

Jack-in-the-Green (symbol of growing things), or Maid Marian (symbolizing fertility). May festivities often featured figures from Robin Hood tales, since May Day was observed as the day the favorite outlaw met his death from the chance flight of an arrow.

Many of the steps in the dance had ritual significance. Leaps showed the crops how high to grow, circles indicated the cycle of the year, stamping awakened the earth spirits, and the clacking of sticks was meant to scare off bad luck. In "Bean Setting," a Morris dance performed in the Oxfordshire village of Headington Quarry, dancers carry short sticks and frequently bend down and tap the ground as though tapping in a seed. In a Northamptonshire variation, dancers also use the sticks to measure the distance between seeds.

Belief in the dance's power have faded, but the English Morris is alive and well, both in its native land and in hundreds of country dance groups throughout the United States. Morris teams, known as "sides," can be seen

treading the ancient steps of dances like "Shepard's Hey," "The Furze Field," and "Nuts in May" in village greens, town squares, harborsides, orchards, and anyplace else where people gather out of doors. As of old, the dancing is accompanied by lively fiddle or concertina music, as well as the jingling of hundreds of tiny bells strapped to the dancers' shins. Costumes traditionally include white shirts crossed with bright ribbons, and hats decked with flowers or leaves.

While Morris dancing was originally more ritual than recreation, the social aspect is definitely an attraction for modern day enthusiasts. If being a spectator isn't for you, and you'd rather be dancing, the coming summer holds plenty of opportunities for instruction at camp. The Country Dance and Song Society runs Pinewoods Camp in Massachusetts and Buffalo Gap Camp in West Virginia. The John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina and Kentucky Summer Dance School in Frankfort are also

popular in states further south.

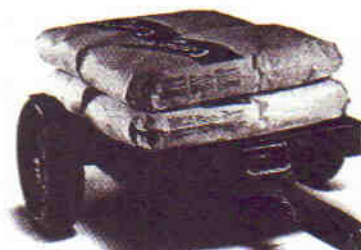
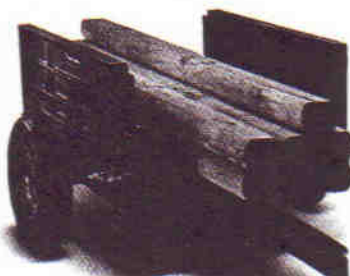
To find out about country dancing opportunities in your area, contact the Country Dance and Song Society, 17 New South Street, Northampton, Massachusetts 01060 (413-584-9913). Nearly 600 groups are listed in the society's national directory, with interests including not only Morris but Scottish and English Country dancing, sword dancing, clog and step dancing, contra dancing, and Appalachian square dancing. The society publishes a bimonthly newsletter with news of country dance and music festivals, workshops, concerts, books, dance camps and recordings.

*Laurie Morrissey*

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