



The Story of the Brackley Morris Men

A Traditional Northamptonshire morris side

5. The 1900s 'Skill and Tenacity'

The early 1900s

Although they'd been at a low point in the late 1800s, it appears that the side regained energy and continued to perform under the leadership of Timothy Howard Junior. Though we have no substantial written records during this period, there is sufficient oral evidence to suggest that they continued to be active right up to the outbreak of war in 1914..

According to Fred Hamer, writing in 1955, the Brackley side changed its annual outing (at some date unspecified) from Whitsuntide to the August bank holiday week. (15)

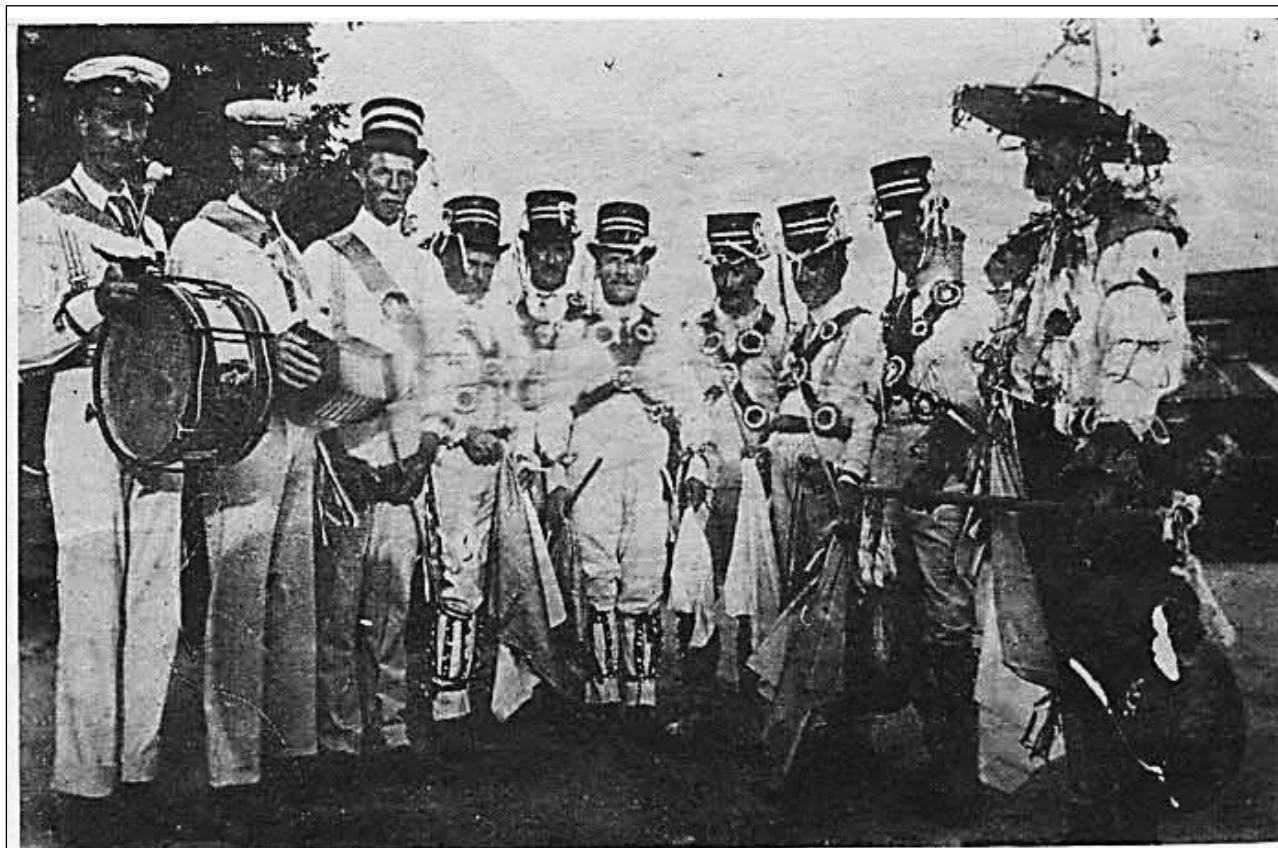
Keith Chandler, in his 1985 lecture quoted an article in the Banbury Guardian from 1950 contributed by Mr H Watkinson stating that: *'Until the outbreak of the first world war, the annual procedure of the troupe was to commence a tour of Brackley, Buckingham, Banbury, Towcester and all the intervening villages, on August bank holiday, and continue throughout the week. It was undoubtedly an enjoyable and profitable holiday and a pleasant spectacle for the people of the countryside. Their only transport a good pair of boots and a delight in walking...'* *'The Rev H Broughton, Vicar of Brackley was a great enthusiast and conducted regular rehearsals, and exhibitions in the town were given about every third week'* (5).

The Brackley Men on the occasion of August bank holiday, 4th August 1913



Thomas 'Tweezer' Franklin
Thomas Henry Rawlings
Albert Giles
W Mallet (Fool)
Aubrey Burbage Rawlins
Timothy Howard
Frank Wooton
William 'Jockey' Giles

The information above was recorded in August 1966 by Fred Hamer and Roger Nicholls when they met with the only surviving member of the Whitfield team, Percy Newberry. Further details of the Whitfield men collected during this conversation can be found in *'The Morris Traditions of Brackley and Hinton'* written by Gordon Reid in 1993. (17)



Another morris side with Anglo concertina, drummer and exotic hangers on. These are the Whitfield Morris Dancers, a team based just outside Brackley in Northants, in 1911. The concertina player, Mr. Tyler, was one of Cecil Sharp's informants, and other members were Tom Chambers, Fred and Arthur Blencoe, and John and Harry Newbury.

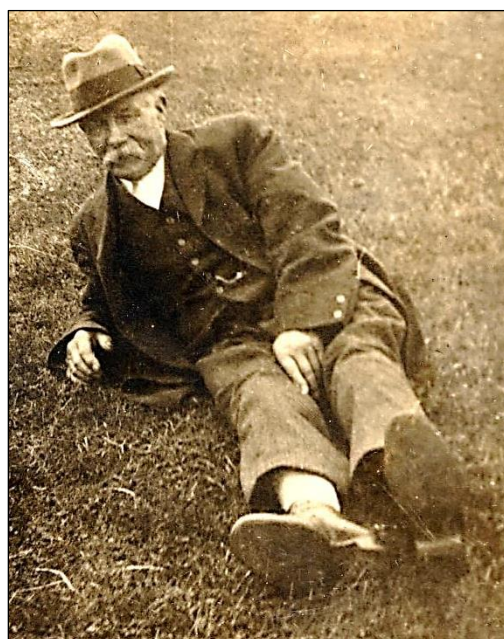
The outbreak of war

Of the 151 sides identified by Keith Chandler as fielding a team between 1660 and 1900, the majority fell into decline during the late 1800s, and early 1900s, but Brackley survived. *'As one would expect, the First World War brought the Morris to a halt, but after 1918 a team was put together again, still under the leadership of Timothy Howard'*. (5)

Timothy Howard

Timothy Howard, pictured here, succeeded the leadership of the side from his father in 1889 and remained active until his own death in 1932 at the age of 80.

It's worth mentioning here that he was the fourth and last member of his family to have led the Brackley men, his predecessors being his father Timothy (1822-1889), his grandfather Charles (1776-1837), and his great-grandfather Ezekial (c1740-1796).



1918 - 1939

The inter-war years were a lean time in our history. There were periodic outings such as the one in 1923 described by Keith Chandler as 'a fund raiser for a blind man, when the local dancers had to augment a team from Whitfield who had been trained by Howard before the war' (5). But perhaps more crucially, this was the period during which many details of the dances and tunes were collected and recorded.

Cecil Sharp

Cecil Sharp first came to Brackley in 1909 when he met with Timothy Howard of Brackley and John Stutsbury of Hinton. His findings were recorded in the first edition of his Morris Book Part III, published in 1910. He visited again in September 1922 when he collected four more dances, details of which were published in his 1924 edition. (16)

The Travelling Morrice.

In 1924, some members of the Cambridge Morris Men, calling themselves the Travelling Morrice, began touring some of the villages where Sharp had previously collected dance details. In June 1927 they visited Brackley (17). The photos right and below show Timothy Howard (in the trilby) and William Giles (in the flat cap), demonstrating 'The Month of May'.

Written on the back of the photo, right, are the words:

*Brackley 21st June '27. Old dancers:
Tim Howard, William Giles.
Shown to Mr Giles, Sept 4th 1937.
Taken by Barton Worthington*



Putterill, Schofield & Peck

Don Thompson, a current Brackley Man (2013) had conversations in the Greyhound pub in Brackley with a couple of older residents, Albert Boyles and Larry Clarridge. They remembered watching William Giles teaching the Brackley dances in the 1930s close to his home on the small Green near St Peters Church.

This was almost certainly the occasion in September 1937 when Jack Putterill, Kenworthy & Joan Schofield and Arthur Peck visited Brackley. They met first with Charles Blackwell (musician) and then went on meet William Giles and other dancers. Peck wrote: *'We visited Mr Giles (at his home in Vine cottage)... Jack then visited several other dancers, and finally after lunch we assembled at Mr Giles' together with two other Brackley dancers. (Bert and Harold Rawlings)'. (17)*

Together they attempted the following dances: *'The Captain wi' his Whiskers', 'Beanssetters', 'Shepherd's Hey', 'Haste to the Wedding' (or Bonnets of Blue?) (17)*

The dancers (past and present) mentioned in this visit were: William Giles, Tim Howard, Joe Castle, Bert (Bert) Rawlins, Albert Giles, Joseph Franklin, W.A. Mallet (fool), C Blackwell (whistle player) and A.E Kendall (whistle player). And at Whitfield: A.E. Blencowe, Harry Newberry, W Tyler (concertina). (17)

The recollections of Herbert Jakeman

David Grist is a former Brackley dancer who now dances with Bathampton near Bath. He used to work at RAF Croughton where his colleague, Herbert Jakeman, told him of how the Brackley men danced in Croughton in the 1930s. The details below come from the notes made by David during their conversation.

Herbert Jakeman was born in 1924 and lived in Croughton, though he attended Magdalen College Shool School in Brackley, He could clearly remember seeing the Brackley Morris Men performing in the 1930s in the front of the White Horse pub in Croughton where his father was landlord. This pub later became an antiques shop. He knew most of the men in the side, whose names included the following:

- Arthur Howard. *(Was he of the same family as Timothy Howard? We don't know)*
- Elisha Tuckey. *(Could he have been related to Albert Tuckey or Elijah Tuckey who both danced with the side in the 1800s?)*
- Freddy Woods. *(Could he have been a relation to Joseph Woods from Deddington, a pipe and tabor player for the side in the late 1800s?)*
- Albert 'Tweezer' Franklin, a blacksmith. Herbert Jakeman recalled that he was sometimes teased as only being good enough to go round with a bladder on the end of a stick, which suggested to Herbert that he had done fooling, as had his father.
- Arthur 'Titchy' Coles, a monumental mason
- E Archie Kendal, a painter and decorator, and also a whistle player for the side
- William Billingham, a wheelwright.

The last three men in this list all appeared in the August 1913 photo of the Brackley and Whitfield Men shown earlier in this chapter, as did Thomas 'Tweezer' Franklin, the father of Albert above

Herbert believed that the music consisted of concertina and whistle. He also related an anecdote of how one of the men walked to and from Northampton in a day and could still go to the pub in Brackley in the evening and dance the Brackley Shepherds Hey jig.

Fred Hamer

Fred Hamer was a musician for the Bedford Morris Men and one time Squire of the Ring. On his first visit to Brackley in 1951 he met with Archie Kendall, whistle player. He visited again in 1954 and met with both Archie Kendall and Harold Rawlins. From these visits he published two articles in English Dance and Song in 1950 and another in 1955 ('The Hinton and Brackley Morris', JEFDSS 7:4 (1955), 205-17). Both men were still living in 1959 when Roger Nicholls started his revival side at Magdalen College School, and were therefore able to offer advice. In August 1966, Fred Hamer and Roger Nicholls visited the home of Mr Percy Newberry, the last surviving member of the Whitfield Morris Men. (17)

1939 – 1959

We have no knowledge of dancing after the outbreak of war in 1939, and therefore have to assume that the activities of the old side ceased. Nevertheless the extensive collecting and recording of details between the wars served to ensure that the revival side of 1959 could continue the tradition with a strong degree of authenticity. The story of the revival side is covered in the next chapter.

"A cultural phenomenon that can survive three centuries without being committed to paper speaks volumes for the skill and tenacity of successive generations of Brackley Men." Keith Chandler. (5)