



## Welcome to issue 4 of the Rose and Castle Newsletter.

Since Issue 3 (November 2011), we have of course been "out of season" in the quieter part of the year.

Nevertheless there are a few events to report on, including our heart-warming dance out on New Year's Day, and our Annual Feast.

Bob Ainsworth started with the side too; Bob's enthusiasm remains undimmed, and an inspiration to us all, despite initial ankle problems. More later from Bob

## Events coming up

24 March – Dance out in Buckingham

7 April - Dance out in Buckingham

## 14 April – Barn Dance in Buckingham

23 April – St George at *The Boat*, Stoke Bruerne

Now read on.....

### Stony Lights – 26 November 2011

Saturday 26 November saw Rose & Castle brightening up the gloomy days before Christmas with our annual performance at the Stony Lights Festival in the old Buckinghamshire town of Stony Stratford.

This is a day of music and revelry in Stony, culminating in a procession of children carrying ornate lanterns and the switching on of the town lights, followed by more music and revelry in the town's many fine hostelrys.



Rose and Castle's part, along with other local Morris Sides, was to dance and disport ourselves amid the stalls and festive fairground rides in the

High Street during the afternoon.

We began by wetting our whistles in the Vaults bar of the *Bull*, a historic coaching inn which, with its neighbour the *Cock*, is the origin of the expression "a right Cock and Bull story". Then we went forth into the bracing autumnal airs to entertain a large and enthusiastic audience with a well-danced set of such favourite dances as Gorton, Colne and Knutsford. Thence back into the Vaults to refresh ourselves (i.e. thaw out) before emerging again to regale the multitude with a few more dances.

The tenebral shades of an early-falling late November evening brought down the curtain upon our terpsichoreal cavortings soon after 3pm. So once more into the Vaults for a valedictory potation, with a Side satisfied that we had acquitted ourselves well and added to the enjoyment of this fine old English festive occasion.

### My introduction to Morris

I had seen Morris Dancing on a few occasions and had been in the majority that often stop and watch with amusement. The spectacle of men in hats full of flowers dancing to the sound of bells seemed surreal. I often expected the sound of sirens, with the men in white coats to take them away and chuckled.

I found myself in Stony Stratford in November 2011 after being invited to witness the spectacle by a close friend.

There were two teams present, the Queens Oak ladies and the Rose and Castle men's teams.

One of the first things that struck me was how they all looked like they were having great fun and totally enjoying themselves. The people that surrounded the dancers were not chuckling and laughing, but seemed to be as impressed as I had become with the display of dance and colour. It all seemed very majestic and very English.

As I watched a leaflet inviting me to a taster morning was thrust into my hand which I politely read and put in my pocket thinking to myself "No waaaaay".

Secretly inside I was very impressed by it all and felt that I would love to have a go. However I felt my courage drain and the taster morning went ahead without me.

It all sort of faded from my mind until New Year's day when at Stoke Bruerne I again witnessed the Morris dancers. I was tapped on the shoulder by an amusing chap whom I now know as Steve the zoologist, and a tin shook in my direction. After emptying my pockets of my small change another leaflet was thrust into my hand. Again I put it in my pocket. I continued to watch the dancers and again thought what fun it looked.

I gave it lots of thought and with some encouragement from a colleague I decided to give it a go.

So after my usual football coaching session on the Wednesday I drove to Stoke Bruerne and arrived at the Boat Inn very early. I ordered a pint and chatted to the barman about the Morris dancers trying to expand my knowledge on which I would base my decision. I finished my pint and because I was driving I left the pub and sat in my car listening to music. I had every intention of leaving with my bottle slowly disappearing.

I remember sitting there thinking "Do I, Don't I" "Shall I, Shan't I" and "Is this really for me?" Just as I had decided to make my escape a couple of cars pulled up and several guys emerged and entered the pub. I recognized the distinctive figure of Steve Bignell and the imposing figure of Clive Wood from the gig at Stony Stratford. After a few minutes they emerged and in a moment of madness I opened my car door and said nervously "Are you the Morris men?"

I was greeted very warmly as the guy the barman had told them about me.

Firstly they said hello and secondly, asked me if I liked beer. I felt instantly relaxed and at ease. A bag, I now know contained some props, was thrust into my arms (lots of thrusting going on here) and I strolled to the village hall and had one of the most enjoyable nights I had had for a long time.

I had a go, made mistakes, but was told I was doing well. Very supportive, everyone was; and spoke kind, encouraging words, I thought. They were all very considerate and showed a lot of patience that really helped in my nervous state.

I now have the bug and although I have a Morris injury from that first night and lately have been banging the bass drum, I feel like part of the team and impressed by the camaraderie.

I have things to look forward to such as the first dance out and the Clive Wood glare but as I buy my bowler hat and flowers and put together my kit I am sure I am in for a lot of good fun.

My aim is to dance out for the first time on St George's Day and injury and courage permitting I will be there. Watch this space!

*Bob Ainsworth*

### A Christmas Ale

It is a widely held and popular misconception that associates Morris dancing with merriment and drinking lots of beer. In reality ours is a grave and sober pastime, in which scarce a sip of elderflower cordial passes our lips as we solemnly practice our arcane art. Which is why we would never contemplate having a pre-Christmas festive celebration in one of the finest pubs in all the East Midlands. Not us!

So the casual observer might wonder what we were doing foregathered in the *Malt Shovel* in Northampton on a Friday evening before Christmas, flagons of the finest ale (or in our Squire's case, cider) in hand, merrily swapping reminiscences of another year of Morris fun and frolics.

Admittedly the venue would tempt the most hardened abstainer. The *Malt Shovel* is a regular winner of the Campaign for Real Ale's East Midlands Regional Pub of the Year.

Along the bar an ever-varying array of superlative guest beers stands beside the regular offerings from the fine local Great Oakley microbrewery, alongside real farmhouse ciders and bottles of Belgian beers bringing back memories of Rose and Castle's visit to that country a couple of years back. Whilst the ambience is that of a good old English pub, in which a group of Morris dancers would be expected to be ensconced merrily around a table.

Finally, with delicious irony, this splendid alehouse is situate just across the road from its antithesis, the vast, soulless Carlsberg-Tetley chemical plant churning out tasteless lagers, keg "bitter" and other industrial effluent. It would be a gross libel upon this global multinational to suggest – whatever the taste might suggest – that the raw material for its products is piped under the road from the *Malt Shovel's* loos. So no such imputation is even hinted at.



*The Squire in suitably austere mood sipping herb tea.*

Nor indeed could it be suggested that so sobriety a Side as Rose and Castle spent the evening in bucolic merriment in such salubrious

surroundings, quaffing English ale and cider and generally having a fine old time. The foregoing is a total work of fantasy - the truth is that our annual Christmas celebration consisted of a small cup of herb tea sipped delicately in a chintzy tearoom. And if you'll believe that....

*Steve Brady*

### **New Year 2012**

Rose and Castle started 2012 the way we wish to carry on with a fine display of North-West Morris dancing on New Year's Day at our home hostelry, the *Boat* at Stoke Bruerne. In which we were joined by our friends of Queen's Oak, a local ladies' Side, dancing the Border Morris tradition.

The elements smiled upon us – unlike on some previous years it was neither raining nor snowing and the temperature was above freezing. Indeed, once of the large and enthusiastic audience who evidently gather from across the world to see us dance informed us it was warmer here than in the desert of New Mexico in the US South-West, where snow apparently was lying round about, deep and crisp and even.



So we were able to dance in the New Year in fine style for a good couple of hours, taking turn and turn about with Queen's Oak. Before adjourning, as is also traditional, to the tap room of the *Boat* for an afternoon of music and song. All right, and the odd pint of ale!



As always on such occasions our Music Master and Band Leader Clive Wood entertained us with many a witty ditty and merry madrigal, often of his own composing.



The strains of “The Joys of the Morris”, “The Lament for a Spilled Pint” and that saga of gluttony and cannibalism upon the High Seas, “Little Boy Billy”. To say nothing – which I am strictly enjoined to do – of “The Female Morris Dancer”. All these and more hung happily upon the afternoon air, before we all joined in the Rose and Castle “Recruiting Song”..

Another splendid afternoon of dance, music and song – and perhaps a sip or two of beer – launching Rose and Castle on another year of Morris. If you like the sound of this, please come and join us!

*Steve Brady*

### **The Feast**

It's not just me. Cricket used to be for the summer and footie for the winter. Now it's all the bloody time isn't it?

But not for the Morris. With one or two aberrations it's a summer sport. Winter is for practice (though hard to tell any has been done sometimes), “Ales” and Feasts.

Now some sides combine the Ale and the Feast, wittily calling it an Ale-feast. Guess what happens then? But Rose & Castle are by-words for refinement and our feast has room for partners and the tee-total (whatever that means). So this year we graced the restaurant at The Boat yet again. As well as a proper dinner, there is room for modest beer.

This year we had 39 diners (close to a record I think) and we were delighted to welcome some “retired” dancers and two of the new men. A great chance to catch up with friends not seen for some time. Sometimes to marvel they are still with us. Dave Marshall travelled specially from Chichester – the longest trip this year.

Dave and Jean Blagrove walked the few yards along the cut – setting the record for the shortest. This year for the first time JT got the keys for the stair lift so it was great that he and Frances could join in. Didn't see it in action so still don't know whether his beer is carried separately. Mind you, he couldn't spill more than me walking up the wretched stairs.



*The Squire in Hour 3 of his traditional four-hour address at the Annual Feast 2012.*

We had a lovely evening. The Boat did us proud again so thanks to all their staff and to Phil for organising it all. Roll on next time.

*Clive Dennis*

#### **And finally...**

A sketch by our Artist-In-Residence, Norman...



#### **Interested?**

If you are interested in joining R&C as a dancer, musician, or helper, contact

Andrew Castley on 01604 752624; Email [bagman@rose-castlemorris.org.uk](mailto:bagman@rose-castlemorris.org.uk);

Steve Brady on 01908 612793

Clive Dennis on 01604 713360

#### **And remember!**

#### **Rose & Castle Barn Dance**

**Saturday, 14 April from 7.30pm at  
Buckingham Community Centre  
Cornwalls Meadow  
MK18 1RP**

#### **Music & entertainment by R&C Morris**

**Why not come along for a really  
enjoyable evening!!**

**Tickets £5 (includes food)**

**Real Ale Bar**