advice to the dancers. The record of the event concludes with the note that Mike's Morris dancing is better than his Disco dancing ! "thank you for making our day that little bit different," wrote the bride and groom in thanks, which was very tactful of them.

The four men who went to the White Hart Morris Men's Ale and Tour in October found themselves lucky enough to be on the tour which made part of its journey by rail, by steam train on the Severn Valley Railway. This was a cue for several picturesque tableaux with the men dancing on the station platforms amid clouds of soot and steam.

They soon realised why steam engines were generally painted black. Once in the train Joe Ward fell prey to the illusion that the ticket collector was in fact a waiter coming round to take orders for drinks, one of many hallucinatory experiences that the four were to suffer as the day went on. It was a long day, with the feast being delayed until 10.00 p.m., a problem for the Whitchurch men who were planning to drive back afterwards.

The Whitchurch Autumn Feast took place a week after, on October 19th. The afternoon was turned into an instructional session on Lichfield dances, and about fifty visitors turned up for this, as well as the Whitchurch men. The new pattern was well received, and there was another innovation when Cyril Blunden showed a film he had made of the club's performances during the summer. The law which says that no amateur film show will ever proceed smoothly came into force and Cyril's projector blew up. Amazingly he knew another enthusiast in Wilstone village with the same type of projector and was able to effect repairs quickly enough to still show his film in the time available.

In November, after a gap of thirty-five years, the Whitchurch men were back dancing at Cecil Sharp House at the National Gathering of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. They performed right at the end of the evening in between two groups of clog dancers. This National Gathering was the Society's last event under the directorship of S. A. Matthews, who was always known as 'Nibs'. and in December the club turned out a side to dance at a farewell party for him organised by the Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire branches of the Society. A hundred and fifty people turned up to Wendover Memorial Hall and saw the Whitchurch men perform. A good picture of a smart Constant Billy from Headington appeared in the local paper.

For the winter practices the club moved to the Quarrendon Centre at Quarrendon School in Aylesbury at the end of 1985, and in January 1986 one of the local papers ran a story, appealing for new members, but also speculating that a junior side might be formed. The publicity, or something, worked and four new recruits arrived. Only two stayed on beyond April, John Bush (who was a teacher at Quarrendon School as it happened) and Richard Lovegrove. Good as the new practice facilities were, the nearest public house, the Horse and Jockey,

proved a disappointment, always very busy when the men went in after practice.

There was snow in Buckinghamshire on March 1st. when a small group set out to attend the Lassington Oak Ale in Gloucestershire. The snow had vanished by the time they were west of Oxford. It was a genteel journey down, stopping for tea in a picturesque Cotswold village, but any pretension to gentility vanished once they were in the hands of the Lassington Oak men. Everyone ended the evening standing on their chairs and singing 'We're climbing up sunshine mountain.' Later in March came another 'family' event when the club performed at Ken and Judy Stroud's Silver Wedding celebration in Chesham. The celebration was also graced with one of Joe Ward's recitals of First World War favourites, perhaps making Ken and Judy feel very young by comparison. Joe's energy was abounding and he drove the men at a furious pace through all their dances. He was still driving them fast in April at the Icknield Way Ale at Lain's Barn, near Wantage. The impatience was catching. Cyril Blunden insisted on setting out at what, to the rest of the side, seemed to be the middle of the night to attend the King John's Morris Men's Day of Dance in Southampton. He was roundly cursed and lambasted by the others for the whole of the two hour wait before any of the hosts turned up to open the doors.

May Day arrived and the club had eighteen men out to perform at the May Fair at Whitchurch. There was only time for a very quick break at the end before most of the dancers moved on to the fair at Quainton. The Whitchurch men had only taken this engagement on after another local Morris side had let the organisers down at the last minute. After trying so hard to be helpful, however, the men were disappointed to find they were performing in front of a tiny audience. Most people had gone home for lunch. Five men made their way on to Wheatley, near Oxford, in the early evening for a walking tour of the village. This too proved disappointing, with only one opportunity to dance, when they were joined by two of the Long Crendon Morris Men, still fresh after cancelling one of their engagements earlier in the day ! The Whitchurch men, their club nearly forty years old, must have felt like elder statesmen the following week when they attended the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Redbornstoke Morris Men at Toddington in Bedfordshire. Jim Gent, who had joined Whitchurch

from Redbornstoke, reverted to his old colours for the day. The photograph taken that day breathes warmth, but the weather had changed, as it often does in May, when a side went to High Wycombe to dance at the Royal Grammar School fete. They bravely danced in a downpour to satisfy the curiosity of a handful of people, and were rewarded with a free tea. The current Bagman, Rod Holt, then went off to record an interview for the local Hospital Radio service. It proved to be a classic broadcast. Rod had steadied his nerves in the usual way and was able to give an effusive account of the bagman's duties. Few of the listeners, not even his fellow Morris men, were able to understand everything he said, especially the bit about the dirigible. Leaving the studio, Rod was ready for the crowds who would be wanting his autograph. In fact it was a one-man-and-his-dog situation where the man had failed to turn up. The same was almost true of the second performance at the fete.

A small party went to the Leeds Morris men's Dales Weekend, and it rained a good deal. There was a new camp-site which seemed quite some way off the horizontal. There was a running buffet on the Saturday night - 'you had to run or else you starved' - and then more rain on Sunday and Monday, but it still ended with a determined intent to return the next year. The mercurial English (and Welsh) climate had swung to the other pole two weeks later when another small party went to the Forest of Dean for the Family Weekend there. Although the weather was so good and the dancing sites well chosen the audiences were tiny. Simon Rollason, who wrote the accounts of both weekends asks the question about the change in people's habits. 'Isn't it a shame that the audiences for morris have dropped off so much over the years.'

The summer evening programme began in Tring at the King's Arms. Despite the landlord's welcome and his free beer the writer in the club log is not impressed. 'A dull sort of spot' he calls it, perhaps endorsing Simon Rollason's fears about the declining audiences. The best audiences were often at fetes and other special events, like the one at the Chiltern Open Air Museum at Chalfont St. Giles that same June. While these events also often brought the men's presence to the attention of the local press, there was sometimes some grating of teeth when the reporter's words appeared. 'More musical mirth was

supplied by the Whitchurch Morris Men' was the alliterative beginning to the report on the museum fete. The same newspaper had a photograph of the side, but as they had just completed two or three hundred yards of the Wheatley Processional in the heat, they were obviously beginning to flag and look rather ragged.

The hot weather was not to last. The Weekend of Dance on the usual first weekend of July was plagued by sudden heavy showers. The Aylesbury Carnival Queen presided over the massed dancing in the town's Market Square but disgraced herself by absconding with Mike Chandler's umbrella which he had loaned her during an inconvenient shower.

The Autumn Feast in 1986 grew to become a weekend. It had also become a weekend of instruction for Morris musicians under the auspices of the Morris Ring. This was an extremely successful event, and the Saturday led into the Whitchurch Feast. Michael Chandler was elected as Squire again and Cyril Blunden, who had been the acerbic keeper of the club log up till then, took over as Bagman. It was good that Lionel Bacon was still able to attend the Feast, nearly forty years after helping the club start on its way. He had to have his baldrick and bells posted on to him afterwards, but the Whitchurch men were more than happy to do that.

The new Squire was determined to polish up the side's discipline, and showed his hand quickly at the pre-Christmas 'Drinks Night' at the *Bull* at Stoke Mandeville. The Christmas carols, he insisted, were to be sung properly, with none of the unauthorised words which had been drifting in recent years. The winter practice nights, at Quarrendon School again, were well supported, with an average of fourteen men turning out, making it possible for two sides to dance most of the time. This seemed to have been a response to some hard talking at the previous October's Annual General Meeting, when there had been serious thought of the club having to shut down unless members showed more commitment.

The year 1987 opened with an invitation to join the celebrations in Friedrichsdorf in Germany to celebrate the town's twinning with Chesham, but this time, despite the happy memories of 1982, the club was unable to go.

Ladies' Night was now established as a Barn Dance. This year it missed the target date of February 14th. by a whole week, but was nevertheless enjoyed by all who attended.

At the beginning of March one car set off to go to the Lassington Oak Ale in Gloucestershire. The weather looked bad at the beginning of the trip, but by the time the four brave men had reached Northleach in the Cotswolds it was clear that they could go no further. They hastily retreated before the advancing blizzard and made it back to Aylesbury. Having missed their supper, they bought fish and chips, bewildering the staff by assuring them that in their white clothes they were on their way to play cricket. At the end of March the club sent a side to support the show which the local branch of the English Folk Dance and Song Society put on for the Aylesbury Festival of the Arts at the Civic Centre in Aylesbury. A request for a £2 entrance fee from each man nearly led to a rebellion, and the protracted running of the show meant that it was 10.00 p.m. before the men went on. Despite all that, the performance was excellent. There were two or three gentle warm-up engagements before the season began in earnest on the May Bank Holiday. The last of these was on St. George's Day when the men went to the *Rose and Crown* at Saunderton, near High Wycombe. The club was appearing with the folk group Upstreet as the accompaniment to the special St. George's Day feast in the restaurant. The folk singers were listed in the leaflet as 'not too noisy!', but the Whitchurch Morris Men were promised as 'very noisy, but hopefully outside, weather permitting.'

May Bank Holiday turned out to be a full day, with dancing in the morning at Whitchurch, at the Bierton School Fete in the afternoon and at the *Old Crown* at Little Horwood in the evening. Tempers appear to have frayed a little, with the Bagman being grilled over differing times appearing on posters, but a free beer and ploughman's supper at Little Horwood eased the pain.

A rash promise made the previous year in the Forest of Dean, gazing across the head of a pint of beer into a young woman's eyes, led to the side making the long journey down towards Slough to appear at the Farnham Royal School fete the next Saturday. The men were well received, even if the free lunch turned out to be a roll and coffee, and in between shows they made the most of the side shows. Like many

fetes this brought in a useful fee to the club's coffers. For the next month it was the familiar story of bad weather and audiences who preferred to stay inside in the warm, especially when there was the alternative of a jazz band inside, as there was when the men returned to Saunderton, to the *Rose and Crown*.

When it came to the Weekend of Dance, the weather gave the club a reprieve. It was a well-attended event, with ninety-eight people sitting down to the Feast, most of whom had also been on tour during the day. The dancing began in Aylesbury Market Square in front of a large crowd of shoppers. One tour then headed towards High Wycombe, and the other went out towards Amersham and Chesham. Both came together to entertain patients and staff at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. In the hot sun, many patients were wheeled out in their beds to enjoy the fresh air and the perspiring Morris dancers. At the Feast Moss Ambrose from Leeds was made an honorary member of the side in recognition of his support for many years. On the Sunday not everyone joined the procession to church and this part of the Weekend was rather disappointing. All the remaining men were assembled in front of the *Half Moon* later, however, to entertain the crowd who had gathered. This part of the programme was now well established as a local attraction. The convivial atmosphere which was generated was no doubt a factor in reminding so many Whitchurch men to stay and help clear up. The Bagman's usual complaint about everything being left to a few was redundant this year.

It was almost too much to ask the side to turn out again the next weekend for the Aylesbury Carnival, which stubbornly refused to coincide with the Whitchurch Weekend. A musician and six men were raised just in time and enjoyed dancing in the Market Square again in front of the Carnival crowds. To make it a worthwhile day, the men then went on to Waddesdon Manor to dance. At the end of the afternoon, the Administrator took the men and the families who had joined them on an unscheduled tour of the house.

When things went well, as they had this summer, despite more rain and one or two lonely dancing spots with no audience and unfriendly barmen at the end of July, there was often a call to fit in a couple of extra sessions in August. This year, as was usually the case, it was the triumph of optimism over realism. When the extra outings in

August came it was almost impossible to raise a side. When the men visited the *Boot* at Soulbury, it was only the fortuitous presence of the new honorary member, Moss Ambrose, that made it possible to dance. As it was another hot evening with a sizeable crowd at the *Boot* it would have been annoying to let them down. The following week another scratch side made it to the *White Horse* in Whitchurch, where the landlord had provided free sandwiches and sausage rolls at the prospect of their coming. This was a difficult place to dance, the pub having only a narrow pavement between it and the road. Dodging passing traffic and a fire engine returning to the station next door added a touch of absurdity to the dancing. The last trip away of the season took a small group of Whitchurch men to Redditch to join in the White Hart Morris Men's weekend of dance. This proved quite boisterous. The Whitchurch Bagman, having annoyed his hosts with some banter, nearly became the Debaggedman at one point. The Lichfield Morris Men played havoc with a dress shop in Stourport, managing to remove the dummies from the window and taking their place. After all that a certain world-weariness set in and the Whitchurch contingent spent the gap before the Feast in a quiet but rather decrepit public house where any movement either caused the lights to go out or set the dog snarling.

At the Annual general meeting in October the club decided to branch out in a new direction and add a Mummers' Play to its repertoire. Two members, Peter Rollason and Malcolm Seymour, were on hand with texts, and it was decided to try out both. Neither was ready, of course, by the following weekend, when once again a Morris Ring backed musicians' training day was combined with the Autumn Feast. This was unfortunately the weekend of disastrous storms and gales across southern England, and many of the men attending had to make sudden arrangements to leave early and clear fallen trees and demolished sheds.

A cold wind seemed to keep blowing through the winter practices. Work and other regrettable changes in life kept some of the men away from practice and the smaller numbers had an effect on morale and enthusiasm. The Squire was trying hard to give a couple of the newer men intensive training, but inevitably this made things less interesting for the more experienced dancers.

In order to lift a slight feeling of gloom a big effort was made to attract as many people as possible to Ladies' Night in February 1988. Appropriately, this was held at the *White Swan* at Whitchurch. It was a good evening, with good food and lively dancing to music provided by Alan Robertson. Unfortunately, the restaurant had forgotten to provide the vegetarian meals, and, annoyingly, several people had to go out and move their cars just after they had started eating, and, depressingly, one man found that vandals had been busy with his car when he went to leave, but the event was still rated a success.

Despite some anxieties about the standard of dancing during the winter practice the side rose to the occasion when they took part in the Folk Dance Evening at the Aylesbury Festival of the Arts in March. There were the usual problems in finding enough men to turn out on a Saturday evening, and the usual complaints about dancing in the 'hot, airless' Civic Centre. The men danced a processional on and off and three dances in between, so it was quite a strenuous contribution. Afterwards, however, they were enormously cheered up by the volume of very genuine applause and congratulation.

At the end of March the Whitchurch men were saddened to hear of the death of Leslie Nichols, of the Greensleeves Morris Men, who had come to their aid in 1975 and taken them through their winter practices. He had remained a good friend of the club and been seen at most of the Weekends of Dance and Autumn Feasts since then. The club was represented at his funeral at Chipperfield on March 25th. There was an even greater sadness to come. Joe Ward, who had been playing enthusiastically for the side at the Aylesbury Festival of the Arts evening, died suddenly on that same March 25th. The men learned of his death the next day, when they were due to go to the Icknield Way Morris Men's' Ale at Lain's Barn, near Wantage. They were shocked by the news, and the shock was reflected in their dancing that night.

When May came there was a very gentle start to the season's dancing, with just two appearances at the Whitchurch May Fair and no afternoon fetes or galas to attend. The first Tuesday evening out, at Wingrave, was rather a disaster. No-one liked the pub, one they were visiting for the first time, and none of the villagers turned out to watch. At the end of the evening the Bagman resigned, not, however, as a

result of the evening, but because of increased demands of his job. The club was in need of a lift for its morale. Luckily, Aylesbury Vale District Council was able to find £210,000 to do this. In strictly factual terms the money was spent on turning the Market Square in Aylesbury into a pedestrian precinct and moving the statue of John Hampden to a commanding position at the corner of it. The Whitchurch Men were invited by the Council to take part in the celebrations on May 14th. The weather was perfect and the Market Square was packed with a responsive crowd. It was a cheering event of the side, whose only regret was that the press photographers concentrated on the detachment from the Sealed Knot Society who paraded in Civil War uniforms. Their pikes were much longer than the Morris men's sticks, and size clearly does count with the uninitiated.

The end of May and the beginning of June were busy travelling times with the club ending small groups to the Leeds Morris Men's Dales Weekend, the Thaxted Ring Meeting and the Forest of Dean Family Weekend. At Thaxted the Whitchurch men heard that Morris Sunderland's wife, Barbara, had been fined for attempting to break into the airfield at Molesworth in Bedfordshire which had been designated to receive American cruise missiles and promptly contributed to pay her fine. Barbara received so many similar contributions from Morris men and others that she had not only paid the fine but passed two or three hundred pounds on to Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Audiences on Tuesday evening outings through June were thin. This was nothing new, but a pub landlord who insisted that the men keep off his grass when dancing was unexpected. Perhaps one of the dances that evening should have been 'Old Woman tossed up in a *wet* blanket' ! The men may have seemed preoccupied during this period, however, because the club was preparing to host another Ring Meeting, their first since 1975. There were about a hundred men expected. Helmond Morris Men came from Holland with their distinctive red handkerchiefs. Almost in the same category of exotic foreign visitors were the Durham Rams and the Royal Lancashire Morris Men, who were welcomed into the Morris Ring at the meeting. The Micklebarrow Morris Men from Newark were at a Whitchurch event for the first time, and there were familiar faces from the Forest of

Dean, Leeds, White Hart, Offley Thaxted and Icknield Way. Rod Holt took on the duties of Bagman for the meeting and Sally Chandler once again faced up to the challenge of feeding so many people for three days. Geoff Jerram of the Winchester Morris Men was the Squire of the Ring, which, with the historic links between the two clubs, was very appropriate, especially as Lionel Bacon was able to attend the Feast on the Saturday.

The Friday night was relaxed and convivial even if the weather was poor. The welcome given to everyone, both at the hall in Wilstone and at the *Half Moon*, was an indication of how well organised the meeting was to be. Saturday, surprisingly, stayed fine in the morning, and drew a sizeable crowd for the massed show in the newly pedestrianised Market Square in Aylesbury. After this the coaches took the men off for three well-spaced tours which covered most of the county of Buckinghamshire (apart from the area to the south of High Wycombe). The Ring Officers were driven round to meet each of the tours by Cyril Blunden, despite the fact that he had reported in with an eye problem ! While in earlier days, before the dangers of drinking and driving were so noted, there had often been 'legless' drivers in Whitchurch cars, there had not apparently been an eyeless driver before. Cyril managed all the same to get the car-load of officers to their last rendezvous. Here, at Cuddington, a call from Mike Chandler (appointed head musician for the weekend and proudly wearing the Ring's Tom Prince badge) for the Ring Officers to dance together triggered Whitchurch's uneasy relationship with the local weather. There was a massive downpour, but the 'Officers' side' kept going with a fortitude which matched that of their driver.

The Feast was a friendly affair with so many men tucked into the village hall at Wilstone, and the catering efforts of Sally Chandler and her team put a great choice of dishes before the diners.

There was a fine parade to church on the Sunday morning, but predictably the rain began straight afterwards and made it impossible to dance outside the *Half Moon*.

Most of those involved in the Ring Meeting must have been longing for a complete holiday from Morris Dancing the following weekend, but there was, as always, the invitation to perform for the Aylesbury

Carnival. Sensibly, the Aldbury Morris Men and the Brackley Morris Men had been invited along to join in, and this meant that a reasonable number of dancers were available. In the morning they danced as a warm-up for the Carnival procession, and then moved on, as before, to Waddesdon for more dancing and a cream tea, which the Whitchurch men gallantly bought for the visitors.

The rest of July was wet, and reinforced a sense of anti-climax after the Ring Meeting. It needed a warm September to liven the club up, and that was what they got when they visited the *Red Lion* at Little Missenden at the very beginning of the month. They also found a salesman from a German brewery handing out beer steins, but only on condition that they also tried a sample of his company's lager. Anyone watching the faces as they drank it would possibly have understood their reluctance to go on the twin town trip to Germany the previous year. Luckily, the landlord of the *Red Lion* then appeared with a jug of free beer.

The Feast in October was a large gathering, and two coaches set out with tours on the Saturday despite dreadful weather which limited the men to dancing inside pubs. Back for the meal in the evening everyone saw Rod Holt installed as the new Squire. In the New Year, unfortunately, Rod was to follow the unwelcome tradition set up by Charlie Hogston and Joe Ward of new Squires being taken seriously ill soon after their appointment. When Ladies Night came round in February 1989 Rod was in hospital with a viral infection which resisted treatment.

There was anxiety, too, about the new venue for Ladies Night. It had been moved to the Social Club at the large Aylesbury printing firm of Hazell, Watson & Viney. The two members who went to take a look over a week before the event found it looking neglected and marooned in a sea of fresh concrete as building work went on around it. On the night, however, as promised everything went well.

In March the side once more appeared in the Folk Dance Evening at the Aylesbury Festival of the Arts despite their misgiving about the heat in the Civic Hall, and about having to sit through the long programme before their performance late in the evening. 'I am sorry I did not announce you but thought your member would do so as usual,'

wrote the organiser of the event later, adding 'do hope he has recovered from the 'flu.'

A small group attended the Offley Morris Men's Ale at the beginning of April. Charlie Hogston came home with a sore head after getting too close to the enthusiastic stick work of Stewart McKeggie, who was following in the footsteps of his father, already known as a fearsome wielder of the stick. Charlie was recovered for the following weekend and was one of another small group who went to the Icknield Way Morris men's Ale.

The May Bank Holiday that year fell on May 1st. itself. To mark this, the men started their May Day celebrations by meeting at 6.30 a.m. on Coombe Hill, a landmark in the Chilterns near Wendover. There is a monument at the edge of the escarpment commemorating the dead of the Egyptian campaign and from this point there is a clear view over to Aylesbury and the north. On the way up to the monument it is just possible to catch a glimpse of the Prime Minister's official residence at Chequers. The Prime Minister at that time was a Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, but we have no way of knowing if she was aware of the Whitchurch Morris Men and the other dancers looking down at her. She may not even have been there. The other dance groups who faced the challenge of the early morning were the Amersham Garland Dancers and the Chesham Country Dancers. It was raining at 6.15 a.m., but then it cleared and from 6.30 a.m. onwards it was just misty and cold. Several sightseers had climbed up to Coombe Hill as well, and they enjoyed an hour of dancing. Those who had been performing then decamped to the *Rose and Crown* in Tring for breakfast. Fifty-six men and women sat down to the cooked breakfast. They also danced in front of the *Rose and Crown* and were surprised to have a decent audience even at 8.30 a.m. on a Bank Holiday Monday. After breakfast the Whitchurch men on their own set off for their eponymous village where they were to head the carnival procession as usual. The procession disintegrated slightly because of the copious polluting fumes which poured out of the ancient vehicle which was carrying the May Queen and her attendants and which was spluttering along directly ahead of the Morris Men. The May Queen and her entourage were allegedly reduced to helpless laughter by the plight of the dancers, but in future years the Morris men would always insist in

preceding the May Queen. Thus are traditions made. The side performed their usual two shows at the Fete before moving down the road to Weedon for lunch. They deserved their plate of sandwiches there. They had a long day ahead of them. The next stop was at Bierton School Fete. The organisers had cannily laid in a supply of bottled beer for the men, more necessary as it was now turning out to be a very hot day. Some dancers were beginning to make their excuses, but eight men made the journey across country to the Quanton Fete, where there was a large crowd to watch them. By the time they made their last call at the *Queen's Head* at Long Marston they were down to seven and the long day's effort was definitely beginning to show. In future May Day would always begin early at Coombe Hill, but the number of afternoon engagements would eventually be cut. The Bagman received a letter a few days later.

Bierton C of E Combined School

Dear Morris Men

Thank you for helping us to raise money for our may fair. I hope you enjoyed yourselves. We enjoy your dancing. It was fascinating and that piece of cake was delicious. We raised £1246.19. This sum will be used for much needed equipment for our school.

Yours sincerely

Lee Sayers.

While the side had been dancing outside the *Rose and Crown* in Tring early in the morning a BBC producer had spotted them and thought of featuring them in the titles of a series called 'People' about various leisure pursuits. He contacted the Bagman later and a date was made for recording. This took place outside the *Half Moon* at Wilstone one Tuesday evening later in May. There was apparently some jockeying for places in the side which was to feature on television, the promise of exposure to the nation overcoming people's usual reluctance to turn out and dance. In the end a role was found for everyone who wanted to take part, and the chosen men set out to dance the Fieldtown dance, *The Rose*, and to dance it over and over and over again for an hour and a half until the director was satisfied. It was thirsty work, and satisfying the needs of the dancers, the film crew and all the

spectators must have made it a good night for the landlord of the *Half Moon*. 'The end results are looking good,' wrote one of the production staff a few days later, thanking the men, "and your enthusiasm and energy are very impressive." No-one would have guessed that a couple of days later, however, when the club's next Tuesday evening performance had to start with a four man set which only grew to six men after two or three dances.

It was turning out to be a hot summer. It must have been the heat which, in June, persuaded two policemen at Long Marston to contribute handsomely to the bag. It stayed hot and dry all through the Weekend of Dance and on into July. The heat was beginning to tell by mid-July. At the *Red Lion* at Studham, near Whipsnade Zoo, the side arrived to see two men being thrown out of the bar of the quiet pub after a fracas inside. The landlord that night was offering double whiskies for £1. No wonder that the log records that 'one or two sets were a bit sloppy'. The last outing of the summer, at the end of July, at the newly refurbished *Pink and Lily* at Loosely Row, between Princes Risborough and High Wycombe, had the men choking on the dust they raised in the car park. It was time for a rest. The summer had been good training for John Killman who was about to travel to Brunei for several months and who would send regular meteorological reports of high temperatures and high humidity.

The weather did not rest, however, and September found the sun still shining on the club as they met at the *Red Lion* in Little Missenden, with the Amersham Garland Dancers. Ten days later, however, dancing at the *Bell* at Hardwick had to be abandoned when a ferocious storm broke, and all the rain which had been accumulating over the summer seemed to fall in one night, the violence of it putting out all the lights in the pub at one point. It was raining on the following Sunday, too, when the side may a long overdue visit to the *Rothschild Arms* at Buckland, soon to enter the ranks of 'vanished public houses'.

The Autumn Feast came at the end of another Musician's Instructional Day, during which the Whitchurch men allowed themselves to be used as guinea pigs for the musicians.

The men who had been to Thaxted earlier in the year had noted how frail Morris Sunderland seemed, but it was still a shock to hear of his

death on October 29th. Morris was mourned by the whole movement, but the Whitchurch side, who had felt his encouragement and support since 1951, felt a special sense of loss, and many of the members gathered at Thaxted on December 16th., when Morris' ashes were laid to rest there. Afterwards, in the course of conversation, Mike Chandler was persuaded to stand for the post of Squire of the Morris Ring at the following year's election.

The club had a new place to practise this winter - the village hall at Weedon, north of Aylesbury. One of the advantages was the close proximity of the *Five Bells* public house, which allowed the men a much more convivial winding down after practice. One new member came along for the new season, Leonard Pepper, the priest at St. Mary's church in Aylesbury, encouraged by the parish treasurer, John Bush. St. Mary's would become the club's most fruitful recruiting ground over the next two or three years.

A clear, bright Boxing Day greeted the side who turned out at the *Woolpack* at Stoke Mandeville, justifying the decision, after much thought, to go there. The early months of practising in 1990 were broken up by Ladies Night in February, at Hazell's Social Club again. The Amersham Garland Dancers and the Chesham Country dance Club, who had braved the winds at Coombe Hill on May Day with the Whitchurch men, were invited to join in and this made a large party. Many of the guests were expert when it came to the Barn Dance after the meal, of course.

As a dress rehearsal for the coming summer of dancing the club returned to the *Rothschild Arms* at Buckland on St. George's Day. It was a dull, chilly evening and the dancing was rather ragged, but in the bar a man was playing his accordion and the evening turned into a nostalgic evening of old favourites, ending with 'Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag', no doubt inspired by the conveyance for the Whitchurch sticks !

May was late coming in. It was not until May 7th., the Bank Holiday Monday, that the men were able to appear at Coombe Hill once again to celebrate. The *Bucks Herald* gave them the front page, an astonishing photograph in which all six men appear to be suspended in mid-air. The reporter who covered the story was quite carried away

Mad dogs, Morris men and a bevy of bleary eyed revellers went out in the early morning May Day sun on Monday. The remarkably composed Whitchurch Morris Men were to be seen performing aloft Coombe Hill at 6.30 a.m. in front of a bewilderingly enthusiastic audience as the rest of the district slumbered.

The long shadows, the laughing turn of the whistle, the shallow beat of the drum and the windmill-like whirling of their handkerchiefs provided a somewhat mystical air to the just post-dawn proceedings.

The Amersham Garland Dancers and the Chesham Country Dancers were there again. Breakfast this year was in the *Fox* at Dunsmore. This was much more convenient for the tired dancers, being only a few minutes away from Coombe Hill. After an exceptional breakfast the Whitchurch men set out for Whitchurch itself for their usual appearance in the May Day procession and Fete. After that, it was on to Quainton and Long Marston once again.

The spring had brought the news that Mike Chandler had been elected as Squire of the Morris Ring. This created some interest locally and when the side visited the Unicorn at Cublington late in May a reporter from the Bucks Herald was there to write about the side and to talk to Mike. In the article as it appeared in the paper the Whitchurch men do come across as a bastion of male chauvinism and as firm upholders of the origins of Morris dancing in ancient religion, but they may have been laying it on heavily for the reporter. The club had found a boost for its morale in Mike's election. Appearing at Weston Turville in June things verged on the slick, one side performing while the next six men waited ready to go straight into the next dance. This was a night when there was World Cup football on television inside the pub, but the quality of the performance brought a good audience out to watch. Back at Dunsmore at the *Fox* a week later the call for 'One more man' had re-appeared, but the quality of the dancing was still good. The weather was fine and attracted a large audience to watch the dancing. One pair of diners was surprised when their main course turned out to be a Morris man! Ken Stroud, after tripping over a bag of sticks found himself crashing headlong across their table, but the couple obviously thought it was part of the entertainment and took it in good part.

This year the Weekend of Dance was held later, right in the middle of July. It was hot, which generally drew good audiences. The High

Street in Aylesbury had been newly paved as a pedestrian area and was ideal for the massed company to process along, once an obstructive traffic warden had been disposed of. (Perhaps the word Morris made him think of motor vehicles.) There was a good massed display around John Hampden's statue. From Aylesbury one tour set out to the north. After a quiet stop in Aston Abbotts they moved on to Leighton Buzzard and were dropped outside the Conservative Club. After the band had given a spirited performance of *The Red Flag*, the men danced in the busy main street, winning the attention of Saturday morning shoppers, but also the undying enmity of a bus driver who was held up for four minutes. Lunch was taken at Cheddington. Several tour members were beginning to suffer the effects of the heat and the several pints of beer they had drunk to combat the effects of the heat. When the men moved on to Marsworth, to dance at the village fete, the dancing was, not surprisingly, slightly ragged, but as the side were performing in the middle of a football pitch, with the audience strung out around the touchline, the raggedness may not have been noticed. A certain degree of alcoholic remorse seems to have set in by the time the coach reached the final stop, another fete at Aldbury, and the dancing here was quite neat. The Feast went well. Lionel Bacon was still able to attend, and to sing. Most of the men were feeling the effects of a long day in the sun, however, and dancing afterwards was rather like the scene in *The Sound of Music* where the family disappear one by one into the darkness. The darkness in this instance being the road to the *Half Moon*.

After the church service on Sunday, which was quite poorly attended, there was dancing outside the *Half Moon* as usual, and everyone left contented.

In the middle of August the side went to St. Mary's Church in Aylesbury and took part in the celebrations for the Feast of the Assumption. Fr. Pepper appeared in Whitchurch kit before the service and then re-appeared in gold vestments, luckily having removed his bells. The men performed an offertory dance inside the church. The evening ended with a fireworks display in the churchyard, very spectacular in the confined surroundings, especially for unsuspecting people living in the nearby houses.

The Whitchurch men did not then meet until Mike Chandler was

inaugurated as Squire of the Morris Ring in Bristol at the beginning of September. There was a big turn-out, with many men taking families. The Squire-elect, with the outgoing Squire, Mike Garland, led the procession to the Cathedral on Sunday morning. It was hardly his fault that he tried to lead them all in through the wrong door. After the service Mike Garland danced himself out with a jig, leaving the Squire's staff on the ground ready for Mike Chandler to pick up after he had danced himself into office. Jim Catterall played the music for Mike's jig. The Whitchurch men danced after this, and then champagne appeared.

Winter practices were held at Weedon again. Three new people came along, two of whom, Andrew Ingram and Mike Sharp, were recruits from St. Mary's Church in Aylesbury and were to be with the side for some years. It was very convenient for all the St. Mary's people, then, to hold Ladies Night in the church in February 1991. When it was first suggested as a venue some people had visions of sitting in rows in the pews to eat their dinner, but it was quickly explained that the nave of the church was now a clear open space intended to be used for all kinds of more secular events. It proved to be an excellent place for Ladies Night. It was slightly draughty, not so bad considering that it was February, and everyone warmed up when the country dancing began after the meal.

It was much harder to get warm on the May Bank Holiday Monday, May 6th., when the men assembled at Coombe Hill as usual at 6.30 a.m.. Even dancing failed to undo the effect of the cutting wind. The Amersham Garland Dancers and other country dancers were there as well and everyone showed remarkable endurance in the face of the gale. The warmth of the *Fox* at Dunsmore, the breakfast rendezvous again, was very welcome, as was the apparently endless supply of sausages, bacon and black pudding. The traditional appearance at Whitchurch was compressed this year. There was no break between the two performances, no chance for the studious and green-fingered to pore over the book stall or the plant stalls at the fete and no chance for the ale-knights to go questing for a pint or two. The reason for the hurry was that the side were due to appear with the Garland Dancers at the head of yet another village fete procession, this time back at Wilstone. They led a column of vintage vehicles from one end of the

village to the other, many of the men themselves close to qualifying for the category of 'vintage vehicle'. After that there was some relaxing dancing on the familiar ground outside the *Half Moon*, altogether a quieter May Day than those of the previous years.

There was a very different setting for Morris dancing the following Saturday when the Whitchurch men joined in the Day of Dance presented by the Westminster Morris Men. Gathering appropriately in the *Westminster Arms* close to Whitehall, the tour which included Whitchurch moved on to dance opposite the entrance to the House of Commons and then round in front of Westminster Abbey. For men from the wilds of Buckinghamshire this was heady stuff. Lunch was bought in a rather noisy pub off Victoria Street (it was noisy enough before the arrival of forty or so Morris Men) and the tour then walked across the Mall and danced next to the Institute of Contemporary Arts, risking being mistaken for a piece of avant-garde performance art, before moving down to St. Martin-in-the-Fields and ending up in a massed show in Trafalgar Square. The Feast at the end of the day could not unfortunately be held in Westminster.

The Squire of the Ring was accompanied to Thaxted in 1991 by a full side and one or two extras, the best Whitchurch presence at Thaxted for some years. It was a blisteringly hot day on the Saturday. The tour with the Whitchurch men in it went first to the market in Saffron Walden, travelled on to Rickling Green and Stansted, and then halted for a long lunch at Arkesden. All these Essex villages looked at their best in the sun. Eventually the tour ended at Audley End House before heading back to Thaxted. There was the usual two part show in the evening, straddling the Feast. The Whitchurch men performed a very creditable *Old Woman Tossed up in a Blanket* as their show dance. On the Sunday morning, again blessed with hot sunshine, Father Pepper exchanged his Whitchurch kit for his ecclesiastical finery to join in the celebration of the Mass in Thaxted church. He was pleased to see that copies of his own book about Conrad Noel, the celebrated Vicar of Thaxted were still on sale in the church. After the service there was dancing outside the church, before people drifted away to lunch or music-making in the *Swan*, finally to set off home through drifts of poppies which coloured all the Essex roadside verges that year.

Disappointingly, however, the weather was dismal again when the club began its Tuesday evening dancing programme in mid-June at Dunsmore. The rain eased off just in time, but left behind it a cold blustery evening. Fortunately, the *Fox* boasted a covered patio which was big enough for the men to perform on, while the audience stared out from behind the slightly misted windows of the warm bar. The next day the side was in action again, at Little Horwood in north Buckinghamshire where British Telecom had a staff training establishment. The company was entertaining some European telecommunications people and had asked the Morris Men to appear as a foil to the new technology which was being presented to the visitors. In other words, it was to show that BT was linked both to tradition and to progress. The new future was apparently symbolised by a hot air balloon which, despite a great deal of fuss and roaring flame from its burner, rose only eight feet into the air with its passengers. Clearly a symbol of cautious progress ! The Whitchurch men were far from cautious, having benefited from the evening's generous hospitality even before starting to dance. It was a good lively display, so lively that a stick was shattered in *Balance the Straw*. The multi-national crowd applauded and the dancers moved on to do justice to a plate of sandwiches, hoping that it was not going to be reflected in their telephone bills for the next quarter.

The next event of the year was the Weekend of Dance. The Whitchurch men were joined by sides from Leeds, Uttoxeter, King John's and Icknield Way. Two bus tours were sent out to the north and the south on a fine sunny Saturday after a mass performance in Aylesbury Market Square. The northern tour arrived at their first stop to find the pub firmly locked. Fortunately there was no shyness and a concerted banging on the doors produced results. By mid-afternoon, when they appeared at the Cheddington village fete, this northern tour was beginning to flag, and the Whitchurch men had to be reminded sharply that they were performing for hard cash. It was a relief in the heat to be able to relax at the end of the tour in the *Greyhound* at Aldbury, a pub which was really on the home ground of the Aldbury Morris Men but has always been a favourite of the Whitchurch side. The Feast in the evening was well organised as usual, but the heat dissuaded men from dancing afterwards and they congregated in the

Half Moon instead.

On the Sunday morning only a minority attended the church service, a trend which was developing, but all gathered again for dancing outside the *Half Moon*, this part of the programme attracting a better crowd every year.

One Saturday later in July a side went to The Lee, near Wendover, to dance at the Flower and Art Show. On the programme the Whitchurch men saw that they were to be followed at 4.45 p.m. by the 'Presentation of cups by Mrs. Jessica Harrison.' They waited for a few minutes for vessels of refreshing liquid to be brought out to them but the cups turned out to be for the 'Best Horticultural Exhibit', the 'Best Sweet Peas', etc.

A small contingent accompanied Mike Chandler to the Chichester meeting of the Morris Ring at the end of July. It was good weather again and the Whitchurch contingent enjoyed a tour out into the lush Sussex countryside. Leonard Pepper was mislaid in a book shop, but as he was due to preach the sermon at the service the next day it was assumed that he was searching for inspiration and nothing unkind was said.. The Feast was cooked by the West Sussex school meals service. This raised some anticipatory grumbles in the stomachs of some who remembered watery mashed potato and tapioca pudding, but it proved to be a fine meal with over two hundred men being fed in the hall of Chichester High School for Boys.

August was usually a quiet month, but on August 15th. the club turned out for Father Pepper's farewell party at St. Mary's Church in Aylesbury.

At the Annual General Meeting in October Andrew Ingram was elected as Bagman, a meteoric rise for someone who had only joined the club the year before. In fact Andrew was nobly stepping forward when older members of the club exhibited symptoms of 'office fatigue'. He would be Bagman for the next six years.

Winter practice saw one newcomer, John Bush's son Kieran. Kieran learned quickly and danced with the side for the first time on Boxing Day. It's wonderful to be young ! There was, in fact, an excellent turn out at the *Red Lion* at Little Missenden on a bright Boxing Day

morning.

The customary appearance of the side at the Whitchurch May Feast earned them a good picture in the Bucks Herald this year. This appearance came after the usual 6.30 a.m. rendezvous with the Amersham Garland Dancers at Coombe Hill. It was clear and fresh this year with no trace of fog or mist.

Again the club sent a full side to the Thaxted Ring Meeting at the end of May, and one that managed to keep going until at the very end of their Saturday tour it was decimated by injuries. The Whitchurch men were sent on a different tour this year through a new set of picturesque Essex villages. The weather was good. This was very confusing to the men from Aylesbury who had been kept awake the previous night by a violent storm which left up to three feet of flood water in some parts of the area. More storms visited the Aylesbury area on Saturday, but Essex was tranquil and dry. The Whitchurch men were on tour with the Dutch club Helmond, who proved to have a great repertoire of Dutch drinking songs. These songs were produced once more at the Feast in the evening, which became a fairly riotous occasion as a result.

On Sunday the various sides went in procession to Thaxted church as usual and listened to a sermon from Father Pepper.

An unusual booking for the club came in June when they performed at a Chiltern Forest Open Day in Wendover Woods. This was an exceptionally well-attended event and the side had a good audience. Stick dances seemed especially appropriate in this context. It was during one of these that the Bagman received a smart blow on the head from the Foreman. As the Bagman had caused confusion earlier by mixing up two public houses called the *Rising Sun* it was perhaps fitting for him to end the day seeing stars !

In terms of numbers the Weekend of Dance was less successful this year, and was perhaps a sign that generally people were having to think twice before attending weekend events. With several last minute withdrawals by sides and individuals the club lost over £250 on the weekend. Apart from that, however, it was another enjoyable event with two tours visiting some of the well-tryed venues once more. The Feast was a relaxing occasion and the final hour of dancing in front of

the *Half Moon* on Sunday attracted the usual enthusiastic crowd.

In mid-July the Bedford Morris Men hosted a Ring Meeting. A small group of Whitchurch men took part, joining a number of other clubs who had taken part in the previous Bedford Ring Meetings in 1951 and 1961. There was a larger representation at the next Ring Meeting in the Forest of Dean in late August, however, where Mike Chandler handed over to the next Squire of the Ring, Roy Yarnell. There was a well attended service at the church in Mitcheldean, with Fr. Pepper as the officiant and a team of servers from the Whitchurch men.

In October a Squire handed his office on once more, this time the office of Squire of the Whitchurch men, when Charles Whitlock took over from David McKeggie at the AGM in October. The following week a large gathering of musicians took place at Wilstone for the instructional weekend, and the club provided an eager team of guinea pigs to test the newly learned techniques. At the end of Saturday everyone sat down to the usual Feast.

At Christmas a small chapter of the club's history closed when practices at Weedon and occasionally at Cholesbury came to an end and the village hall at Wilstone became now the focus of all the club's events.

Ladies Night in 1993 was celebrated again in St. Mary's Church in Aylesbury, which provided a perfect setting for the Barn Dance afterwards.

A sad event was to follow. Jim Gent, who had been a stalwart of the side for many years, died suddenly in February. An experienced dancer Jim was a constant encouragement to the newer members, and he had accompanied Mike Chandler to a whole series of events during Mike's two years as Squire of the Ring, allowing Mike to imbibe deeply as required and always being there to drive him home. He had in fact driven Mike home from an event shortly before being taken ill.

As a kind of curtain raiser to the season the club went to High Wycombe on the Saturday after St. George's Day to dance at Fr. Pepper's church again. In contrast to the previous year it was a hot day, good for dancing before the service and afterwards when a visit was made to the *George and Dragon* in Marlow. This was off the

club's usual round, but there were crowds out for a day in the sun and many coins rattled into the collection box.

May Day came again, and this year it was bright and clear on top of Coombe Hill, perfect for dancing. The Garland Dancers joined the Whitchurch men and joined them for another astonishing breakfast at the Fox at Dunsmore. Once again the side led the May Queen's procession down the main street in Whitchurch and danced twice before a good crowd afterwards. The last appearance of the day was at the familiar base of the *Half Moon* in Wilstone.

There was a pause after Bank Holiday so that the men could prepare themselves and pack ready for their trip to the Ring Meeting at Utrecht in Holland. On Friday, May 14th. a coach started picking men up at 5.00 a.m. (the High Wycombe contingent), passing through Aylesbury and on to meet another party who had assembled at Mike Chandler's country seat in Bedfordshire. Another stop was made to collect Thaxted and St. Alban's men and then on to Dover and the ferry. Across the channel there was a stop at a hypermarket, which then led into a fairly convivial ride for the last hundred miles through Belgium and into Holland. The Utrecht men had taken over a large youth hostel in a quite idyllic setting as the base for the meeting. Luckily it had a bar, to which most of the coach party returned after a quick supper and claiming of bunks. The party in the bar went on into the late early hours, but, still full of dancing, the English sides were all up and on parade early the next morning. The Dutch side had arranged five very interesting tours. Whitchurch were booked on a tour through a fruit growing area ('too late for the blossom, too early for the fruit' apologised the hosts) which stopped for dancing in four exceptionally pretty towns. Kinder to bicycles than coaches, the towns all called for a short hike before the men could dance, and unfortunately offered little in the way of refreshment, and little time to stop when there was refreshment. The audiences were intrigued by the dancing, but looked unsure about how they should respond. Back at the youth hostel it was time for the Morris men to stand back and watch while a Dutch folk dance team entertained them. Comely Dutch maidens then invited some of the men to join in, with varied results. A Feast followed and then the whole company was bussed to the town of Veenendaal for a massed show there. This looked very impressive in the big open

square. Afterwards, everyone was shipped back to the youth hostel in relays, most of the Whitchurch men chancing their luck on getting back on the last coach and using the wait to stock up on food and drink. (The Feast, though well-prepared, had been short on carbohydrate.) Then the bar was open again. Spirits were not quite as high as the night before. The need for sleep was beginning to catch up. Hardy types were still up (and often dancing) at three or four again all the same. The next morning, Sunday, saw a fairly early start and a bus trip into Utrecht for a tour of the canals (by boat, of course). This led, with space for a stop at a café, into another massed show in the centre of Utrecht, starting with a grand procession under the arch of the cathedral campanile. There was time afterwards to visit some of the city's attractions, such as the Organ Museum, or to catch the sun at another café, before meeting at the coach for the trip home. The departure was delayed when two men appeared to be lost. They rolled up just as the chorus of 'Leave them behind' was reaching its peak. The trip home was much quieter than the journey out, the last men being delivered home in High Wycombe around midnight.

May was quiet after the trip, but enough men were recovered to send a good side to the Thaxted Ring Meeting. The side were put on a different tour this year and performed in a new crop of pretty Essex villages. Some of the side had to leave early on Saturday evening before the club could perform a show dance. The problem was solved by dancing the three-man *Lollipop Man*, from Adderbury, a device which had been useful in other situations where they were short-handed. Father Pepper did his usual change of kit to appear with the clergy in church on Sunday (where Mr. Chandler gave one of his impeccable readings again). The Whitchurch men were disappointed that Fr. Pepper had still not managed to have vestments made up in the complete Whitchurch colours.

It was turning out to be an exceptional summer for weather. Later on in June it was a great achievement to get strong sides out two nights running, on the Tuesday, the longest day of the year, to perform for a large summer evening crowd in the garden of the *Full Moon* at Hawridge Common, and on the Wednesday to join the Towersey Morris Men at Naphill on the edge of High Wycombe. The Tuesday dancing went on late into the long evening, with a break in the middle.

The audience were enthusiastic and showed no sign of growing tired of the dancing. Charles Whitlock only called it to a halt when it became just too dark to be safe dancing on the slightly uneven turf. At Naphill the Towersey men had called in reinforcements in the shape of a women's side. All went well, despite mutterings from more purist members, until all three sides joined in Bonny Green Garters. The note in the log that it was 'like going over the top on the Western front' is surely ungallant, but still a vivid testimony to the damage that can be caused by a swirling petticoat in a tight line of dancers.

This was not the end of this busy week. On Saturday the club was able to assemble a side to dance at the Open Day at the Chiltern Open Air Museum near Chalfont St. Giles. This involved a great deal of walking between dancing sites but was a great chance to take a free look at the interesting collection of buildings gathered there.

The following weekend was the Weekend of Dance. Mercifully perhaps, in view of the busy time which had preceded it, fewer people were able to attend than in some previous years, but there were still enough to send out two tours by bus after the usual massed show in Aylesbury. One of these was something of an experiment, breaking new ground out to the south east past Chesham and down towards Berkhamstead. This meant more time sitting on the coach on a blazing afternoon and the men on this trip were rather tired and irritable by the time they returned. Their audiences had not been very responsive in the heat either. So it seemed, at the time, but Charles received a letter shortly afterwards.

Dear Mr. Whitlock

Whether you were the one with the black hat, wore glasses or just had bells on your shoes I'm not quite sure, but I do know that everyone at the Charity Fun Day was full of praise for the entertainment provided by your group. ..You are still being talked about in and around the club, and will be talked about long after the summer months are gone.

It was decided that this indicated approval. It was a pity the tour had been something of an endurance test because the other tour had turned out to be very relaxed and good-humoured. All the visitors were despatched to Bulbourne while the hall was prepared for the feast. Their coach unfortunately became lost on the way, but in the end they were able to enjoy a quiet drink and recover from the heat of

the day. They returned to an excellent feast, with Lionel Bacon still among the guests. It was agreed that it was still too hot to dance afterwards and the gathering gradually dispersed for a conclusion to the evening at the *Half Moon*. The church parade the next morning was rather thin, many visitors having left early, but a sufficient number of men remained to give a spirited display outside the *Half Moon* at lunchtime.

The Saturday after, the Whitchurch men took turns with the Long Crendon Morris men to entertain the crowds at Aylesbury's 'Charter Day'. This superseded the old carnival which seemed to have lost its appeal. The Charter in question was apparently given in 1554 by Queen Mary as a reward for the part played by loyal Aylesbury people in putting down a minor revolt in Buckinghamshire.

In September Winchester Morris Men held a Ring Meeting and the Whitchurch men turned out in full strength, remembering the strong links between the two clubs which dated back to Lionel Bacon's work with them both in the 1950's. The Saturday was a superb day with blue skies everywhere. After a massed display the tour with the Whitchurch contingent moved on to Whitchurch - Whitchurch, Hampshire. To their dismay, not only was there no great welcome, but even the pub was closed. Faced with thirty very thirsty and noisy Morris men in the yard the staff did rouse themselves and set the beer in motion, thus saving the day, or the morning at least. The next stop was a pub called '*The Watership Down*', which was suspected of being a tiny bit bogus. Nevertheless the Whitchurch men all had bright eyes at the end of the stop and moved on for a good lunch at St. Mary Bourne. Richard Adams to 'Miss Read' ! Moving back to Winchester in the afternoon the side performed at the ancient hospital of St. Cross, watched by the Master and the inhabitants of the almshouses, and were then offered the provision traditionally made for passing travellers - a large glass of wine. The day began to draw to a close with another mass show in front of the Winchester Guildhall, where 'King Arthur's Round Table' is allegedly preserved. Though a splendid piece of woodwork this, too, probably dates from no earlier than the fifteenth century and has no greater claim to ancient origins than Morris dancing. When it was nearly dark the men retired to nearby Stockbridge for the Feast.

The trip to Winchester had been a great success. The next Saturday, however, some of the men turned out to perform for a Caravan Club rally near Aylesbury. It earned a fee for the club, but, as one dancer said, 'If we had known what it was going to be like each of us would gladly have reached in his pocket and produced a ten pound note instead.' There was a forty minute delay before the first session. 'The dog show is running late,' said the organiser. He assured the men that there was a beer tent where they could pass the time, and so, with wobbly glasses of lager in their hands they watched the performing dogs leap through hoops. When the Morris men came on, to dance on a deeply rutted field with shin-deep grass, most of the crowd evaporated.

The club's autumn Feast again coincided with an instructional meeting for Ring Musicians, presided over by Mike Chandler and Jim Catterall, and later in October almost all the members travelled over to Ampthill in Bedfordshire for a memorial evening for Jim Gent. This had been organised jointly with the Redbornstoke Morris Men, the other club with which Jim had been associated. This was a fine evening of music and dancing. There was country dancing for all to join in, and both Whitchurch and Redbornstoke danced on their own to give everyone a rest. The Whitchurch men also came home with a disproportionate number of prizes in the raffle.

Drinks night before Christmas came round as usual, as did the Boxing Day gathering at Little Missenden, and Ladies Night was held once again in St. Mary's Church in Aylesbury just before St. Valentine's Day in 1994.

St. George's Day was the occasion for another visit to High Wycombe, first to St. Mary & St. George's Church for another of Fr. Pepper's spectacles, and then on to the *George and Dragon* in West Wycombe, where the men gallantly danced in the rain while the audience sheltered under the arch of the old coaching inn.

This year was the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the Morris Ring, and in celebration of that the annual dancing at Coombe Hill was moved back from Monday to Sunday, which was in fact May 1st. As it happened it was a beautiful morning and the Whitchurch men met with the Garland Dancers under a cerulean sky. Two young men camping -

illegally - on the hill were rudely awakened by a procession of bells past their tent. After dancing, everyone drove the short distance to the *Fox* for what was, sadly, to be the last of the sumptuous breakfasts served there.

After breakfast, the Whitchurch men left the Garland Dancers and went on to St. Alban's to join the St. Alban's Morris Men and other sides in front of the Abbey there. After the Abbey there was a walking tour of St. Alban's, after which everyone was very glad to sit out in the hot sun and let the ale evaporate.

This was the beginning of a busy week. The next day the men turned out again to lead the procession at the Whitchurch May Fair and to perform for the visitors to the Fair. On the Saturday a side was put together for another May Fair, at St. Mary's Church in Aylesbury, and then the following Tuesday the regular summer programme began at the Plough at Cadsden. Here the men met a reporter from the Aylesbury Advertiser/Gazette whose speciality was joining in as a beginner with various activities. He wanted to try Morris dancing. The men were not keen, but the Bagman had already agreed. It did slightly turn the evening's performance into a farce, but the young man made a brave effort. He turned down the offer of a permanent place in the side if he came to winter training.

The summer appeared to be already over. Tuesday evenings were famously chilly. Late in May the men went to Wingrave, to the *Rose and Crown*, usually a cheerful and busy pub where there had often been a barbecue when the Whitchurch men danced. This time the *Rose and Crown* seemed to be making a strong bid for 'emptiest pub of the year'. The dancing began and a stray dog appeared, just the dog, not even one man and his dog. It had been hoped that the Aldbury Morris Men were coming to join in, and after each lonely dance someone suggested that it would be 'better when Aldbury came.' Aldbury never came, and it was never decided whose fault it was, but it was a dismal evening.

Ten men and assorted families went to the Yorkshire Dales for the Leeds Morris Men's Bank Holiday Weekend. The weather was good for the Dales, mixed sun and cloud.

June brought sun again and a good night at the *Full Moon* at Hawridge

Common. The men thought they had attracted a better class of onlooker when a dozen or more prosperous looking men in good suits arrived as they prepared to dance. Unfortunately the men all disappeared smartly into the *Full Moon's* dining room, gave not a moment's attention to the dancing and threw not the slightest of coins into the club's coffers. The next week, for most of the side it was the Long Day's Journey into Night, the long drive to the *Crown* at Upper Sundon. For Mike Chandler this is almost on the doorstep, but for him alone. It was a good place to dance, however, with people to look on and applaud and a generous landlady who provided plates of food afterwards. The weather turned nasty again for the joint evening with the St. Alban's Morris Men at Northall. Having come so far both sides wanted to dance once at least and managed it, the musicians sheltering under the rude canopy in the pub's back yard while the dancers got wet. This was the last evening out before the Whitchurch Weekend of Dance and seemed to hint at a wet weekend. In fact the sun came out by the weekend and all was well.

The sun came out and stayed out, and the humidity built up as well as July went on. One hot Tuesday evening the men travelled to High Wycombe to give a show at the end of a day of country dancing for local schools. There was a big audience for this, but unfortunately no chance to collect money from them. Free ice-creams all round, however. From here the side went on to the *Beech Tree* at Terriers, where a new landlord was so pleased at the crowd who gathered to see the men that he became very liberal with the free beer. This was just as well, as the dancers perspired freely in the extreme humidity, and that was just with going to the bar. There was one session of dancing, and then, as the audience were so supportive, after a short rest, a second session right up until closing time. The side was meant to turn out the following night to dance with the Towersey Morris Men at Weston Turville, but the exertions at the *Beech Tree* had taken their toll and only six men turned up, having to rely on the Towersey musicians, often with curious results. The night the weather broke was, inevitably, the night the landlord at the *Bell* at Chartridge put on a barbecue to coincide with the club's visit. A few brave souls wrapped up well to watch the dancing in a blustery, gritty wind, and the food was collected from the barbecue and taken into the warmth of the bar

to eat. The following Tuesday it was raining again. The meeting place was the *Three Crowns* at Askett. It was a welcoming place, but the only dancing spot was on the rolling gravel at the edge of the car park, where cars swept past at quite high speed. It encouraged the men to keep a tight set. Anyone waltzing out into the road could easily have disappeared on the bonnet of a passing Volvo. Some of Fr. Pepper's congregation arrived with some visiting Albanians, who were given a glimpse into one of the recesses of English cultural life. The sun came back at the end of August. It was already dark at the end of the evening when the dancing finished, but pleasant to sit out in the fading warmth.

In the middle of the summer's outings, at the end of July, the sad, but not unexpected, news came that Lionel Bacon had died. Lionel had been looking increasingly frail when he had been able to attend Whitchurch events, and everyone appreciated the efforts he had made.

At the beginning of September the Whitchurch men appeared at the Wycombe Show. There was a good turn-out and some good dancing. The visitors to the show were apparently more interested in bulls and performing dogs and only a thin knot of people came over to watch the Morris dancing. Afterwards, everyone travelled to the other end of High Wycombe to celebrate Fr. Pepper's fiftieth birthday and danced on his steep drive - foot-up was downhill and foot-down almost crampon work uphill.

There was to be one more day out before the AGM and the resumption of winter practice. Seven men went to the St. Alban's Day of Dance at the end of September. There were good audiences for dancing in the city centre shopping precincts and then a tour out into the country. This ended with a performance in a home for retired people, which was dubious, many of the men, at 4.15 p.m. after a day's tour, having more problems with memory and co-ordination than any of the residents.

At the AGM Malcolm Seymour was elected as Squire and promised to put his energy into the quality of the side's presentation. The Foreman, Mike Chandler, also put in a plea for greater commitment, both to regular practice and during performances.

A memorial service was held for Lionel Bacon at St. Cross church in Winchester. A good number of Whitchurch men were able to attend, and Fr. Pepper officiated at the service and preached. The church was packed with representatives of many clubs, and the only disappointment was the torrential rain which made it impossible to dance outside afterwards.

The village of Wingrave had become a regular stop for the Whitchurch men, either at the *Rose and Crown* or the Macintyre School in the village, where the Treasurer, John Bush, was a teacher and the club regularly appeared at fêtes. In the autumn of 1994 a group of people in the village were planning a performance of the Mystery Plays in the parish church and called for advice about Morris dancing. Charles Whitlock and one or two others went and gave the group the help they needed.

The winter practice season went well following the Foreman's call for greater commitment. There was a break for Christmas and another fine, if cold, Boxing Day, when several men danced at Little Missenden.

The Leicester Morris Men's Feast had now become a regular date, offering perhaps the best cooking on the round of Ales and Feasts (apart from that provided by Sally Chandler at Whitchurch's events, of course). A number of men attended, and saw Fr. Kenneth Loveless carried out into the middle of the circle of men to sing 'The Seeds of Love'. Fr. Loveless was to die only two months later, and it was good that he was given such a warm reception that night.

The next Saturday, as close as it could be to St. Valentine's Day again, fifty-six people sat down for Ladies Night in St. Mary's Church in Aylesbury. It was a foul night outside, the cold wind penetrating the church despite the central heating, but everyone warmed up when the barn dance followed the meal.

Fr. Loveless' died at the end of March and his funeral was on April 5th. The funeral mass was a gloriously overdone and extravagant affair at Holy Trinity Church in Hoxton, in London, after which most of the congregation followed the hearse through the streets to the cemetery. The small group of Whitchurch men who attended elected not to join this procession, joined a group of Thaxted Morris Men, and drank Fr.

Loveless to his grave in the local pub instead.

The may Bank Holiday should have been Monday, May 1st., which would have been something to celebrate. This year, however, the holiday was moved a week later, to May 8th. to mark the fiftieth anniversary of VE-Day. (One town council in the south of England issued posters referring to it as VD-Day !) The Whitchurch men assembled dutifully on Coombe Hill on the 8th., with the Garland Dancers as usual. It was another fine morning with good views down to Aylesbury and the other smaller towns in the vale. The *Fox* at Dunsmore was now closed and everyone went for breakfast to the *Bernard Arms* at Great Kimble. The *Bernard Arms* had won national fame when a large unhealthy looking man with white hair had turned up demanding entry out of hours and claiming to be the President of Russia. The arrival of the combined dancers was perhaps even more dramatic than that of Boris Yeltsin, but the staff coped well and served breakfast to everyone. The Whitchurch men moved on to Whitchurch as usual, led the May Queen's procession, with the horse of her pony and trap breathing down the last man's neck, and did two shows which, despite all the warnings from the Foreman, were a little undisciplined. Perhaps it was the spirit of VE-Day. Lunch meant queuing patiently in the *Crown and Thistle*, where there was a rather unfriendly atmosphere (and these were people who had not even seen the dancing). It was more relaxed out in the garden, where the men danced again while waiting for their food to arrive. To mark the day the pub had a distinctive range of guest beers on sale - Spitfire, Bombardier and London Pride, and no Becks or Löwenbrau. After lunch everyone drove to Wingrave to appear at the fête there and experienced a strange sensation of being in an old newsreel. Most of the population were in 1940'd dress and the main street was jammed with a procession of vintage cars and military vehicles. An air-raid warden found the men and assured them that there was no hurry. Before the Morris dancers went on there was to be a display by a group of Czech folk-dancers. It appeared that Wingrave, unlikely as it seemed, had been the wartime seat of the Czech government in exile. It also transpired that the Czech folk dancers were no more authentic than the Whitchurch Morris Men, most of them having been no nearer Czechoslovakia than Piccadilly Circus. The Whitchurch men did

eventually go on and then retired to a re-created NAAFI for tea and cake.

The Bank Holiday had been hot. When the first Tuesday evening out came it was raining hard. A good selection of men went up into the Chilterns, to Whiteleaf, and had to squash into the tiny, low bar, where against all the odds they still performed one or two dances (putting the fear of God into some people who had come out for a quiet meal). Next time out it was warm, but the meeting place, the *Duke of Wellington* of Pitstone, where the St. Alban's Morris Men joined Whitchurch, was only fifty yards from the main London to Birmingham railway line where trains passed every two or three minutes at that time of the evening and drowned the music.

June brought rain again, whenever the men went out on Tuesday nights, and also when they went to dance at a National Trust Centenary Garden Party at Penn House, near High Wycombe. It was usually possible to do something despite the conditions. It was slightly better at the end of the month when some men went to Benson in Oxfordshire to dance at the wedding of Joe Ward's granddaughter. There was a shortage of musicians that weekend, but young Kieran Bush rose to the occasion and accompanied the dancing on a recorder. It was very effective in the quiet country churchyard, and Joe Ward himself would no doubt have approved of it.

When the Weekend of Dance came, at the beginning of July, there was some extremely hot weather. In the week before the tarmac had been melting on the roads. This could have made dancing difficult, but it had cooled slightly by the weekend. The people gathered on a fine Friday evening. Saturday morning saw the usual mass dancing in Aylesbury and then the separate departures of the two tours. One tour started with a call at the *Gate* at the Lee. The Morris men had this to themselves early on a Saturday and were able to let their hair down early before moving off towards Chesham. By the time this tour reached Cadsden in the afternoon of another hot day their dancing had become quite unsteady. Most of the men were sufficiently recovered after a cup of tea back at Wilstone, however, to press on to the *King's Arms* in Tring while the Feast was being laid out in the hall. The Feast was good, but after such a hot day there was little energy

for singing and dancing, and the formal events came to an early close to let the men drift off for a cool beer at the *Half Moon*. The next day, fewer men than usual were present at church, but another good crowd assembled in the village street for the dancing, interrupted by one or two motorists who were too busy to stop for two or three minutes. Everyone set off home, still in the sun, and then in the middle of the afternoon the rain came.

It was a year of unusual humidity. In mid-July a minimal side of six men and a musician turned up and laboured through a programme of dances at the *Five Bells* at Weston Turville, and were so exhausted that everyone went home almost as soon as the last dance was over. The following Sunday a memorial service was held at Thaxted for Fr. Kenneth Loveless. Only one or two Whitchurch men were able to join the large congregation of Morris men there and to dance afterwards outside the church. It was a strangely subdued event, not so much because of the occasion but because there was no beer available. The change in the law allowing pubs to open on Sunday afternoons was only months away, but the rules were kept strictly in Thaxted. The humidity went on into August. August was a month when fewer men than usual were available and those who did turn out on Tuesday nights had to work very hard. There were discussions about the wisdom of dancing in August, but there were often good audiences.

The Autumn Feast in 1995 was something of a departure. It was later in the month and was no longer combined with a musicians' instructional weekend. Instead, it was combined with a visit to Tring Brewery, one of the 'micro-breweries' which were becoming a feature of the beer trade. The Tring Brewery had been supplying beer for the Feast for a year or two and it was decided that it would make an unusual attraction for this year. The 'tour' of the Brewery was fairly brief as it essentially consisted of one room. The substance of the afternoon came with an invitation to sample the various beers produced and compare them. Those who were able to stand at the end of this process went on to the nearby *Castle* and were eventually collected by mini-bus and taken back to the hall at Wilstone for a slightly somnolent Feast.

Winter practice had started at Wilstone as usual, with a serious effort to learn the Sherborne dances. This proved to be more difficult than

the Foreman imagined it would be. One or two members were having difficult personal lives and were not always able to attend and put in the hard work required. Sherborne quietly faded away for the time being. Drinks Night at the *Full Moon* at Hawridge Common was a wild night, heavy sleet on a driving wind, the roads awash with water, and people nervous or in a bad temper. There was no room to dance in the pub, the musicians from the Chesham Folk group were cramped in a tight space so that music stands and music went flying periodically, and the carol singing was very hard work. It was good to have a visit from Father Christmas a few days later, on Boxing Day, at Little Missenden, to cheer up the men.

Four Whitchurch men went to the Leicester Morris Men's Feast at the beginning of February, drawn by the promise of another excellent meal. Bert Cleaver, another former Squire of the Morris Ring, sang the folk song, *The Seeds of Love*, in a moving tribute to Fr. Loveless, who had made almost his last appearance among his fellow Morris men in Leicester the previous February. The temperature dropped around midnight and the Whitchurch party had a long foggy journey home. This was the prelude to a few days of snow across the Home Counties which interrupted the Whitchurch practices as well as the rest of civilised life.

The May Bank Holiday came round soon enough and brought with it another clear day on Coombe Hill. The dancing was energetic as it was still cold at 6.30 a.m., and then the Whitchurch men and the Garland Dancers drove the two or three miles to Cadsden to have breakfast at the *Plough*. The first cars arrived to find the doors not only closed, but fenced off by yards of police tape. There had been an incident in the night, the pub was in the hands of the forensic experts, and the Morris dancers were re-directed to the *Chequers* in not-too-distant Prestwood, where a replacement breakfast had been hastily prepared. After the breakfast and extensive speculation about what had taken place at the *Plough* the Whitchurch men moved on to their eponymous village to lead the procession once again. There were novelties. One enthusiastic camp-follower escorted the men with an outsize St. George's flag, suggesting that they were either going to perform a Mummers' Play or were on their way to a football match (this was the year of 'football coming home', the finals of the European

Championship in England, when the red cross on white suddenly appeared everywhere.). The other novelty was that at one or two points on the procession the men broke into the Winster processional dance - for a few yards. There were the usual two shows in the main street and then time for a brief drink in the *White Horse* before moving on to Chesham. The men danced at a folk afternoon and also invited the audience on to learn the Headington Quarry dance, *Bean Setting*. This went remarkably well and gave a great deal of pleasure.

The summer season of evening dancing began at the *Castle* in Tring, where there was, as always, a warm welcome from the landlord and the customers. It was a pleasant evening and a gentle start to the season. The next week the men danced under a cloud, a huge dark orange brown cloud drifting over from Aylesbury towards Great Missenden and the *Black Horse*, which threatened nothing less than a torrential downpour. Luckily it passed to one side, allowing only a few heavy drops to interrupt the dances. It did spoil any prospect of a balloon ascent from the pub, which is a base for local enthusiasts.

The club was able to send a whole side - and a musician - to Thaxted this year, and were supported by their well-tried borrowed Fool, Moss Ambrose, who was discovered in Thaxted. The Saturday tour followed a well-worn route. The first stop was a 'dry' one, in the Market Square at Saffron Walden. Ironically, this was the one stop of the day where everyone received a good drenching from the showers which were dying away from the area. The next stop was in the village of Wendens Ambo. Dancing took place in front of the church, a distressing distance from the pub, but mothers and children from the neighbouring cottages came out to see the men perform and supplied them with orange juice. There was a quick stop in Arkesden, and then in Stansted, at the *Dog and Duck*. There were quite a number of people there waiting for the men to arrive, but dancing was hazardous on a busy road. Moss Ambrose doubled up as a traffic policeman with his bladder. Lunch was taken at the *Coach and Horses* in Newport. It was **steak and kidney pie**, and this was in the midst of the BSE crisis. No-one refused it, but whether it was patriotism, bravado or stoicism no-one can tell. Also enjoying their food was a small wedding party. Afterwards, out in the car-park, the bride was greeted with a performance of *The Rose* and duly hoisted at the end of it. Finally

On eventually to Debden, the last stop, with many members of the tour showing signs of great tiredness and emotion. Not the Whitchurch men, though, or not all of them. At this stop, they decided to revive *Glorishears*, which they had not danced for two or three years at least. After returning to Thaxted for tea there was the traditional procession down the street and the mass show for the public, who were present in considerable numbers again. There was no opportunity for the Whitchurch men to do a show dance as one or two people had had to start home. Then to the feast, which was a meal that got better with every course, and concluded with an **almost interminable** drinking song in **colloquial Flemish** which was sung by the Turnhout Morris Men.

All too soon Sunday came. The survivors of Saturday (now including only three Whitchurch men) assembled in front of the Guildhall, ready for the procession to church. To their surprise they saw the diminutive figure of Ian Hislop, the editor of '*Private Eye*', watching from the opposite pavement, accompanied by a film crew. Mr. Hislop and the television crew accompanied the Morris dancers all the way to the church and filmed the procession and the service, including Mr. Chandler's spirited reading of the Old Testament lesson. Afterwards, there was dancing outside the church, slightly regimented by the needs of what we now discovered to be **two** television crews ! The Hislop team were filming for a documentary on Christian socialism, featuring the part played by Conrad Noel at Thaxted. (Mr. Pepper could be seen following the producer round, asking if she had seen his book on Conrad Noel ! However, it was Mr. Chandler who was invited to have his photograph taken with Ian Hislop.

June brought some good weather for Tuesday evening dancing and some generous hospitality from the pubs where the men danced. Audiences were modest. More and more often it appeared that people were going out to pubs to eat and were not prepared to break into their meals to watch the dancing. In the middle of the month the European Football Championships started and pubs were full of people watching television. There was a disastrous night in Aylesbury when no-one at either of two places visited could be torn away from the matches. England scored and everyone cheered. The Scots scored, the Dutch scored. 'We were the only ones who didn't score tonight,' complained

one Whitchurch voice. The evening was saved about 10.15 p.m., after the final whistle, when the landlord's small daughter at the *Bricklayer's Arms* said she had been waiting all evening to see the Morris men.

At the beginning of July a Whitchurch side depleted by injuries went over to Hertfordshire to join the St. Alban's Morris Men on one of their Monday tours. Charles Whitlock was seen indecisively wearing his Whitchurch kit under a St. Alban's blazer. The very next night all the fit men were out again, fighting blustery conditions at the *Oak* in Aston Clinton and the *Five Bells* in Weston Turville. The *Five Bells* had been altered over the winter to improve car access, which also made dancing much more difficult. Few motorists seemed ready to pause and let the dance finish before pushing in or out. It made everyone rather irritated and did nothing for the quality of the dancing.

The Weekend of Dance was an experiment in that for the first time for many years the catering was not in the hands of Sally Chandler. The pattern of the weekend was very similar, however, with no escape from the peeling of potatoes. Friday was marked by heavy showers but Saturday was free of rain until lunchtime, so that the massed display in Aylesbury was unspoilt. The men had to share the corner of the Market square with the local Labour Party, who looked less than gracious at the arrival of the dancers. Rain did come at lunchtime and dancing had to be carried on indoors at the afternoon stops. Everyone had dried out in time for the feast - as far as clothes and shoes were concerned, at least. Sunday was suddenly bright and warm after all the showers and a good crowd formed outside the *Half Moon* for the dancing.

Almost by accident, the following Tuesday most of the men were out at the *End of the World* just outside Wendover. This booking arose out of an earlier occasion when some of the side had called in here for lunch. Despite the apocalyptic name and an unpromising location on the side of a roundabout there was an enthusiastic crowd who came to watch and a generous landlord who provided food and drink. Some of the side inadvertently joined in too loudly with the Quiz Night later on. The weather was changing and by the next Saturday it was sun at full strength when Whitchurch visited Enfield to Join the Etcetera Morris Men for their Day of Dance. Very suitably, the transport provided was an open top bus. It was almost too hot to dance as the day went on

and the Whitchurch men with thinning hair became expert at finding shade. It was hot again the following Tuesday, at the *Angler's Delight* by the canal at Marsworth. The men were sluggish, the Squire had to whip them into line to dance. The audience were reluctant to move away from the cool interior of the bar. The same happened at the *Red Lion* further on into the village. Everyone was gripped by the dense heat of the evening. It continued the next week, when a depleted side was rescued by having Stuart McKeggie home from university. This was at the *Blue Ball* at Asheridge. It was too hot for people to come out and watch. There were only a few at the *Full Moon* at Hawridge Common, usually a well-supported show. It was very humid and then the rain began and the men gave up with a degree of relief. If the heat had kept audiences down these two weeks rain kept the people away the following week at Sundon, right over at the easternmost edge of the Whitchurch range, but an easy drive down the road for Mike Chandler. It was close enough for Mike to bring his dog. The dog joined noisily in the singing later. The singing happened because the Whitchurch men were joined by the Offley Morris Men.

It was unusual for the side to go out on a night other than a Tuesday, but they began August with a Thursday outing - to help launch a new business in Berkhamstead. Free drink and food were part of the deal, but having to sit through a barrel organ recital before performing was not.

In October Mike Chandler was elected as Squire. His two years in office would carry the club through its fiftieth anniversary celebrations. Practice began the week after, with some work put in on the Bledington dances and one or two new ones - the *Willow Tree* from Bucknell and *Idbury Hill*, for example.

The Autumn Feast was a repeat of the year before, with the afternoon spent at the Tring Brewery and the *Castle*. Drinks Night went ahead at the *Full Moon* at Hawridge Common again, although the *Full Moon* was becoming increasingly popular as a place for eating out and uncomfortably crowded. After Christmas the men met as usual on a cold bright Boxing Day at the *Red Lion* at Little Missenden.

Practice resumed in January 1997 with cheering numbers attending, and attempts were made at dances like the *Weobley Twizzle* which

never made it into public performance. In the middle of the month, however, there was the shocking news that Alan Abrahams, who had danced with the side for only two years before work took him away but had given so much, had died at the age of 39. He had woken one day with influenza symptoms which had rapidly affected his breathing and refused to respond to treatment. Five men were able to go to his funeral at a village near Cambridge and danced a four man set at the end of the service. That was the Monday after the Ripley Ale in Derbyshire, to which three men went, to be kept warm by the usual over-generous supply of whisky at the Feast on a bitterly cold night. The Bagman slept in his car. The other two men went out early to see if he was still alive inside the ice coated vehicle. The training went on with a strong Headington Quarry emphasis. The weather was kind, but attendance dropped through the spring, picking up just before the end of April.

The May Bank Holiday came, and dawned with deceptive stillness. On the top of Coombe Hill it proved to be blustery and cold. Several members of the side did not suffer too much, arriving for various reasons towards the end of the show. In fact a very respectable audience turned out and joined in willingly when the Garland Dancers proposed some general country dancing. Afterwards everyone met at the *Black Horse* at Askett for breakfast. This was a new venue for breakfast and the staff rose nobly to the challenge, serving fifty-odd hungry people with breakfast in a short time. It was resolved to make this the regular breakfast site.

A History of The Whitchurch Morris Men - Rev. Leonard Pepper

- [1] Circular letter from the Squire of the Ring to all Morris Clubs 'Conduct during the Feast at Ring Meetings.' April 1970
- [2] *The Morris Book*. Cecil J. Sharp & Herbert C. Macilwaine. 5 volumes 1911-1924.
A reprint of the original edition was produced by The Morris Ring in 1991.
- [3] A number of records of Morris tunes were issued in the 1940's. For example
- [4] This meeting was attended by the following Morris clubs:
- [5] See, for example, "*Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles*" *The Social History of Morris Dancing in the English South Midlands*. Keith Chandler. Hisarlik Press 1993. Pp.137ff.
- [6] Morley College Morris men, founded in
- [7] *The Wolverton Express*. 23rd. June 1950.
- [8] The '*Crown and Thistle*' sadly closed in 1996
- [9] *The Bucks. Advertiser*. 6th. July 1951
- [10] The new members were Graham Tinknell, Arthur Warland, Clare and Clare, and, later in May, Noel Taylor, who came all the way from Slough.
- [11] Other clubs were founded later.
- [12] *The Daily Telegraph*. November 1953
- [13] Whitchurch log. June 18th. 1954.
- [14] Whitchurch log. July 2nd. 1954. 'Signposts' is the popular name for the dance 'Shepherd's Hey' from Fieldtown, suggested by the dancers' outstretched arms.
- [15] *The Bucks. Herald*.
- [16] Whitchurch Log. February 12th. 1955.
- [17] The Offley Morris Men frequently dance in Ashwell now, but there were no Offley Morris Men in 1934. Could it have been the Letchworth Morris men ?
- [18] David Eales later danced with Bathampton Morris Men, and died in June 2003
- [19] Whitchurch log. May 4th. 1957.
- [20] Whitchurch log. July 6th. 1957
- [21]
- [22] Letter in the Whitchurch archives. July 4th. 1958.
- [23] Letter in the Whitchurch archives. October 23rd. 1963
- [24] Mike Chandler, the Bagman, who had had to miss the Feast.
- [25] Letter from Walter Newall. 18th. October 1964.
- [26] Letter from F. S. Leeke, Manager of the King's Head hotel. October 21st. 1964
- [27] *The Bucks. Herald*. May 4th. 1967
- [28] Quoted in 'Gleanings from Correspondence and Reported Doings of 1968' circulated by the Ring Bagman.
- [29] Private letter in Whitchurch archives. Oct. 23rd. 1969
- [30] At the Annual meeting of Ring Representatives on February 19th. 1977 there was in fact a proposal from the representative of Chingford Morris Men that these Sunday services should be discontinued at future Ring Meetings.

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- [31] Whitchurch log. Saturday, Sept. 10th. 1977. The log also contains a copy of the programme for the ball, which contains, on one page, a general note about Morris dancing and some information about the Whitchurch side, including practice times. No-one from the ball appears to have joined the side, though.
- [32] Whitchurch log. December 20th. 1977.
- [33] Whitchurch log. Account of the Leeds Weekend by Andrew Main. Dated October 14th. 1978.
- [34] Bucks Free Press. July 13th. 1978
- [35] Whitchurch log. July 8th. 1978.
- [36] Whitchurch log. August 29th. 1978
- [37] Letter to Walter Newall from the Revd. Norman Brown. September 27th. 1978. In the Whitchurch archives.
- [38] Letter from Sq. Ldr. A. J. Stables to Nigel Cox, dated '03 0440 Nov', in Whitchurch archives.
- [39] *Bucks Free Press*. November 17th. 1978
- [40] Whitchurch log. June 23rd. 1979.
- [41] Letter from Colin Corner, Bagman of the Abingdon Traditional Morris Dancers to Ken Stroud, the Whitchurch Bagman. February 25th. 1980. In the Whitchurch archives.
- [42] Whitchurch log. June 3rd. 1980.
- [43] *The Express Magazine*.
- [44] Whitchurch log. 4th. September 1984.
- [45] *Aylesbury Plus*. November 1st. 1984
- [46] *Bucks Herald*. June 21st. 1985
- [47] *Bucks Herald*. January 2nd. 1986
- [48] *Advertiser/Gazette*. January 24th. 1986. Cyril Blunden is referred to in this article as the Keeper of the Scrap !
- [49] *Watford*. June 20th. 1986
- [50] *Bucks Herald*. May 20th. 1988
- [51] *The Bucks Herald*. May 10th. 1990.
- [52] *The Bucks Herald*. Thursday, June 14th. 1990.
- [53] *The Bucks Herald*. May 7th. 1992
- [54] *Aylesbury Advertiser/Gazette*. May 20. 1994

