



The Story of the Brackley Morris Men

A Traditional Northamptonshire morris side

2. The Brackley Silver Paten of 1623 – ‘Rudely Scratched’

The first record actually linking ‘morris dancing’ to ‘ales’ comes in 1632 in the parish of St Mary Magdalene, Oxford. This record states that ‘a sum of money collected “by the morris dancers at Whitsuntide” was handed to the church authorities who in turn provided the dancers with a dinner’. (4)

So with the integral relationship between the churches, their parish ales, and morris dancing, it isn’t surprising that the earliest indication of Morris in Brackley is to be found on an artefact held at the local parish church of St Peter. It’s a solid silver communion plate with the names of seven men inscribed on it.

The earliest written reference to this paten comes in the early 1820s when George Baker’s ‘History and Antiquities of the County of Northampton’ stated that: ‘...belonging to St Jame’s are two old chalices without



inscriptions and an old paten, on which is rudely engraved “Given to the parish of St James in Brackley by Matthew Cadle, William Maiior, Bartholomew Cadle, John Stokes, Richard White, William Bartolomew, and Martin Barfooote”. The above seven persons are said to have been the Lords and servants of the Whitsun Ale, or the morris dancers’ (7).

On 12th June 1884, the Banbury Guardian published an article by Revd. Hilderic Friend which drew attention to the gift made by ‘a party of Morris Dancers to the Chapel of St John in that parish of a Communion service of silver, on the plate of which their names were very rudely scratched’ (8).

On 9th June 1980. The Vicar of Brackley, Andrew Freer, clarified in a letter to Ewart Russell (Bagman of the Morris Ring 1959-71) that: ‘We have a paten formerly used at the old St James Church, now demolished, which bears the following inscription: “Given to the parish of St James in Brackley by Matthew Cadle, William Maiier, Bartholomew Cadle, John Stockes, Richard White, William Bartholomew, Martin Barfooote, 1623”. According to one of the old histories, they were the Lords of the Whitsun Ale – the morris dancers of the day – but this is not recorded on the paten itself’. (5)

Who were these seven men? ‘For three of the named men in 1623, no biographical details have been discovered. Richard White however was baptized on 24th December 1594, and Batholomew Cadle on 1st January 1600/01, the latter being buried on 27th August 1624. In addition, William Major was recorded as the father of children baptized in 1612, 1615, and 1619, and John Stokes similarly in 1626, 1628, 1630 and 1633/34’. (2)

Although there is no evidence that these seven men were either: the Lords of the Whitsun Ale; or the Lord of the Ale & his six morris attendants; or the six morris dancers & their musician or fool, it’s clear that local folklore believed it to be the case. Keith Chandler, in his ED&S article stated that ‘...the existence of a team at Brackley during the 1620s is almost a certainty’ (5). Whatever the exact truth, it’s likely that Morris dancers in Brackley were associated with these early Church Ales.



This picture dated 1620, shows Morris Dancers beside the Thames at Richmond, from a picture now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. Though unrelated to the activities of the Brackley Men, it is a good illustration of what Morris dancers may have looked like around the time of the Brackley paten.

The suppression of the Whitsun Ales...

Keith Chandler describes how 'Popular gatherings such as Whitsun Ales were loud, noisy, alcoholic, animated, plebeian, and morris dancing was merely one form of entertainment associated with such events. A description of a celebration held in Oxford in 1598 reveals further common features, including the carrying of: "Drum and shot and other weapons and men attired in women's apparel (who) brought into the towne a woman with garlands and flowers named by them the Queen of the May. They also had Morrishe dancers and other disordered and unseemly sports" (2)

However, the early 1600s was a time of religious and moral turmoil. These festivities found themselves in the centre of the political battleground between the traditionalists who encouraged them and the puritans who opposed them (6).

James 1 publicly condoned and encouraged the Sunday sports. The King's majesties declaration to his subjects concerning lawful sports to be used, first published in 1618, and reissued in 1633, charged that: 'After the end of divine service our good people be not disturbed, letted or discouraged from any lawful recreation, such as dancing, either men or women, archery for men, leaping, vaulting or any other such harmless recreation, nor from having May games, Whitsun Ales and Morris dances, and the setting up of maypoles and other sports therewith used, so as the same be held in due and convenient time without impediment or neglect of divine service'. (4)



However, the Church authorities were turning against their association with the unruly behaviour that had become a routine part of the Whitsun festivities, and the influence of the puritanical movement was growing.

Perhaps the presentation of the paten in 1623 was an attempt to appease the church authorities by demonstrating that valuable funds could still be raised on these occasions and spent on worthy causes.

Nevertheless, the establishment of church rates as a more respectable and reliable method of raising ecclesiastical funds was well advanced and the church ales slowly disappeared from the scene, to be completely suppressed by the Commonwealth rule under Cromwell (1649 to 1660).

The Paten today

The parish Church of St James was demolished in the 1930s, but the paten was transferred to St Peters where it still exists, though now locked away in order to preserve it from further wear.

But the year 1983 saw the beginning of a new chapter in our May Day tradition. Since that date, whenever 1st May falls on a Sunday, the early morning activities are followed by a church service in St Peters, during which the men re-present the paten. The notes below are taken from the Brackley logs kept by the modern side. (20)

Sunday 1st May 1983: 'All were there by 9.30 and this enabled negotiations to be finalised with Canon Peter Woodward. The Fool was to read the Old Testament lesson, the Bagman to read the gospel, eight other men to pecuniate, and the Squire to address words to the congregation. The 1623 paten was in use, as was a chalice given in 1580, and specific mention was made of these. The church was full and the mayor turned out yet again'.

Sun 1st May 1988. The log records that JC (Jonathan Connor) gave a reading, and that the men sat in the front pews and took the collection. No mention was made of the paten.

Sun 1st May 1994 – log missing

In 1999 1st May fell on a Saturday, and in **2000**, on a Monday (2000 was a leap year)

Sun 1st May 2005: The log records how: 'The Revd. Nicholas Gandy is Morris-friendly, having danced with Whitchurch Morris Men. As a result Don (Thompson) had no difficulty in persuading him to produce the 1623 paten, given by the lords of the Whitsun Ale to the Church of St James in that year. Young James (Don's stepson) presented it at the altar, after the men had Wheatlied up the nave and back to place, and John had read a chunk from John Ch 3. The paten was used during the communion service, and men derived a strong sense of being linked in with the history of the side'.

Sun 1st May 2011. *'During the offertory, Steve F and Richard Y (musicians) led nine men up the aisle, eight of them dancing the Wheatley processional and Ian (Phillips) bringing up the rear with the paten from 1623 AD. The two columns peeled off, left and right in front of the alter, and Ian did his stuff, and men returned to their places down the outer aisles'*

The next year in which May Day falls on a Sunday will be 2016.

St James Day, Sunday 25th July, 2010. Another important moment in the life of the paten came in 2010 when it was again presented in recognition of St James Day. Again the notes below come from the log (20).

'An invitation came from the Reverend Nicholas Gandy... that the men should take part in the patronal festival of St James, and that the 1623 paten should be re-presented to the Church...'

'It was agreed that they should dance a brief show outside the South Door as the congregation gathered...'

'It was a warm morning with bright sun to cheer the early churchgoers. Men did a brief Jockey..., The Rose Tree..., and as the bells were ringing, The Ring o' Bells...'

Men moved inside the Church, bells a-chinking, shortly before 10 O'clock, and settled into the two back rows., and heard the Bishop of Brixworth, Frank White, preach...'

'A fairly full congregation exchanged the Peace, while the Men got themselves into a double column, ready for the off. Father Nicholas explained that the Men would do an offertory dance and present the paten again, and said that this was done traditionally...'



'Steve and Robin played the once-to-yourself, and Paul and Ian led the two columns (of the Wheatley processional) with the Squire bringing up the rear with the ancient paten, first presented in 1623. At the end of one A and one B music the men formed a complete line in front of the alter, and the Squire did the honours (ie presented the paten) and men danced back to their places, and received a round of applause.'

Holy Communion followed and the bread was on the paten...'

*This photo above shows John Weaver, Brackley Fool, and dancer with the side since 1962,
This photo and the two below were all taken on the occasion of St James Day 2010*



All the above notes relating to 'The Paten Today' are transcribed from Brackley Morris logs. (20)

Sun 1st May 2016



In 2015, May Day again fell on a Sunday so, at the invitation of the Rev'd Nicholas Gandy, the men did a processional dance around the Church and presented the paten once more.

Ten generations of Cadle



The service was also attended by John Cadle, a direct descendent by ten generations of Matthew Cadle, one of the men named on the plate. He is pictured here on the right with the Rev'd Nicholas Gandy.

To the left is Adrian Watt, the most recent Brackley Morris recruit, and great grandson of Arthur Blencowe, one of the Whitfield Men (see Ch 5)



THOMAS CADLE bap 1575 bur 12 May 1633 Brackley, Northants mar ??

MATTHEW CADLE bap 03 Sep 1598 Brackley, Northants bur ?? mar 30 Sep 1630 Brackley to MARY (ANNE??) FASKETT

MATTHEW CADLE bap 06 May 1632 Brackley, Northants bur 16 Jun 1690 Bicester mar c1655 to ALICE ???

MATTHEW CADLE bap 27 Apr 1666 Bicester bur 01 Jun 1728 Long Crendon mar c1708 to JOANE ???

MATTHEW CADLE born 04 Feb 1708 Long Crendon bur 08 Mar 1762 Long Crendon mar 24 Apr 1745 Long Crendon to HESTER MUNDAY

HUGH CADLE bap 26 Aug 1759 Chilton bur 01 Dec 1836 Long Crendon mar 14 Oct 1784 to JANE LAWRENCE

WILLIAM CADLE bap 12 Feb 1794 Long Crendon bur 13 Dec 1873 Long Crendon mar 18 Oct 1813 to SARAH SMITH

WILLIAM CADLE bap 15 Apr 1835 Long Crendon bur 14 Apr 1910 Long Crendon mar (1) 17 Oct 1858 to ANN KIRBY

GEORGE THOMAS CADLE bap 24 Aug 1859 Long Crendon bur 19 Mar 1946 Long Crendon mar 16 Aug 1880 to ELIZABETH WARNER

THOMAS GEORGE CADLE bap 17 Jan 1886 Long Crendon bur 02 Dec 1973 Chorleywood mar 29 Sep 1909 to LILY JORDAN.

WILLIAM GEORGE THOMAS CADLE bap 02 Aug 1910 Chorleywood died Hailsham 04 Jun 1999 bur Chorleywood

JOHN BARRINGTON CADLE born 04 Jun 1942 Amersham mar 27 Mar 1965