

A Brief History of Morris Dancing

Nobody knows for certain how old this is, but Shakespeare used morris dancing in a few plays, and it was considered old even in his day. One of his players, Will Kemp, was a renowned “Morryce Dauncer”.

There is written documentation dating from the sixteenth century, including references in Elizabethan literature, indicating that the dances were considered ancient at that time. These sources confirm that the dances were done by both men and women, and that they were a popular form of spectacle.

Like many other rural traditions, it became endangered in the late nineteenth century due to the social upheavals brought on by the Industrial Revolution, mainly the depopulation of villages in favor of increased economic opportunity in the cities.

Fortunately, there were those who were concerned enough about the potential loss of cultural heritage to go into the countryside and collect the songs and dances from the old villagers who still remembered them.

Due to the efforts of Cecil Sharp, and organizations like the Country Dance and Song Society, many of the traditions were rescued from the edge of extinction.

Morris Dancing continues to be a “Living Tradition”, and is thriving in the U.S.!

The 2005 California Morris Ale wishes to thank our incredible sponsors, without whom this event would not have been possible.



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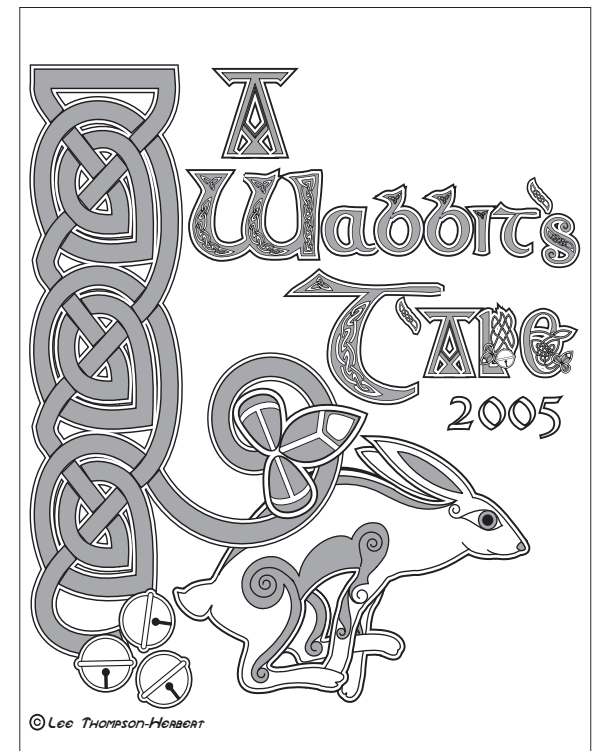
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- San Francisco Recreations & Parks Department
- SF Maritime Museum National Historic Park
- Finnegan's Wake Pub



The 2005 California Morris Ale!

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What is Morris Dancing?

Morris is a traditional form of English dancing so old that Shakespeare himself made fun of it. One feature of Morris dancing is that it is performed for an audience rather than experienced as pure social dance (ie, couple dancing, barn dancing, etc).

Morris is also generally considered ritual dance. In other words, it's danced with purposes beyond mere fun. Many of these purposes have become obscured by the mists of time, but you can still see teams of Morris dancers dancing up the sun every May Day (May 1st).

The dancers hold hankies in their hands which they wave to the music, or perhaps sticks, either two short or one long one which are clashed with great vigor, and have bell-pads tied at their knees which make a loud and cheerful rhythm as they dance.

You're likely to see Morris dancing from different parts of England. The most common form is from the Cotswold region. Each village in the Cotswolds has its own style, or "Tradition", and teams tend to focus on one or two traditions. You may also see Border dances from The Welsh Border region, which is often quite wild, or clogging from the North West. Sword dancing is also frequently associated with Morris dancing.

Here are the teams you're watching:

Apple Tree Morris

Sebastopol, CA

Whites with leafy vest and wreath

Berkeley Morris

Berkeley, CA

Whites, red & black vest, black hat, black knee-socks

Bufflehead

Belmont, CA

Black pants/skirts, clogs, vests - red front, purple back

Capering Roisters

St. Louis, MO

White shirt & pants, red, yellow and black baldricks & ribbons

Deer Creek Morris Men

Palo Alto, CA

Whites with blue and yellow baldricks, bowlers

Faultline Morris

Hayward, CA

White shirt, black pants, orange sash, armbands

FFL

Palo Alto, CA

Blacks, white gloves, masks or paint, rainbow braces, rubber chickens

Goat Hill

San Francisco, CA

Whites with green vests

Mad Molly

Palo Alto, CA

Multi colored, rag skirts, top hats, painted faces

Moreton Bay Fig

San Diego, CA

Yellow, blue and green vests, black trousers

Mossyback Morris Men

Seattle, WA

Whites, red suspenders, sneakers, briefs

Portland Traveling Morris

Portland, OR

White and red shirts, black knee britches, white socks

Rising Phoenix Morris

Santa Monica, CA

White shirt, red vest, black pants, black shoes, hats optional

Seabright Morris & Sword

Santa Cruz, CA

Green vests, black pants, white socks

White Rats Morris

San Francisco, CA

Black, or festive black

<p>If you're interested in learning how to Morris dance, please contact us at info@wabbits-tale.org and we'll let you know which teams are closest to you.</p>
