



# THE RUMWORTH MORRIS OF BOLTON

JAMESON WOODERS

'Up in Fours' from the Royton Morris Dance, Chippenham Folk Festival, May 2008  
Photograph: Andrew White

Founded in 1976 by members of the Manchester Morris Men, the group wanted to dance the local North-West style of morris in its traditional setting and as closely as possible to its traditional style. Rumworth's striking kit of blue breeches, white shirts with yellow and red sashes, and flowered hats is also based on that of earlier morris teams from the area, one of the strongest influences being the Godley Hill Morris Dancers from Hyde in Cheshire.

From the start there was a determination that public performances would be to a high standard. *Rumworth* practised for eighteen months before dancing in public for the first time at Rivington Lower Barn in 1978. *Rumworth* also appeared at Chippenham and Lacock Folk Festival that same year and has performed at Chippenham and other festivals at regular intervals ever since. We have also made forays into continental Europe, most recently a trip to Dunkirk as guests of the *In de Kring* sword dancers in 2014, two earlier visits to Antwerp as guests of the *Lange Wapper* sword dancers, as well as a trip to Lünen near Dortmund in Germany.

From its foundation, *Rumworth* developed a very distinctive style of dancing. The team dances at a strictly measured pace, allowing the dancers maximum freedom of expression within the disciplined format of each dance. This means

that we dance a lot more slowly (or maybe that should be 'less fast') than many North-West sides.

Another deliberate decision was to have a big set, with at least three yards between each pair of dancers. The Conductor always says this is so that *Rumworth* can dance where they belong - in the gutters!

Our repertoire currently comprises nine dances: three use garlands, one is a stick dance, and the other five use 'tiddlers', ropes, slings or 'mollies'. The tunes accompanying the dances are especially chosen to complement the figures. Many of our dances are based on ones originally collected in the North-West though they have all been adapted to the *Rumworth* style. Of these, we see our original Garland Dance as our 'signature dance' and have never taught it outside the membership of the club.

Although I am possibly better known for Cotswold Morris with *Berkshire Bedlam* and *Hammersmith*, or as a Molly dancer with *Seven Champions*, I have also danced with *The Rumworth Morris of Bolton* for the past 13 of its 40 years.

I had seen *Rumworth* when they made journeys south to Bampton, Wimborne, Chippenham and Sidmouth festivals during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and to the Kirtlington Lamb Ale where they processed from Blenheim Palace into Woodstock. I was impressed by their discipline and by the dignity with which they danced, like an unstoppable juggernaut of a team. I had previously danced some North-West with a local team based on the Berkshire-Hampshire-Surrey border, but the way they danced did not click with me in the same way as Cotswold or Molly and I eventually gave up to focus on my other teams. What I really

wanted was to dance North-West Morris in the *Rumworth* style. However, I lived in Berkshire and *Rumworth* was over 200 miles away in Bolton.

It was eventually at Chippenham Folk Festival in 2003 that my chance came to join *The Rumworth Morris*. The team was teaching a series of workshops and I went along with my brother. We were very flattered to be asked if we wanted to join. The team explained that they had other long-distance members from Suffolk and Dorset who came along two or three times a year for weekend practices. Why didn't we come along on the same



'Reel It' from *The Godley Hill Morris Dance*, Middlewich Folk & Boat Festival, June 2014 • Photograph: Christine Dover

# Morris Ring dance in/out

**FEE LOCK,  
 MORRIS FED  
 SECRETARY**

I was invited to attend the *The Morris Ring Squire's* dance-in/dance-out Ring Meeting over the weekend of 2-4 September 2016, in Framlingham, hosted by *East Suffolk Morris Men*. This is a formal event whereby the Squire-elect of *The Morris Ring* officially takes over from his predecessor following the election held in March; the previous six months being an opportunity for a smooth hand-over.

Nicki Pickering (*Open Morris Chair*) and I were guests of Adam Garland (outgoing Squire), Jon Melville, (Bagman), and Steven Archer (Treasurer). Adam had asked us to wear kit, it being a formal occasion, and at the second stand he asked us to join him in a dance along with Brian Prettyman, the Squire of *East Suffolk Morris Men*. We danced Bampton Side-Step (in the 'pram-pushing style'), followed by Fieldtown Valentine, with Eddie Worrall (Squire-elect) playing melodeon.

Although my 'Number One' topped about 6' 6" in his stockinged feet and can dance half a hey while I'm still thinking about

a foot-together, I'd nonetheless like to think I managed to acquit myself respectfully. You'll see me wearing my trademark scowl while

I'm trying to pretend I'm not forever a foreman and checking other people's dancing in Hazel Melville's picture. But it does illustrate the levitational qualities of the bracing East coast.

Seated at the top table, the evening feast was an enjoyable combination of formal *Morris Ring* speeches and current relevance. I was particularly heartened that Adam had decided to extend the toast to 'The Immortal Memory' to all of those involved in researching and maintaining the morris, and mentioned Mary Neal specifically. Those men who had found Nicki's and my dancing disquieting, or who felt our presence at the top table inappropriate, courteously took the trouble to keep their views to themselves.

Unfortunately, I had to rush off first thing on Sunday morning so was unable to stay for the dance-out in Framlingham, although both Eddie Worrall and Adam Garland's Facebook pages have plenty of photographs.

This weekend represented the culmination of several years of inter-organisation co-operation. A big and personal thank you is due to Adam Garland of the *East Suffolk Morris Men*, Chair of the Advisory Council, immediate past Squire to *The Morris Ring*, and all-round good egg, for a wonderful idea.



*The final Quadrille of the 'Original' Garland Dance, Henley-on-Thames, May 2016 • Photograph: Charlotte Dover*

basis? Almost instantly we both said 'yes'.

Although my brother has since retired from the team, I still travel to Bolton for practices and dance-outs. I would rather drive 200 miles to Bolton (on occasion there and back in one day) than dance with other North-West teams closer to home. For me, there is an authenticity about the way *Rumworth* dances: the choreography, musicality and ethos feel true to the original spirit of the dance.

One particular reason to keep going is the chance to dance 'Royton', quite simply the best morris dance ever! Collected by Maud Karpeles and published in 1932 as *The Lancashire Morris Dance*, this is a traditional dance from the eponymous town near Oldham. This is the only dance in *Rumworth's* repertoire where the figures can be performed in any order and its duration can thus be varied by adding or omitting particular figures. *Rumworth's* record is around twenty-five minutes!

The conductor calls from a wide choice of figures, some identifiable only from a particular blast on his whistle. As well as having a large number of figures, there are varying steps, capers and even different sling movements. The dancers, band and conductor have to work together, with the dancers having to respond as one to each call in an instant. Everyone has to know all of the figures, including when

the set is crossed-over, reversed or inverted. The resulting whole is definitely more than the sum of its constituent parts. There really is no other dance like it.

If you want to see or contact *Rumworth*, please visit our website or Facebook page, or send an email to the Team Secretary, Peter Bearon: [secretary@rumworthmorris.org.uk](mailto:secretary@rumworthmorris.org.uk)

On Saturday 17th September 2016, The *Rumworth Morris* celebrated its 40th anniversary by performing at various spots around Bolton town centre with their guests *Rivington Morris* and the *Mersey Morris Men*. Dance venues included the ornate Methodist Mission in Victoria Hall as part of its Heritage Open Day, and Victoria Square in front of Bolton's grand Town Hall. In the evening we hosted a reunion of current and ex-members, including a *Rumworth*-themed quiz and music session. It was a very enjoyable way to celebrate the team's 40th birthday.



*'Fall Back' from the Holme Chapel Morris Dance, Sidmouth Folk Festival, Aug 2004 • Photograph: Andrew White*



*"Levitation" • Photograph by Hazel Melville*