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**An exploration of the work of David Bintley, a very  
‘English’ choreographer, with particular reference to his  
use of English Morris dance in *Still Life at the Penguin  
Café* and the process of translating ‘genuine’ English  
Morris dance to a theatrical environment.**

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Trinity Laban Conservatoire  
of Music and Dance in the graduate school.

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## **Dedication**

To my family who taught me to believe in my dreams and aspirations

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to sincerely thank those people who have helped in the process of my research. My thesis would not have been possible without the time, openness and trust of the Ravensbourne Morris Men who have shared with me their precious knowledge and experience of the Cotswold Morris dance form and whose generosity and boundless energy I will always admire, respect and endeavour to safeguard.

Similarly, I would like to thank David Bintley, whose sincerity, time and inspiration has been invaluable and allowed me to open up the door to his creative mastery and expertise in English ballet. I feel very privileged that I have gained this insight into the man behind the choreography.

I would also like to thank my supervisors Dr Henrietta Bannerman, who from the beginning has always believed in me and my research and supported me wholeheartedly throughout my study and Dr Claire Mera-Nelson, who has encouraged and been there to offer me support, advice and guidance. I would like to thank them both for all their time, assistance, belief and dedication.

## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

The study explores the work of the English choreographer and Director of the Birmingham Royal Ballet, David Bintley. Particular reference is made to Bintley's ballet *Still Life at the Penguin Café* (1988) and the extent to which he has drawn from English Cotswold Morris dance in the *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* section of the ballet. The comparison between Bintley's selection of movements and their traditional Morris dance counterparts is based on findings from extensive fieldwork conducted with Morris dance teams and in particular the Ravensbourne Morris Men of Keston in Kent, as well as a study of Bintley's creative practice. The research draws from ethnographic modes of study including participant observation, embodiment and notions of reflexivity. Following an analysis of the results from the creation and performance of a more authentically 'Morris' version of Bintley's dance for eight female dancers, entitled *Still Life at the Folk Café*, the study offers a series of recommendations for the translation of English Morris into a theatrical setting.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first explores the methods involved in the development of the analytical model for the study, including those of the Hungarian scholars György Martin and Erno Pesovár during their folk dance research in the Upper-Tisza region of Hungary, and the categorisation of the various aspects of Morris dance using Morris dancer Lionel Bacon's motif catalogue, *A handbook of Morris dances*. It also reviews the work of folk dance theorists such as John Forrest and Chris Bearman.

The second chapter discusses the concept of Englishness to define the importance of the English ballet tradition as advocated from 1926 by the founder of the Royal Ballet, Dame Ninette De Valois. It looks at Bintley's influences, ideological inheritance, creative process and place as a protector of the English ballet tradition. Chapter three focuses on the fieldwork conducted with the Ravensbourne Morris Men, and compares Bintley's movements in *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance with their counterparts from the Cotswold Morris tradition. Chapter four details the practice based element of the research and analyses the findings from a series of Morris dance workshops in which the eight female dancers representing the field of professional dance were introduced to the Morris dance form. It also investigates the results from the creation and performance of *Still Life at the Folk Café*.

Chapter five discusses the benefits of conducting a workshop with the Ravensbourne Morris dance team and some of the dancers involved in the performance process. Finally chapter six explores the conclusions drawn from the research and explains how choreographers or dancers wishing to work with Morris dance should immerse themselves in the source language of its practitioners, and draw from aspects of the tradition in rehearsals and performances in order to extend their choreological and physical vocabulary and attain the stylistic and social qualities associated with the dance form. These aspects include working with live musical accompaniment, using the performance space informally to maintain close interaction with the audience and challenging the dancer's personal response to their own movement style.

## **Introduction**

The thesis investigates the use of English Morris dance in Bintley's ballet, *Still Life at the Penguin Café* (1988). It questions the extent to which Bintley has drawn on traditional folk dance forms in the work and whether his use of Morris dance has reinforced his status as a quintessentially English choreographer (Dromgoole, 2009, p.41). For the purpose of the investigation I undertook a process of ethnographic research and fieldwork, during which I participated in the rehearsals and performances of English folk dance teams. Throughout the study the groups of English Morris dance teams are referred to as 'sides,' which is how they are colloquially known within English Morris dance circles in the UK.

The aim of the folk dance fieldwork was to find out more about the conventional steps used in English Morris circles, or what scholar Geraldine Morris (2000, p.14) calls "codified movements". This is a term for the written descriptions used, for example, in connection with ballet syllabi (Morris, 2000, p.14). However this term can also be applied to the standard steps and figures that have been documented by English folk dance performance teams. These set movements, figures and patterns are recognised across English Morris dance sides. The codified movements can help define or characterise a vocabulary of folk dance steps and figures from which folk dancers and performance teams can draw.

I also observed Bintley and the Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB) in rehearsal in order to analyse Bintley's working practices and methods of choreography and teaching. I was then able to compare his use of English folk dance with the codified vocabulary of English Morris or so-called authentic steps. The terms 'authentic' 'genuine' and 'traditional' are used throughout this study to differentiate between the English Morris dance form now practised within the folk dance communities I studied, and its theatrical manifestation in Bintley's choreography. By comparing the theatrically stylised and the traditional Morris dance form, I am able to analyse to what extent the folk dance element has been adapted when integrated with the predominantly balletic style of Bintley's movement vocabulary.

My research revealed that it was important to focus specifically on the genre of Cotswold Morris dance as this is the dance form on which Bintley mainly draws for *Still Life at the Penguin Café* (1988). Although the dance form originally derived from the geographical region of the Cotswolds, it is no longer restricted to that area. The style is danced across Britain, but is most associated with the south of England, and has a long history of performance in the region of Kent (Burgess, interview 2003a). Consequently I concentrated on the Ravensbourne Morris Men from Keston in Kent to research Cotswold Morris dance as this side was created in 1946 and has over sixty years of experience. However, I also undertook supplementary research with the Red Leicester Morris Men, who are a Cotswold and Border Morris dance side and the Singleton Cloggers, who are a Lancashire mixed clog and North West Morris dance side. It is recognised within the folk dance community (Johnson, 2003) that English folk dance steps, figures

and patterns are open to interpretation and vary across the English regions. This complex issue will be discussed in detail in chapter three of this study, in which I present the fieldwork.

The research findings from the ethnographic study and an awareness of Bintley's place in the English school of ballet constitute the foundations of the practice-based element of the thesis – the creation of a dance based on one section from *Still Life at the Penguin Café*. The eponymous *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance is a comic dance, featuring a female dancer as the flea who teases a group of male dancers representing Cotswold Morris men. I have observed live performances of *Still Life at the Penguin Café* by the Royal Ballet and the BRB and also studied a video of the work. The study investigates the extent to which authentic English Morris dance steps, figures and patterns can translate into a theatrical dance medium.

My interest in studying Bintley is largely due to his status as both the artistic heir to the Royal Ballet choreographer, Sir Frederick Ashton (1904-1988) and protégé of the founder of the Royal Ballet, Dame Ninette De Valois (1898-2001). One of Bintley's primary goals is to continue the English classical tradition of dance embodied in the work of Ashton and De Valois (Flatow, 1996, p.70). Like his predecessors, Bintley is a traditionalist who believes in the energy, power and poetry of the classical dance vocabulary (Dromgoole, 2009, p.41). However, in accepting the role of Director of the BRB, Bintley has chosen to balance his artistic aspirations with an interest in working with the local community in Birmingham. BRB is logistically and culturally central to the wider society of the

town and its environs. This is largely because of the company's energetic educational initiatives and outreach activities.

There is very little literature on the life and work of Bintley, thus I have had to base my research on the discussions I have had with him and his colleagues, together with press reviews and any interviews with Bintley that have appeared in dance magazines and television and radio documentaries. In terms of the literature that does exist, there has been limited investigation into his passion for the English ballet tradition. His affinity with the tradition raises many questions as to what extent he feels it is necessary to present on stage essentially English dance forms, like the Morris, as well as to what extent he feels responsible for preserving the artistic legacy of Ashton and De Valois.

He is a modest man, with a strong desire to make dance an intrinsic part of the local community. This is evident from the 'Ballet Hoo!' initiative, an 18-month collaboration between BRB and the charity, Youth at Risk (March 2005-September 2006). The project brought together 200 disadvantaged young people from the Midlands with BRB artists who taught them to dance in Kenneth MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet* (1965). The ballet was performed to public and critical acclaim at the Birmingham Hippodrome. Bintley is not elitist, and creates ballets that use a strong sense of characterisation to convey a story or provide commentary on a social situation or injustice. He refuses to be stereotyped, and although he favours the full-length ballets and the narrative form, he has also created plotless, one-act and abstract ballets.

My interest as a researcher is predominantly in theatre rather than in folk dance, but Bintley's choreography has always appealed to me for the way in which he blends traditional dance forms with classical ballet. There has been limited research into the use of folk dance in ballet. I have found that the two dance forms share conflicting qualities, especially in terms of the use of body weight, amount of flexion in the foot and degrees of relaxation required in the torso. The variations will be discussed in detail in chapter four (pp.155-158).

My research is informed by my own varied background in ballet and modern dance from the 1980s to the present day, along with a current involvement in Morris and country dance. I was initially trained as a performer and teacher in classical ballet, ISTD modern and jazz dance and have appeared as a professional dancer on stage, and in television and film. I have worked as a choreographer for theatre productions such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Bromley Little Theatre in 2001 and *Mack and Mabel* for the Sevenoaks Playhouse in 2003. I studied English folk dance as a student at dance college, but was not brought up within a folk dance based society or culture. In my current capacity as a news and programmes journalist for the BBC, I have acquired and developed research skills that can also be applied to the study of dance. These skills include interview techniques and obtaining eyewitness reports, investigative journalism and documenting sources or data obtained from interviewees.

## **Chapter one**

### **Methodology**

This chapter begins with a discussion of the ethnographic methods of research and approaches to the fieldwork, followed by an introduction and description of the analytical model. It goes on to look at the methods involved in the practice aspect of the research and ends with a discussion of the literature relevant to the study.

#### **1.1 Ethnographic modes of study and approaches to fieldwork**

For the purpose of this thesis, it has been important to explore current ethnographic practice as my research involves the study of human behaviour and experiences. There are differing definitions and perspectives on dance ethnography. Joan D. Frosch (1999) offers an insight into this relatively new discipline which she describes as “writing about people”, from the Greek *ethnos* meaning “folk” and “graphein” meaning to write (in Horton Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999, p.258). Frosch develops the definition by describing ethnography as a process of pursuing cultural awareness through the layering of the specific and highly complex contexts of human experience (ibid). The primary research methodology of ethnography is the practice of participant observation or the ethnographer’s attempt to foster a cultural understanding through an insider’s point of view. An insider can become familiar with the social and cultural practices of the community or society under investigation

- its language, dance and music - through active participation as well as interviews and observation. Whilst an outsider can learn about the community in question through techniques of “observation, reading, reviewing field notes” (p.258), embodying a culture by participating in its practice can offer the ethnographer a greater insight into the community in question.

Positivists pre-suppose that reality is found and that by using objective research methods, a ‘truth’ can be uncovered without considering either the role of the observer or the experiences of the observed (Green and Stinson, 1999, p.93).

Also positivists attempt to prove or disprove a hypothesis and regard analysis and data as separate entities. In contrast, post-positivists acknowledge the subjectivity of the researcher and believe analysis is reached through the prism of the researcher’s own world view. Establishing ‘truth’ therefore, is more elusive. For post-positivists, subjectivity is not only unavoidable, it is essential to the research, because it gives the researcher a broader and more experiential understanding of the community as a whole (ibid).

Post-positivist researchers claim that we construct reality according to our own social and cultural experiences, and as Jill Green and Susan W. Stinson explain (in Horton Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999, pp.91-123), while data collection and analysis may provide “parameters and a general guide for study” (p.95), many of the rules must be created by the researcher as she goes along, as ethnographic research methods vary according to the research question being asked. This requirement for adaptability was evident during the course of my fieldwork. When, for example, I attended a Morris day of dance in Trafalgar Square in

London (2 November 2003) I began recording interviews with members of the different Morris sides, but realised that the camera intimidated the performers. They were more comfortable talking off camera, so I revised my methods of data collection and instead took notes from interviews. Sensitivity to the emotions and concerns of the people in question is imperative if the researcher is to gain respect within the Morris dance community.

### **Participant observation**

As noted earlier (p.16), participant observation involves the researcher entering as closely as possible into the activities of the researched. Thus, during my fieldwork, I constantly participated in rehearsals, performances and social gatherings with the Morris men. Adrienne L. Kaeppler (in Buckland, 1999, p.17) argues that participation is a way for researchers' bodies and eyes to "learn about the distinctive ways in which people move, how these movements are categorised and if there are specially marked movement systems." For Kaeppler, an ideal movement study of a society or social group would include embodying and experiencing the movement itself. By participating in the Morris dance rehearsals I could experience how the dancer's body had to move in order to execute a particular step, and how much space I covered on the floor. I could also share some of the physical and psychological feelings involved in the performance of the movement such as the enjoyment and pride felt in mastering a step or Morris dance figure.

It was essential for me to become competent in the folk dance culture I studied and familiar with the local customs and traditions. According to Kaeppler, such an approach to research also opens up a door to the cultural values, politics, economics and sociocultural system in which the created dances are embedded (ibid). Active participation in the dance and culture studied often reveals what is implicit within it, and, therefore invisible to the mere observer. The observer or onlooker relies on what can be seen in terms of the visible characteristics of the dance. But this, after all, is only the surface manifestation of a complex web of underlying codes and customs. For the theatrical context of my research, in order to investigate the stylistic principles of David Bintley's Morris-influenced choreography, I had to immerse myself in the context of his creative practice and process to gain greater understanding into his cultural values.

I was fortunate to be able to study Bintley during rehearsals with dancers at the Birmingham Royal Ballet and to meet him personally in one-to-one interviews. As with the Ravensbourne Morris Men and the work I did amongst them, I wanted to assemble the pieces of information I obtained about Bintley's ideological and cultural inheritance. I was not allowed to video Bintley in rehearsals with his dancers, but was able to take notes and observe how he reacts and responds to dancers in the company and to examine his rehearsal techniques. Bintley says that he does not approach the rehearsal with a specific sequence of steps or movements prepared (interview 2004a) although he often has fragments of movement in mind with which he wants to experiment.

Active participation within a particular culture is invaluable, yet the participant-observer needs also to understand that when a community is aware that they are under investigation, they may behave differently from normal (Giurchescu in Buckland, 1999, p.50). For example, when I conducted fieldwork in Kent with the Ravensbourne Morris Men, the fact that I was the first woman for fifty years to attend one of their rehearsals significantly changed the dynamic of the group because the men began to show off their dance skills to me, which they would never have done to the other members in the team. Moreover, as the only young dancer in a Morris side of men aged predominantly fifty years and over, my presence among them was even stranger. The differences in height and weight, and the age gap, meant that the group made allowances for me in their movement patterns and actions. For example when learning to clash staves or traditional wooden sticks, I noticed that, in comparison with their normal action, the men did not exert their full force against me, because they doubted that I would be able to sustain the impact. I go on to discuss this further in chapter three (pp.114-115).

One of the older members of the group confessed that he had been reluctant for me to join in with the team because he felt that I would not be able to appreciate the importance of the tradition and that I was trespassing on territory that is a traditional male preserve. He changed his mind over the course of the three year study, and acknowledged that my research was helping to keep the tradition alive by promoting further discussion and debate within the academic and dance world. Although he accepted me as a potential teacher of Morris dance steps and figures, he was resolute that, as a woman, I should never perform them with an

authentic Morris side. I will return in more detail to the team's reaction to my fieldwork in chapter three in a discussion of the issues that arose during the time spent with the side.

### **Insider/outsider approaches**

As noted above, participation by an outsider within a group or social activity can be beneficial in helping to keep certain traditions alive. The researcher asks questions that raise issues of which the community may not have been previously aware. Research has shown that when dancers are very close to the tradition they practise, it can be revealing to try and take a step back from it in order to explain why they dance certain dances or how they prepare for a performance of them (Kaepler in Buckland, 1999, pp.21-22). For Kaepler, this process of taking part by learning the movements, and asking questions about them and the context in which they are performed, means that the researcher can observe "surface manifestations and behaviour" which make it "necessary to ask questions about underlying systems and intentions" (1999, p. 20). During the research, my questions for the folk dance performance teams ranged from seeking precise details about how the dancers perform a particular step to questioning their emotional response to performing in public, and how responsible they felt towards the continuation and authenticity of the tradition.

I must acknowledge that I am English and am researching an English tradition; there can be dangers of working within one's own culture. For Giurchescu, such cultural immersion has advantages such as knowledge of the socio-political and

economic contexts, along with handicaps such as the fact that some details considered obvious could be overlooked (in Buckland, 1999, p.45). However, I was an outsider to the Morris dance community. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973, p.13) defines the role of an ethnographer, claiming that she should make no attempt to become a native member of the group/community she studies. Rather, for Geertz, the ethnographer seeks, in a widened sense, to converse or enter into a dialogue with a member of the society or culture. Geertz acknowledges that this is a more difficult process than is usually acknowledged when he compares ethnography to the reading of a manuscript which is “foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalised graphs of sound, but in transient examples of shaped behaviour” (1973, p.10). Geertz suggests that the ethnographer witnesses, feels and embraces a moment of time in a world or community that is alien to her and plagued with inconsistencies. As a researcher, I was given contradictory information about some of the dances I learnt, such as conflicting versions of floor pattern and armline. This was frustrating and reinforced the difficulties in trying to establish any sort of universal movement code for English Morris dancers. An ethnographer is sometimes forced then, to use her own interpretative skills to understand such subjectivity and process the various strands of activity that comprise a community’s behaviour.

Geertz’s theory came to mind when the folk dancers spoke about the steps used in a dance or the relationship these steps have with other dances and the history of the tradition of the dance forms. The language they used referred to physical or emotional experiences. For example a member of the Red Leicester Morris

Men described the team's dance style as a mixture of grace, strength and "attitude" (Pete Johnson, 2003). For Johnson, "attitude" is the ability to fully attack a movement with the required force and untamed power. Attitude also describes a sense of pride in the Morris dance as a virile form that demands great physical prowess. He argues that a woman cannot achieve the same effects of vigour and strength and is unlikely to embody this degree of attitude. These robust movements often appear within phrases that include more delicate, intricate steps and complex arm movements. It is this meeting of punchier, aggressive movement with the precision of footwork and gesture that Johnson identifies as the gracefulness and elegance of the Morris form.

It can be argued that Johnson's ideas of Morris grace and strength share similarities with ballet, in that a ballet dancer requires the kind of attack described as Morris "attitude," but is tempered by extreme control in order to achieve the grace and delicacy that characterises ballet. Participating in a Morris dance rehearsal was the best way to try and understand attitude and how the dancers achieved it, as my body was attempting to create the shapes and experience the dynamics by carrying out a movement from an understanding of its inner motivations. When watching the dance I could see and appreciate attitude, but as a researcher, however, I found it difficult to experience what it was like to try and create this quality or communicate what is essentially a code of behaviour within the Morris dance community. I was attempting to identify a quality that is bound up with masculine pride and solidarity and thus, is an established and invisible code understood by the Morris men themselves. In my

analysis of attitude I endeavoured to make this code visible or determine what Geertz refers to as the “thick description”.

Geertz argues that individual behaviour within a society or culture should be thoroughly investigated in order for the researcher to understand what is going on between its members. It is here that he introduces the term “thick description” (1973, p.6), an expression originally coined by the Oxford philosopher and specialist in human behaviour, Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976). The “thick description” is the ethnographer’s analysis of the codes of behaviour as social/cultural signs that operate within the community studied and which may differ from those that are familiar to the researcher. For example, only those inside the culture can differentiate between what is a voluntary or involuntary gesture or movement. Geertz illustrates this notion with the example of a “boy’s wink” and the different ways in which the wink as a sign can be read according to social or even private codes (1973, pp.6-7).

Geertz compares the difference between two boys both contracting the right eye – one is a genuine wink, whilst the other is merely a twitch. The difference is vital and could not be easily detected, for example, in a photograph. The winker is communicating a message in a precise way through a socially established code available only to the users of that code. The wink is deliberate, aimed at someone in particular, charged with conveying a particular message. Geertz goes on to mention a third boy who parodies the wink “practising a burlesque of a friend faking a wink to deceive an innocent into thinking conspiracy is in motion” (1973, p.7). Somewhere between the “thin description” to use Gilbert Ryle’s

terminology of what the winker, twitcher or parodist are actually doing, and the “thick description” of the meaning behind this activity of winking is where the object of ethnography lies.

For Geertz, this is important as he believes that an ethnographer's deeper social understanding of such signs will open and increase the dialogue among different cultures. He defines culture as a public practice and notes that it is the development of shared systems of meanings which produce culture. These systems are the collective property of a particular people. When the beliefs, actions or movements of a people from a foreign culture are not understood, there is a “lack of familiarity with the imaginative universe within which their acts are signs” (1973, p.13).

The Old ‘Oss ceremony in Padstow, Cornwall, which is re-enacted every year on May 1<sup>st</sup> attracts local people, but also a great many tourists who are not familiar with the ceremony’s ancient customs. The hobby-horse performing in the ceremony manhandles people who are bystanders watching the event. He dances through the streets, approaching random women and throwing his ‘skirt’ over them. Under ordinary circumstances, this is a violation of social codes, but in the context of the May Day festivities, for those who are familiar with the ritual it is a token of good luck and a symbol of fertility. However, for the tourists, or outsiders to the festival, this ritual could seem threatening, unpleasant or even terrifying. The lucky ‘victims’ may not realise that the bawdy behaviour is the re-enactment of an old English Morris dance custom.

## **Embodiment**

The researcher's wholehearted participation in the researched helps towards gaining insight into a community's systems of belief and structures, it also leads to various degrees of embodiment. The embodiment of unfamiliar movement is a complex process and as Valerie Preston-Dunlop suggests, involves more than merely learning steps, gestures and actions: "Embodiment of movement involves the whole person, a person conscious of being a living body, living that experience, giving intention to the movement material. It involves perceiving oneself in the space and hearing one's sound, with kinaesthetic awareness of creating and controlling the movement" (Preston-Dunlop, 2002, p.7).

Sally Ann Ness (in Thomas and Ahmed, 2004, pp.123-144) argues that embodied research can generate new information about the cultural aspects of movement, and that embodied practice can reveal culture through dance not as a "simple present, perfect and definite reality, but in terms of a present understood in relation to both past oppositions and instances, and to future temporal realities and continuities" (p.138). According to Ness then, culture and by extension dance, are not fixed in time and space. Culture in relation to movement can be a means of gaining access to past discourses. This concept will be discussed later in the thesis in order to examine the extent to which Bintley uses elements of the English Morris dance culture to reinforce his status as a quintessentially English choreographer.

As we have seen from the example of the Cornish Old 'Oss hobby-horse (p.25), a dance can embody specific socio-cultural, customs and practices. By participating in this dance on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2003, I experienced this local culture, learning more about the community's beliefs, actions and movements. As the Old 'Oss dance is processional in the way that it travels through the town of Padstow, the movements are relatively straightforward and are based around walking steps. This allows the hobby horse figure and the male and female dancers who follow the procession, to progress quickly through the streets. The steps progress from walking to hopping steps, and finally, to skipping, which helps to vary and increase the pace and overall dynamic of the procession. The dancers of the team also embody a collective spirit and sense of motion while performing the dance. This communal feeling is represented by Johnson's "attitude" as described on page 23.

It has been important for me to draw on the knowledge of informants from within the Morris dance community in order to gain an understanding of how the culture is embodied in the movements. As noted earlier, I chose to work with the Ravensbourne Morris Men of Kent (p.12) because the side was created in 1946 and this makes them one of the most experienced teams in the Morris dance genre. The first elected Squire of the club, Geoff Metcalf, trained with William "Merry" Kimber (1872-1961) who was both a musician and leader of the Oxford Headington Quarry Morris men. Kimber was performing with the side when Cecil Sharp visited the area in 1899 and became interested in folk song and dance after observing the team's performance ("History of the Ravensbourne Morris Men," 2006). The current Ravensbourne Morris side are carrying on the

tradition and the depth of their commitment and knowledge provided me with the information discussed in chapter three.

### **The individual researcher: Reflexivity**

The notion of reflexivity has to be considered because the observations or actions of those researching in the social system can affect the situations, systems or behaviour of the individuals they are researching (Parker in Nightingale and Cromby, 1999, p.28). Personal reflexivity involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research. The researcher cannot ignore the self when undertaking ethnographic study. Drid Williams (in Buckland, 1999, p.33) claims the investigator takes into the field an idea of the society to be studied that consists of a set of judgements and perceptions, and this was certainly the case with my own preconceptions of Morris. I expected that the movements of the Morris dancers would be awkward and clumsy and that they would not demand a finely tuned sense of control. From the trained dancer's viewpoint, use of body weight appeared to be relaxed, almost off balance at times, and the footwork seemed blunt and unsophisticated. Study with the side and the embodiment of a range of Morris steps and figures revealed that the Morris dance movements and style are complex both to acquire and to perform.

Reflexivity also involves thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed the researcher and their practices. I set out at the beginning of the practice element of the study with the idea that I would continually work with

the Morris dance genre within the staged formality of a traditional theatre framework. Yet the translation process of genuine Morris dance into such a framework revealed that the form uses space relatively informally in order to maintain close communication with the audience and I would now incorporate the dance genre into a site-specific work to encourage the close interaction with the audience, thus changing my working practices.

## **1.2 Methods used in the development of an analytical model**

### **Hungarian folk dance models**

For the purpose of analysing the movement material in this thesis, it was necessary to find a model which was suitable for a folk dance form such as English Morris dance. György Martin and Erno Pesovár (1958) studied folk dance in the Upper-Tisza region of Hungary during 1954-8 and they offer an approach to recording and observing folk dance forms within an ever-changing and developing social community. Their model is appropriate because the methods were put in place as a way of dealing with the breadth of Hungarian folk dance forms. I have found such methods useful when faced with the numerous factions and styles in English Morris dance. Structural analysis of Hungarian folk dance forms began in Hungary in the 1930s (Felföldi, 1999, p.56) when it was difficult to accurately record observations of a living and breathing folk dance. The process was perceived as a scientific problem because of the ambiguity of documentary and archive material and so methods were put in place by scholars Sándor Gönyey and László Lajtha (1937) to record, document and analyse their

observations of folk dance via film recordings, verbal descriptions and the compilation of photographic records.

### **G. Martin and E. Pesovár**

Gönyey and Lajtha's research methods were further developed by Martin and Pesovár. As mentioned in the previous section, I have found it beneficial to follow the model formulated by the Hungarian scholars Martin and Pesovár during their folk dance research in the Upper-Tisza region from 1954-8. The programme was conducted by the Work Group for Folk Dance Research within the framework of the Ethnographic Department of the Institute of Folk Education in Budapest. Research was undertaken in a region which possessed a rich repertory of dances. Their methods could be described as mandatory in relation to the various phases of field research (1958, pp.424-436) and are further summarised by László Felföldi, the Head of the Folk Dance Department at the Institute of Musicology in Budapest (in Buckland, 1999, pp.64-65).

The methods include background research into the proposed area of study. Martin and Pesovár recommend the collection of the widest range of available documentation on the subject under research. This data includes historical documents, state archives and written material from the local press (ibid). Within the context of English Morris, I have investigated historical literature on English folk dance which includes texts such as John Forrest's *History of Morris dancing 1458-1750* (1999) to which I will return later in the chapter. I have also researched into local archives on the work of the folk dance performance teams

in order to discover more about the history of these groups and their local traditions. For my research into Bintley, I consulted books including biographies of those who have acted as key influences on Bintley's artistic development - Dame Ninette De Valois (Sorley Walker, 1987) and Sir Frederick Ashton (Vaughan, 1999) along with articles on Bintley (Merret, 1994, Flatow, 1996, Boccadoro, 2000, Dromgoole, 2009) and reviews of his work.

Martin and Pesovár also selected places for research based on the intensity or presence of the dance tradition. This means finding a location/group for study that has a well documented and long history of the chosen dance tradition and in which the community also actively take part in the team's heritage (1958, pp.424-436). The Ravensbourne Morris Men of Kent fulfil this condition because they have over sixty years of experience as a performance team and are integral to their local community.

A further phase of the field research involved detailed data collection through interview techniques, direct observation of dances and the dance life in and out of a social context and the selection of key informants in the group. In addition to these core research strategies, I consider participant observation to be a vital method of study because of the importance of embodied information to the researcher. During the research I visited the Ravensbourne Morris Men twice a week to attend rehearsals and social gatherings and performances.

Further methods include documenting through video recording. This includes filming rehearsals and local events or performances. Martin and Pesovár

advocate the importance of recording the same dance twice in order to distinguish between the repertory and the cases of improvisation or creativity (ibid), something that I have found particularly relevant when trying to distinguish between a dancer's use of authentic steps or movements and how their individual style of performance may affect them.

Another key factor was supplementary research such as the recording of verbal comments from the community under investigation to reveal any new information. I have built up a close network of informants within the Morris dance community and found that asking many different Morris men the same question could help to verify the data and also reveal new insights into other areas of the dance practice.

### **Lionel Bacon's *A handbook of Morris dances* (1974)**

Aspects of the Morris dance form have already been recorded and categorised in the motif catalogue compiled by the twentieth century Morris dancer, Lionel Bacon. Bacon's handbook is used as a guide to performing popular Morris dances among the majority of English Morris sides (Burgess, interview 2003a). Bacon was involved in several Morris dance teams in the early half of the twentieth century. A founder of the Winchester Morris Men in 1953, he was also a member of the Cambridge Morris Men (having been admitted in 1932), and of three other teams: The Travelling Morris, London Pride Morris Men and the Whitchurch Morris Men. His experience as a dancer is well respected in Morris circles, and provided the necessary practical and contextual knowledge for the

handbook. Bacon has broken down Morris dance movements into five categories or movement motifs **(1) Figures**, such as the grand chain in which the dancers weave in and out in a circle in a clockwise direction. **(2) Steps**, such as the caper which is an exaggerated jump from one foot to the other, often used in Cotswold Morris dance to begin, connect, or end figures; in some dances a series of ‘travelling capers’ is used as one kind of stepping. **(3) Arm movements**, such as the ‘down and up,’ whereby the arms are swung down by the sides and then flung up into the air. **(4) Hand-clapping** such as the ‘clap under left knee,’ in which the dancer raises his left knee and claps his hands together underneath it. **(5) Stick-striking**, such as the ‘partners strike butts,’ in which each partner strikes the base of the other partner’s stick (see Appendix: fig. A and fig. B for a full list of categories and motifs, pp.224-225).

Bacon’s *A handbook of Morris dances* (1974) or as it is affectionately known in the Morris dance community ‘the black book’ of dances, is an important background source of information because it records a range of Cotswold Morris dances. Despite the extensive research of folklorist Cecil Sharp, whose legacy will be discussed in detail on pages 40-43, the folk dance performance teams on which I focus in this thesis rarely draw on Sharp’s guides (1907, 1909, 1910, 1911 and 1912). They prefer instead to use Bacon’s book because of his knowledge and practical experience as a Morris dance performer and musician (Johnson, 2003). His key or glossary of steps is well-recognised across the folk dance community.

Although Bacon provides tools for the structural analysis of Morris dance, it is worth noting that his book could not possibly be used to show the extent to which the dances, steps, figures or movements he categorised have since been adapted by individual groups within varying regions. Although the basic steps remain the same and are recognisable even to a non-specialist audience, subtle variations can emerge that affect the overall look of a dance or its style.

Bacon's manual is, however, a method which permits the categorisation and recognition of the authentic movement motifs in folk dance. Such a method will be applied to analyse parallels between Bintley's choreography and the authentic folk dance style. As Bacon's manual does not show how a dance, step or movement may have undergone variations over time, I also use the findings gathered from my participant-observation to compare Bintley's choice of folk-dance-inspired steps with their traditional counterparts. For instance, the traditional grand chain (see p.33) in its standard form is clearly evident in *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance, but there are other figures/movements in the dance which fall outside the codified system. For example, there is a phrase when one dancer climbs onto the knee of his partner, and this is most probably Bintley's own invention because I have found no record of this particular movement either in Bacon's manual or in my own investigation of Morris dance. Since Bintley adapts Morris for his own creative practice and stages it theatrically, it is not surprising to find such anomalies in his choreography.

### **Laban's theories of movement and space**

Rudolph Laban is a major figure in dance theory and his work has been further developed by scholars including Valerie Preston-Dunlop (2002) and Rosemary Brandt (in Preston Dunlop, 1998, p.275). Laban's systematic description of qualitative change in movement documented through his theories of effort and shape (1971) allow the researcher to examine discrete movements and their dynamic qualities. His effort theory provides terminology when analysing the changes and variations in the use of body weight which is useful when comparing folk dancers and classical ballet dancers performing folk movements. In particular, the attention to the strength and control required to perform a Morris dance movement and the changes in the flow of the movement or the impulse to move.

Flow can be seen as continuous change within a range from free to bound. The psychoanalyst Judith Kestenberg has developed three sets of characteristics or attributes as a way of defining how the flow quality changes (in Dell, 1970, pp.16-17). The first attribute is intensity or the relative degree of concentration in the production of a quality (p.16). There are three degrees of intensity: extreme or high, middle, and neutral. The second attribute is the amount of change that appears in the continuity of flow. If there are many changes in the flow quality, it is characterised as "fluctuating" (p.17). If the quality of flow remains the same over a period of time, it is described as "even". The third attribute is the duration of change of the flow quality as in abrupt or gradual (ibid).

Vera Maletic takes the idea of dynamic change in movement quality further in her claim that the theory of natural affinities shows that certain dynamic qualities cluster together naturally (1987). For instance, strength, speed, directness and controlled flow tend to cluster together. Similarly, qualities of lightness, free flow, indirection in space and slowing down in time tend to cluster. Preston Dunlop suggests that crossing over from one natural cluster to the other requires more skill (2002, p.95). Thus, it could be argued that asking a ballet dancer to adapt to the style of a Morris dancer, and vice versa, is asking him/her to deliberately change their natural affinity to the quality of the movement. A low centre of gravity and grounded body weight is required for Morris dancing. In addition, the flexed feet and relaxed shoulder girdle of an English Morris dancer produces the quality of bound flow which allows the dancer to move with force. In contrast the ballet dancer, with a high centre of gravity and pointed feet engenders a quality of free flow which allows the dancer to move with an appearance of weightlessness. Further analysis of the movement qualities required to perform Morris dance can be found in chapter four of the thesis.

### **1.3 Approach to practice based research methods**

As established earlier (p.10), approaches to the practice-based element of my research took the form of the creation of a short dance for eight women based on the *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* section from Bintley's *Still Life at the Penguin Café*. I set out to create a more authentically 'Morris' version of Bintley's dance. In preparation for the performance of the dance, which I entitled *Still Life at the Folk Café*, I conducted a series of one and a half hour Morris

dance workshops, followed by rehearsal sessions between November 2005- May 2006. The main aim of the workshops was to take the traditional Cotswold Morris dance form I had studied during my ethnographic research and explore the extent to which it could be translated into a theatrical presentation. The dancers who took part in the study had varied backgrounds in dance. I chose to work with women because I wanted to investigate the extent to which an all-female, rather than a more traditional all-male side, affected the qualities of the performance. I also wanted to investigate whether it was possible to create a dance for the theatre that drew mainly on the traditional English Morris steps and figures. Since *Still Life at the Folk Café* was designed to be performed under conditions that approximated the theatrical nature of Bintley's work, it was performed on May 18, 2006 in the Studio Theatre at Laban, London.

Having tested *Still Life at the Folk Café* under theatrical conditions, I wanted to investigate how the dancers who took part in the production and its process would respond when taught by the authentic Morris men, and I organised a workshop in September 2006 with the Ravensbourne Morris dance team in order to further explore the questions raised by the practice. My own participation in the dance form ensured that I could act as a conduit between both types of dancers.<sup>1</sup>

Estelle Barrett claims that the innovative and critical potential of practice-based research lies in its “capacity to generate personally situated knowledge” and new ways of “modelling and externalising such knowledge” while revealing

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<sup>1</sup> DVD recordings of the performance, along with footage from my ethnographic research, practice-based workshops and the workshop conducted with the Ravensbourne Morris men form part of the appendices to this thesis.

philosophical and social and cultural contexts for the application of “knowledge outcomes” (2007, p.2). The little that there is in the way of guidelines is perhaps recognition of the fact that it is neither practical nor feasible to create prescriptive guidelines for practice-based research. It has been helpful, however, to base the research methods I employ for my workshops and demonstration on information delivered at the *Practice as research in performance* (PARIP) 2001 symposium which took place at the University of Bristol. This information stresses the importance of documentation throughout practice-based research in the form of note taking and video recording. As a result of the symposium, PARIP have published a list of guidelines that stress the need to develop modes/examples of documentation appropriate to practice as research and have established networks of people who are redefining the boundaries (2001). Although the information suggested at the symposium was some time ago, the methods prove to be continuously practical.

An essential paper published by PARIP includes Caroline Rye’s multi-viewpoint approach to performance documentation (2003, pp.115-123). Rye, a Research Associate with the PARIP project claims that issues of documentation are of critical concern to the question of practice as research in performance for two paradoxical reasons. First, because the research maybe concerned with those qualities of the live encounter and the production of embodied knowledge which, by definition, cannot be embedded, reproduced or demonstrated in any recorded document. Second, more pragmatically, to give the research a life beyond its original live manifestation, and thus be available to a broader research community, Rye advocates the importance of recording footage on to DVD

because of the disk's ability to handle a variety of types of data, not just video, sounds and images (ibid). For this reason I have recorded my ethnographic and practice-based research on mini DV cam which permits me to store video frames digitally, so that I can access them with frame accuracy when presenting my research.

Rye also offers practical tips on shooting live performances, such as keeping the camera static, using a wide focus lens and not changing this focus, in order to record the performance from a static audience perspective. She also stresses the importance of saving the rushes as every moment videoed has the potential for later interest/use. In my capacity as a news and programmes journalist for the BBC, I have acquired a good knowledge of shooting on DV cam and have developed production skills that I have applied to the recording, documenting and filming of my field research. Rye's suggestions help to confirm my existing practice.

#### **1.4 An overview of historical figures concerned with English folk dance**

##### **Mary Neal (1860-1944) and Cecil Sharp (1859-1924)**

The early twentieth century folk dance revival in England was initiated by Mary Neal, the founder of the Esperance Girls' Club. After hearing about the deprivation and unwholesome conditions under which working class people in London were living at the time, Neal set up the club for working class girls in 1905 and established the Maison Esperance, where socially disadvantaged

women worked as tailors but in improved conditions (Dowling, 2000). The increase in urbanisation during the late nineteenth century brought with it a new physical and social environment in Britain (Brehony, 2003, pp.87-106). The replacement of the country by the town as the dwelling place of the majority of the population created increasing class divisions, social polarisation and spatial segregation (ibid). Industrialisation, increased overcrowding in the cities and exploitation of the workers who came from the country in search of a better life, led to a growing gap between the rich and poor (ibid). Initiatives were put in place to improve the social conditions and bridge this gap by those such as the socially active or philanthropic Neal (ibid).

Neal used the, as yet unpublished, work of the folklorist Cecil Sharp in order to teach traditional dances to the members of the Esperance Girls' Club. They, in turn, could teach the dances in schools and clubs to ensure the continuation of the tradition and help improve the education, social status and welfare of the poor. Sharp was delighted with this practice. He believed that “by a spiritual sixth sense, these working girls would reclaim their lost inheritance” (in Dowling, 2000). However, it would appear Neal’s inclination to use folk dance as a tool for social improvement ultimately led to Sharp breaking with Neal in 1909. He did not agree with what he considered to be her sacrifice of the purity of the form for its more spirited execution by the young women in the cause of social regeneration (Brehony, 2003, pp.87-106). Neal accused Sharp of embalming the dances as museum pieces, thereby stifling their spontaneity and liveliness (Sutton, 2000). Sutton offers insight into the relationship between Neal and Sharp, claiming they were two extremely strong-willed individuals, both

accustomed to exercising leadership, and not overly tolerant of views that differed from their own. Moreover, Neal believed in widening the access to English folk dance, even at the cost of some lowering of standards, while Sharp wanted to ensure excellence, even if that meant some degree of exclusivity (ibid). This study in some respects encounters the same debates that Neal and Sharp came across, namely the dichotomy between form and content, spirit and technique, tradition and modernity and inclusivity and exclusivity.

The Esperance Club became a feminist centre and a haven for suffragettes such as Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Annie Kenney (Brehony, 2003, pp.87-106). Sharp went on to found the English Folk Dance Society in 1911. He recruited athletic young men and women from universities and teacher training colleges to perform and teach the traditional dances he had collected from across England (Sutton, 2000). Sharp preferred to align the dance form with the elite and middle class, and steer it away from Neal's socio-political ambitions to improve the conditions of raw, uneducated, working class girls.

Sharp approached Morris dance from the opposite end of the spectrum to Neal. He travelled around England collecting dances, which he recorded and published in five volumes of work (1907, 1909, 1910, 1911 and 1912).<sup>2</sup> Many of England's traditional dances and music owe their continuing existence to his notation in the form of these *Morris Books*, although as discussed earlier (p.33) the folk dance performance teams on which I focus in this thesis rarely draw on Sharp's guides.

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<sup>2</sup> The only biography written about Sharp (Strangways, 1933) is hagiographical in tone and focuses on factual information about his life and anthropological studies.

Sharp's research belongs to the older positivist approach and as discussed on page 17, in this form of research, objective research methods are used, such as the collection of documentary evidence to fuel and inform an idea of a preconceived truth. Thus, Sharp's research gives an incomplete view of the Morris dance community. He did not embody the culture he was trying to preserve and remained, therefore, in the position of an 'outsider'. Since he did not enter physically or psychologically into the dances and songs he collected or investigate the cultural context of the song and dance forms he studied, it is unlikely he could provide a well-rounded picture or narrative of those dance forms.

In contrast to Sharp, Franz Boas (1858-1942), the so-called founder of modern anthropology, and best-known for his ethnographic research into the Kwakiutl Indians from Northern Vancouver (Stocking, 1982, pp.83-86), claimed that everything was important to the study of a culture. Boas added cultural relativism to the existing body of anthropological theory and believed in historical particularism. Cultural relativism pointed out that the differences in people were the results of historical, social and geographic conditions and all populations had a complete and equally developed culture (Boas, 1929, pp.198-236). Historical particularism deals with each culture as having a unique history and teaches that it should not be assumed that universal laws govern the ways in which cultures operate (ibid).

Unlike Boas, Sharp's work does not respect the social differences and individuality of the communities he studied. His lack of cultural sensitivity has

led to mistrust of his work within folk dance circles (Ravensbourne Morris Men; Red Leicester Morris Men). The flaws in Sharp's research are attributed to the idea that, because he was an outsider, his informants gave him selective information about their dances. One possible reason for this is that the groups were trying to protect the privacy of their individuality and local traditions. The sides are proud of their local traditions and want to keep them alive, and yet, at the same time, want to retain their integrity. These sentiments can be summarised in the words of Morris man Johnson, cited earlier (p.23) when he claims: "The whole point of our side's existence is to maintain the local tradition through performance, so that a unique element of our national heritage is not lost" (2003).

As a result of his formal data collection, Sharp wanted to preserve the dances untainted, or in other words, maintain them in a static form as handed to him by his informants. In this way, a dance "was an expression of their enthusiasms, based on the incidents of a common life and common work" (Sharp as cited in Dowling, 2000). However, during my research, I found that local performance teams encourage change through a continuation of active practice. It is against Morris dance tradition to record dances (Ravensbourne Morris Men, 2003). The sides prefer to pass the dances on verbally to other group members and to encourage progressive development. It is easy to criticise Sharp's method of documentation, however we must consider the context of pre-World War I England, the period during which he carried out his research. It was a time of political unrest, nationalist zeal and romanticism across Europe, and with this came pride in domestic and social traditions. The 1914-1918 war did considerable damage to the Morris dance tradition. Many men who were

enthusiastic Morris dancers went off to war and never returned. In the post-war climate, those who did return home had other financial and psychological concerns, and English Morris dance teams found it hard to attract or retain new members (Adams, 2009).

Neal tended towards the post-positivist methods of enquiry (see p.17) because she learnt from the traditional dancers who practised the folk dance forms. They passed on both the steps and the “spirit of the dance” - an energy derived from local pride in the movement tradition (Dowling, 2000) or what Johnson calls “attitude” (p.23). It is the spirit and individuality of a dance that the Morris communities are keen to keep alive as part of their heritage (Johnson, 2003). The idea of spirit in relation to Neal’s understanding of it has not changed over the years. This study is an extension of Neal’s original ideology that folk dance is a rich source of creativity and inspiration for participatory arts practice.

Although Sharp has his critics (Harker, 1985), this study has revealed that dance practitioners should endeavour to maintain the integrity of the Morris dance form. Efforts have been made to reconcile Neal and Sharp’s work. The Mary Neal project which is led by her great, great niece, Lucy Neal endeavours to celebrate Neal’s work whilst also encouraging a celebratory programme of projects and dance events and a learning programme within primary schools. The creation of the web site [www.maryneal.org](http://www.maryneal.org) has been designed to connect the history of the Mary Neal story to a continuum of participatory arts practice. The online archive is rich with audio, photographs, letters and excerpts from Neal’s autobiography. Lucy Neal also told the story of her great, great aunt in a

documentary broadcast on 2 November 2007 on BBC Radio 4. On 7 February 2009, 'Mary Neal day' was held at Cecil Sharp House, the home of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, in which Lucy Neal officially handed over her aunt's personal papers to the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library. The day was a historic reconciliation between Neal and Sharp. An excerpt from Neal's autobiography reveals that she believed it was Sharp's opposition to the emancipation of women that created the real division between them (1937, p.168).

The Mary Neal project has opened up debate about Neal, Sharp and folk revivalism, and confirms the importance of recognising the ever-changing nature of the English folk dance practice. It can be suggested that the evolution of English folk dance can be partly attributed to individual dancers themselves and their inventiveness. This was entirely the case with The Singleton Cloggers with whom I carried out a period of research in 2004. This group is a North West of England traditional Lancashire mixed clog and Morris dancing team founded in 1949. It specialises in local dances, many of which come from the village of Singleton in Lancashire and are named after local personalities and land marks. The team is of central importance to the local community and includes a wide age range from seven-year-olds to men and women in their seventies.

In addition to the traditional dances, the team's repertory includes several which were created in the North West region in the 1990s. These newer dances have already been affected by varying teaching methods and personal styles. A member of the Singleton Cloggers who had danced with several teams in the

Singleton area over the years spoke of a dance performed in the region which he knows to have at least three variations. This is an indication that even dances created as recently as the 1990s are being constantly altered, reworked and adapted. The variation of age, gender and ability in the team, suggest that it has a high degree of sociability and is less intent on the idea of authenticity. This is why, perhaps, that members of the team are more willing to embrace change and new influences. The older dancers in the group are pleased that the dance form is evolving, but are also keen that the form retains the spirit of the Lancashire clog dance. The openness to change and flexible approach amongst this mixed team contrasts with the all male Ravensbourne Morris side. This team pay more attention to preserving the traditional character of steps or arm movements and place less emphasis on individual invention. In restricting Morris dance both from the point of view of gender participation and creative engagement they demonstrate a concern with retaining as authentic a Morris form as possible.

### **John Forrest**

As discussed earlier (p.30), I have looked at historical literature on English folk dance. A Professor of Anthropology at the State University of New York (1990-present day), Forrest has examined the history of Morris dancing (1999), as well as collecting and listing documentary and literary references to the dance form since 1458. Forrest's detailed research has earned respect in the English folk dance tradition (Corrsin, 2002, pp.105-106) and it has been, therefore, highly beneficial to this thesis. Forrest establishes that Morris dancing has no single point of origin, although he confirms the year 1458 as the earliest time when

there was reference to a dance called 'Morris' (1999, p.47). However, between 1458 and 1890, there is hardly any information available and this nearly 500 year gap in the history and documentation of Morris dance may be explained in terms of the domination of the Church. Although Church officials were early supporters of Morris dance, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they attempted to suppress its popularity because they associated the dance form with pagan ritual (1999, p.117). Morris dance was seen by the Church as devilish, sexual and heathen (p.189).

Forrest's book focuses purely on documented evidence such as references to Morris dance in fictional novels, poems and plays as well as personal letters from Morris dance performers, political speeches, social diaries and event calendars. Forrest analyses this wealth of evidence and claims that Morris dancing does not in fact originate in pagan, pre-Christian rituals, but that the Morris traditions instead belong to the wider area of English social customs and public celebrations. Particularly relevant to my research is Forrest's claim that the Morris form itself embodied ideas from sixteenth century country dances and, for example, adopted the general style of the longways set, which uses six or eight dancers (1999, pp.317-318). He also noted that formal principles of court and ballroom dance were passed to Morris dance in the seventeenth century. He demonstrates that Morris dance has inherited characteristics of the social dance forms used by the sixteenth and seventeenth century aristocracy including figures such as the grand chain (cited on p.33). Forrest's work dispels the myth that the Morris dance form is solely attributed to a lower social bracket and is merely a physical expression of a primitive pagan ritual.

In today's world, the pagan associations for Morris dance have become more symbolic with the re-enactment of festivals such as May Day. Such festivals attempt to recapture the social context of the past. The day now has political connotations with Labour Day, commemorating the historic struggle of working people throughout the world. Best known as International Workers' Day, May Day is devoted to celebrations of labour and workers, and is often associated with socialist, communist, and anarchist marches. It is important to acknowledge these influences when exploring Bintley's use of English folk dance and to consider whether or not he has drawn from the pagan symbolism associated with the dance form or its socialist and political associations.

From the research carried out, it would appear Bintley has used certain characters associated with paganism in his work. For instance, in *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance, the flea represents the traditional Morris dance fool. The fool is seen as a mischief-maker and is sometimes used as a symbol for the devil. In Bintley's dance, the flea is playful, teasing her fellow dancers and disrupting the dance. However, it could also be argued that she is causing artistic anarchy by disturbing the dance and thereby inciting a choreographic riot. In this respect Bintley has been influenced by pagan associations with social anarchy and rebellion.

### **Chris Bearman**

Further research into the history of English folk dance and song has been conducted by the social historian, Chris Bearman. Bearman completed a PhD

thesis in 2001, entitled *The English folk music movement 1898-1914*. His work is not of particular relevance to my research as it focuses predominantly on the English folk music movement as the most important influence on English cultural life in the years immediately before 1914. However in an article exploring the demography of Cecil Sharp's Somerset Folk singers (2000, pp. 751-775), Bearman argues that historical understanding of the folk music movement and modern appreciation of the material have been hampered by a Marxist orthodoxy which sees folk music as the cultural property of the working class and which attempts to discredit the folk music collectors, particularly Cecil Sharp (ibid).

Bearman summarises the trends in scholarship and reflects on the criticism that took place of Sharp's work between the years 1965-1975 (p.753). He employs the first biographical survey of a large group of folk singers and claims that Sharp collected folk song from a fairly wide social range, thus dismissing a more Marxist interpretation that folk song belongs to and should only be performed by the rural proletariat (p.774). The question of the social status of English folk singers can be extended to include English folk dancers. This class association with folk or rural society is crucial in explaining why English folk dance is portrayed in ballets as the dance of the rustics or working classes. It could be assumed that some choreographers who use folk-inspired material want to tap into a simple, cultural ideal of England in order to parody or represent a way of life.

## **Theresa Buckland**

The anthropologist Theresa Buckland is one of the few dance specialists and the most recent scholar to address English folk dance and to publish research into the English folk dance tradition. Her article on the Britannia Coconut Dancers from Bacup in Lancashire (2001, pp.49-60) offers an insight into the perspective of this male team as they responded to researchers collecting data as part of the English dance revival movement (1929). Buckland demonstrates how reluctant the team was to share information about their specific dances with the English Folk Dance Society. There was concern that if there was too much exposure of their practice, stylistic principles would be taught inaccurately in other parts of Britain (2001, p.53). Information about the side's history can be found on their official web site [www.coconutters.co.uk](http://www.coconutters.co.uk).

According to Buckland, the members of the team wanted their folk dance form to remain a local tradition and to retain control over how the dances are performed. This resistance to research is not representative of the whole folk dance community, but is an indication of the protectionism that sometimes surrounds the folk dance culture. Such reluctance to impart information about a dance form would make it harder for a choreographer like Bintley to access insider information or specialist archival resources, and, therefore, to gain insight into folk dance circles. I also asked the Britannia Coconut Dancers if I could conduct some research with them, but was refused by the team because they did not want their dances or performance style recorded or discussed in either textual form or on video.

Having introduced the methodological framework for the thesis, the study now moves to a discussion on the concept of Englishness and gives an overview of Bintley's career, ideological inheritance and place in the English ballet tradition. The next chapter also includes a summary of his creative process.

## **Chapter two**

### **David Bintley: Influences, ideological inheritance and the preservation of an 'English' tradition**

Following the discussion of the methods involved in the development of an analytical model for the study, chapter two introduces the concept of 'Englishness' and explores the disparity surrounding ideas of an English identity. It also explores the notion of Englishness in relation to David Bintley's ideology and choreographic language and discusses the importance of English folk dance in relation to what has come to be known as the English ballet tradition.

#### **2.1 The concept of Englishness**

What does it mean to be English? What are the national and cultural qualities that we identify with Englishness? England is the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, the Protestant Church of England and the world's first parliamentary democracy. However to offer a definition of the English identity is problematic. It is not purely a nationhood of gentlemen with stiff upper lips playing cricket on the green. England also has a vibrant folk culture, which could be described as a sub-category of Englishness. Folk culture is associated with localised lifestyles, a strong sense of community and an ideology handed down through the generations via an oral tradition (Riedl, 1966, pp.557-563). It is dependent on a sense of place and if any elements of the folk culture are removed or imitated by anyone outside of this location, it will somehow carry with it connotations of its original home.

Prior to a definition of English ballet, I want to discuss further the complexity of defining the essence of Englishness. This concept of a specific type of nationalism, as noted above, is difficult to pin down, as the state of being English in the twenty-first century must be both inclusive of a heterogeneous population and differentiated from the idea of being British. Britishness is often regarded in imperialistic or colonialist terms and conjures up images of an all-consuming British Empire. With the Welsh and Scottish gaining autonomy in 1999, Scottish and Welsh nationals have become even more distinct from Englishness (Paxman, 1999, p.vii). Englishness has been described as both nowhere and everywhere, constantly changing, yet essentially the same (Sutton, 2000). Napoleon famously described the English as “a nation of shopkeepers” and the English are often portrayed in films as a “stoical, homely, quiet, disciplined, self-denying, kindly, honourable and dignified people who would infinitely rather be tending their gardens than defending the world against a fascist tyranny” (Paxman, 1999, p.3). Englishness can be a concept, a feeling, or a state of mind.

Renowned for his wartime celebration of Englishness, *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941), George Orwell painted a picture of an England that corresponded “to the reality of the lives of most of its citizens” describing a place of “Lancashire clogs, smoky towns, crude language and lines outside labour exchanges” (Paxman, 1999, p.8). Unlike the upper and ruling classes of England, Orwell was hostile to the idea of the grandness of empire and the trappings of privilege, advocating rather a plain style of living. Writing in the tradition of literary social commentators such as the author Charles Dickens, he aimed to reach the ordinary people (Crick, 1980, p.254).

The late academic and former key adviser on citizenship to the Department for Education, Sir Bernard Crick argues that Orwell is quintessentially English in his Protestant conscience, despite the fact he was an unbeliever. By this reference to Protestantism, Crick implies that Orwell's sense of faith is a belief in a fair-minded work ethic and a climate of equality and respect for all workers. Orwell was angered by social injustice and the prevailing lack of concern for the plight of the poor (Crick, 1980, p.xix). It could be argued then that the liberal conditions of freedom of speech and a sense of social justice are endemic in the idea of Englishness. For Orwell, however, Englishness is more than a utopian ideal of an empowered population, the concept of Englishness has the power to transform and adapt itself through time because as he writes, "there is something in it that persists, as in a living creature" (1941, p.11). In his 1941 essay, *England your England*, Orwell states that English national characteristics are difficult to define, but he offers "generalisations" amongst which is the claim "that the English are not gifted artistically" (1941, p.12). It is noticeable that Orwell ignores English folk song and dance as an example of artistic accomplishment and even in contemporary society English folk song and dance forms are rarely prized as an example of the nation's artistry. In his essay Orwell also claims that painting and sculpture have never flourished in England as they have in France, and adds that the English "are not as musical as the Germans or Italians" (ibid).

However, it was through music that further interpretations of a concept of Englishness have been embodied with the English pastoral music movement of the early twentieth century. Composers such as Ralph Vaughan Williams, George Butterworth and Edward Elgar offered a romanticised view of a pastoral

England. Through their social and creative sensibilities, such composers attempted to reconnect the nation with a folk and pastoral history and through their musical contribution to raise awareness of a national consciousness or concept of a social identity. In the early twentieth century, as far as music was concerned, England lagged behind the rest of Europe and was even called “das land ohne musik,” or a land without music (Schmitz, 1914). At this point in history, music was dominated by Germany, and the work of composers such as Beethoven and Brahms. Unlike other European nations, the English did not cherish or promote their musical or dance traditions. It was in this context that folk song and dance enthusiasts such as Cecil Sharp began seeking out and propagating traditional English folk music and dance as a way to regenerate the past.

By 1914, folk-inspired melodies began to influence the high art sphere of English classical music, and at the same time folk songs and dances were gaining a foothold in the educational domain because they were taught as part of the school curriculum (Sutton, 2000). Despite these revivalist tactics, folk song and dance have remained of minority interest and are often scorned by the cultural establishment. For Sutton, this failure may be linked to confusion surrounding the English national identity (2000). He questions if England is too diverse in its social fabric to have a common cultural identity. Perhaps it is more likely to be the case that English identity is so fluid that it is impossible to capture or identify a single version of it within our ever more hybridised society. Nationalism is now likely to be “individualistic, ironic, solipsistic, concerned as much with cities and regions as with counties and countries” (Paxman, 1999, p.265). English folk song

and dance is just one part of a myriad of ethnic influences that includes not only the relatively indigenous Scottish and Irish traditions but also Asian and African cultural inheritances.

In his study of the British symphony from 1914-1945, Jürgen Schaarwächter describes some English composers as “traditionalists” (as cited in Anderson, 1996, p.38). These included Ralph Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten, both of whom wrote music inspired by pastoral images. As I mentioned earlier (p.54) Orwell did not comment on the English pastoral revival in music, but did point out that part of what is distinctive and recognisable about the English civilisation, is that it is somehow bound up with images of “winding roads” and “green fields” as well as with “the clatter of clogs in the Lancashire mill towns” and “old maids hiking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn morning” (1941, p.10-11). He refers to these as “characteristic fragments, of the English scene” (p.10). Thus, it is not surprising that in response to the increasing dominance of European music, composers such as Vaughan Williams and Britten wrote music that echoed ideas of the pastoral, perhaps wanting to re-establish a vision of peace for the future by using such “characteristic fragments” of the past.

Vaughan Williams’s famous composition, *The Lark Ascending* (1914) uses the sounds of the woodwinds, led by the flute and clarinet, as well as the solo violin to resemble bird-like calls which invoke images of the freshness and purity of the natural world and the English countryside. Following the feeling of barrenness and waste which stifled a post-World War I England, *The Lark Ascending* offers

a promise of a brighter and more fertile future, while encouraging the listener to remember the past and to take pride in England's musical heritage. Vaughan Williams himself describes the composition as "an English landscape transcribed into musical terms" ("Lark ascends to top classics poll," 2006).

Vaughan Williams's music also expressed a regard for folk music. A dedicated musicologist, he collected and catalogued over 800 English folk songs from 1903 (Kennedy, 1992, p.29). Notably the same year Sharp embarked on his process of data collection. Vaughan Williams also edited the new *English Hymnal* of 1906, to which he added several new hymns of his own (Heffer, 2000, p.28). He had a more practical use for his folk song collection and adapted 43 of the traditional tunes to use in the 1906 hymnal (Onderdonk, 2003 p.104). He also drew on the traditional songs collected by Sharp when setting hymn texts and other religious verse to music. Onderdonk (ibid) argues that the roots of Vaughan Williams's connection with folk song derive from the humanitarian dimensions of his nationalism rather than his musical or stylistic goals. His transformation of folk song was not just about trying to develop a national style of music, but rather about establishing a common English heritage (Onderdonk, 2003, p.104). Vaughan Williams acknowledged that the composer had to "make his art an expression of the whole life of the community" (as cited in Kennedy, 1992, p.37).

Aligning folk music with English Protestantism also imbued the music with a sense of social morality and righteousness, ideals that are associated with a traditional English way of life. Vaughan Williams envisaged that the use of folk

song in church services would forge connections and break down barriers between social classes and lead to a shared feeling of social consciousness (Heffer, 2000, p.29). It should be pointed out that Vaughan Williams's wife described him as a "cheerful agnostic" (1964, p.29), so it would appear that a profound spiritual mission was not part of his agenda. Thus, for Vaughan Williams, folk song could provide a shared language and a shared tradition that worked across class divides.

Vaughan Williams's regard for folk song is evident in compositions such as *The Lark Ascending* (1914) and *A Pastoral Symphony* (1921). The violin is prominent in both works. It is interesting to note that in Morris dance the unornamented sound of the violin has become a motif employed by English Morris dance musicians as it compliments the sound of the melodeon or accordion (Johnson, 2003). It is Vaughan Williams's ability to evoke images of the natural world and combine these images with religious sensibility that constitutes his patriotism in its subtlest form. As illustrated in his belief in the power of folk song to transcend social class, Vaughan Williams's sense of Englishness is collective and therefore defined in terms of a common cultural ancestry and shared communal experiences.

Yet establishing a collective English identity is extremely difficult, despite attempts by individuals such as Vaughan Williams, and perhaps more importantly the government. In an article exploring government patronage, national identity and national culture in England from 1939-45, Brian Foss argues that during the Second World War, the UK government wanted to

establish an idea of national identity to counteract images of Nazi Germany (1991, p.53). Thus, they identified certain key characteristics as English in order to undermine the Nazi regime. These characteristics included a belief in social justice and human rights (ibid). John Baxendale argues that the UK government's idea of the national character "amalgamated" qualities in line with what was required of the population at that time. Thus, he maintains that during the war years Englishness was connected with notions such as independence, toughness of fibre and sympathy with the underdog (1999, p.305). These qualities were bolstered by a respect for real life or fictional upper class and public school heroes with their unsentimental stiff upper lip (pp.305-307).

As discussed on pages 54-55, English national identity has also been embodied in the idea of England as a type of arcadia, the pastoral idyll of a merry green land. It is this romanticised nationalism that is often represented in English folk culture as a nostalgic perception of an English way of life. Yet the English pastoral has also been used consistently as a reaction to shifting social conditions such as war. In an article exploring the body of work Ashton created during the Second World War, Morris argues that it was the English countryside that was promoted as a reflection of stability and tranquillity in comparison to the smoky industrialisation of Germany (2008, p.170). Foss also claims that during the war the countryside became the "repository" for the country's values and standards (1991, p.52). Meanwhile, in his exploration of the pastoral vision in English art from 1820-2000, Jerrold Northrop Moore goes even further in describing the English countryside and pastoral tradition as "self-renewing" in each generation

(2007, p.16). Therefore qualities of Englishness can be reapplied in different contexts and at different periods in time.

Sonya O. Rose on the other hand argues that the countryside was misrepresented during the war years and has often been portrayed as a place “absent of politics and conflict” (2003, p.289). This is a view which maintains the countryside as locked in a “past time,” without registering or recognising that the technological revolution was also transforming the agricultural landscape. Thus the countryside, just like the town, was a place of change and social revolution. Rose maintains that there is no “one-size-fits-all” sense of Englishness and that even during the Second World War, a time of so-called national unity, there was underlying division and disparity surrounding a sense of English identity (2003, p.286).

As far as Ashton is concerned, Morris argues that in his war time ballets he responded to the government’s attempt to create a “sense of identity by promoting and idealising English characteristics” (2008, p.184). Whether it was intentional or not, he continued to depict a landscape free of conflict in his later work *La Fille Mal Gardée* (1960). As I go on to argue on page 76, Bintley depicts a darker and more realistic view of the English countryside.

## **2.2 Bintley and an English ballet tradition**

It is widely agreed that English ballet is rooted in the traditions of *danse d’école* or classical ballet (Banes, 1980, p.1). The earliest manifestations of the flagship

national company, the Royal Ballet, date as far back as 1926 led by Ninette De Valois on the principles of the Russian, French and Italian schools (Genné, 1996, p.9). It can be argued that in the twenty-first century, the company continues to be defined by its excellence in staging and performing the great nineteenth century ballets especially *The Sleeping Beauty* which it first performed in 1939. Although developing high standards of technical excellence in the classical art of ballet, the company has evolved its own styles of execution and performance. These stylistic principles have changed over the years (Morris, 2000), but their essence is embodied in the ballets of De Valois, Frederick Ashton<sup>3</sup> and Kenneth MacMillan<sup>4</sup>. De Valois and MacMillan's work was strongly expressionist and oriented towards narrative and often highly dramatic ballets. Ashton has been called a traditionalist (Morris, 1996, p.20), yet he also created an individual style of dance that relied less on narrative and more on themes to explore human emotions in ballet, coupled with a profound sense of musicality. He wanted to develop a movement vocabulary that was specifically English (Morris, 1996, p.19).

Joan Acocella describes Ashton's work as leaning towards "pure dance," in so far as his work is capable of "communicating something on the highest level of meaning through purely dance means, without resorting to imitation of the methods of painting or literature" (in Acocella and Garafola, 1991, p.1). There is a distinctive wit in Ashton's ballets, along with a romantic and lyrical quality. He concentrated on communicating subtle differences of character and relationships and there is certainly a humanity and emotional responsiveness in his ballets that

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<sup>3</sup> Ashton was a founder choreographer of the Royal Ballet and the Artistic Director of the company from 1963-1970.

<sup>4</sup> MacMillan was appointed as the Artistic Director of the Royal Ballet from 1970-1977.

permeates the choreography. All of these various influences have been woven into the fabric of the English ballet tradition along with the staple ingredients advocated by De Valois of expressivity, dramatic characterisation, high production values and the fondness for narrative.

As a dancer trained at the Royal Ballet School (1973-1976) before joining the company in August 1976, Bintley would have been sensitive to the values of the company's artistic director and its founder choreographers. De Valois's biographer (Sorley-Walker, 1987, p.307) and some critics have noticed how Bintley weaves into his work these specific stylistic principles. For instance Ismene Brown in *The Daily Telegraph* calls Bintley's *Edward II* a "ballet drama of sweeping and chilling scale" (13 October 1997, p.19) with an "epic range" of delicate and brutish characters. Louise Levene writing about *Edward II* in *The Independent* comments on the depth of its narrative: "a strong tale, told with conviction, danced with passion and staged with the greatest possible style" (11 October 1997).

In his movement vocabulary, Bintley refers to the historical constitution of English ballet by favouring the classical ballet lexicon as the springboard for his choreography. He deepens his relationship with English dance culture by drawing also on traditional English folk dance styles. For the writer and dance consultant Patricia Boccadoro, Bintley's approach to dance is essentially English in the sense that he favours the full-length, narrative formula, with works such as *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1996), *Hobson's Choice* (1989), *Arthur Pendragon* (2000), and *Beauty and the Beast* (2003). Within this range of

scenarios, Bintley is able to explore the entire gamut of human emotions and to move between the epic and the everyday. As Boccadoro points out, it is the authoritative use of characterisation that brings the drama of these stories to life (2000). A dancer's dramatic skill is one of the hallmarks of English ballet training. For De Valois and Ashton, it was vital that a dancer was able to communicate meaningfully through the movements of the body. A key aspect of Ashton's style in particular, is the development and evolution of a character throughout a ballet (Morris, 1996, p.52).

The dance historian Beth Genné claims that during the formation of the Royal Ballet, works were thought of as "dance-dramas" (1996, p.53). She explains that this was not just true of the nineteenth century classics such as *The Nutcracker* (1892) based on the dark tales of E.T. Hoffman, but was also the case with so-called abstract works, such as Ashton's *Symphonic Variations* (1946) where the emotional resonance requires sophisticated expressive qualities from the dancers. This was because dancers were seen as actors. No matter what dance they were performing or how technically proficient, a dancer was not considered truly accomplished unless they could blend movement and dramatic expression (Genné, 1996, p.53). Emerging from this English tradition, Bintley is an unashamed dance-dramatist although he also creates abstract dances such as the one-act ballet, *Young Apollo* (1984), intended as a homage to the major American choreographer George Balanchine (Bintley, 2000). Despite the concentration in this work on the formal grace of pure dance, Bintley persistently

returns to full-length dance-dramas. The three-act *Cyrano* (2007), for example is based on Edmond Rostand's action-packed play *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897).<sup>5</sup>

Bintley claims that narrative ballets are easier to market and promote than those that are more abstract (interview 2004a). At a very practical level, he is the Director of a repertory ballet company with charitable status and which also receives a public subsidy; part of his brief, therefore, is to provide programmes that appeal to audiences of all ages and backgrounds, thus ensuring the company is artistically accessible and commercially viable. Audiences generally favour full-length ballets with familiar stories or plots that can be followed in a programme note rather than a mixed bill of shorter dances which are often abstract (Bintley, interview 2004a). Bintley is in fact unusual amongst a younger generation of choreographers in his interest in and capacity for creating the three-act narrative ballets.

As discussed (see p.61), De Valois's choreography was based firmly on narrative and Bintley has been exposed to and has embraced this choreographic trait. He is endeavouring to embody the characteristics and the ideological standpoints inherent within the tapestry of the English ballet tradition. Thus, he claims that he shares with his predecessors a responsibility to help conserve and secure the survival of a tradition with which he has been entrusted (Bintley, interview 2005b). He agrees with De Valois, that he is in "a line of succession" as far as the English ballet heritage is concerned (Bintley, interview 2005b). Bintley holds the view, therefore, that he is on a continuum as a guardian of English ballet's

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<sup>5</sup> The play concerns one man's self-sacrificing devotion to his cousin and his friend, and is set against a backdrop of the siege of Arras, a battle of the Thirty Years' War in seventeenth century France.

cultural identity (ibid) and other critics support the notion of him as a caretaker of the English ballet tradition (Sorley-Walker, 1987, p.285).

A close examination of Bintley's background and professional development reveals the pathway he has followed on his way to becoming the heir to the English ballet tradition. He was born in the former mill town of Huddersfield in 1957, and at the age of 11 started taking dancing classes at the Audrey Spencer School and also at the Dorothy Stevens School. At the age of 16 he first showed signs of a creative sensibility when at the Dorothy Stevens School he choreographed his first ballet, *The Soldier's Tale*. His potential as a dancer was recognised when he gained a place at the Royal Ballet Upper School in 1973, although as one of only three boys at a small northern dance school, he found it difficult to adjust to the increased competition of a large training centre (Bintley, interview 2004a). It was Bintley's involvement with choreography at the school which compensated for his difficulties (Beckett, 1992, p.43) and in his final year at the Royal Ballet School, he won the Ursula Moreton Award for choreography (Bintley, interview 2004a). Bintley claims this achievement secured him a contract with the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet (SWRB), as the competition was judged by Kenneth MacMillan who at the time was the Artistic Director of the Royal Ballet (ibid).

It was also at the Royal Ballet School that he developed a talent for a style known as 'demi-caractère' defined as "a type of dancing, adding character flavour to a basically academic technique" (Koegler, 1982 p.121). It was Bintley's sensitivity to the portrayal of human personality traits aligned with his

command of the ballet vocabulary that appears to have made the critics notice him. His first success in such a role was as the eccentric Dr Coppélius in the Royal Ballet School's 1976 production of *Coppélia* (Flatow, 1996, p.71). The role of Dr Coppélius is that of an elderly, self-deluding, foolish and slightly sinister toymaker. Ashton played the part in 1951 bringing to the character a "touching and believable" quality that depicted the loneliness of an ageing man (Vaughan, 1999, p.257). The former Royal Ballet principal dancer Robert Helpmann portrayed the role as grotesque (ibid). It was Bintley, however, who brought fresh humour and pathos to the role:

David Bintley's Dr Coppélius practically stole the show. Made up to look even more elderly than is usual, he never slipped out of character and found comedy of his own in a role that owed nothing to performances by his famous predecessors. He was as funny as Helpmann used to be but managed the pathos at the end of Act II as well. A born performer and a talent to be watched (Clarke, 1976, p.584).

Bintley's dancing career in the Royal Ballet was notable for his interpretations of tragi-comic roles. He played Bottom in *The Dream* (1964), a role that is characterised as a buffoon or clown and yet tinged with the loneliness of an outsider. It is also a technically demanding role as Ashton introduced a note of comedy by choreographing some of the steps for Bottom on pointe (Vaughan, 1999, p.343). This is exceptionally challenging for any male dancer to execute as normally their training does not include developing this skill. Bintley also played the roles of Alain, and the Widow Simone in *La Fille Mal Gardée* (1960), the last of which he also danced with the San Francisco Ballet. The Widow Simone is an over-bearing mother who is larger than life, exasperating, but lovable. Ashton modelled the role on the pantomime 'dame' and so wanted the character to be extravagantly theatrical. Although this role was developed for a male

dancer, he was also keen to accurately convey all the gestures and attitudes of a socially pretentious woman and at the same time wanted to avoid any hint of effeminacy (Meisner, 2007). Bintley is named as one of the finest dancers to portray the role (Cross, 2007) as he managed to embody Ashton's vision for the character. The role of Alain is in complete contrast to the Widow Simone because he is portrayed as a pathetic milksop dominated by his pompous father. Alain rather half-heartedly woos the heroine Lise and she of course rejects him.

Bintley's skill in embodying a huge range of character and personality led to greater success and recognition as a performer. In 1984, he was awarded the Laurence Olivier Award for Dance for his outstanding dramatic interpretation of the enigmatic puppet Petrushka in Fokine's *Petrushka* (1911). On observing the performance, the dance critic Ann Nugent called Bintley's interpretation of the role of a puppet who feels human emotions exceptional: "The loneliness and pathos of his Petrushka, his lean, hunched body and dangling feet, has won exceptional praise. I would go as far as to proclaim him the outstanding character actor of British ballet today" (as cited in Beckett, 1992, p.45).

Bintley has spoken about his thought process for the characterisation of this role which underlines his attention to detail. He understands, identifies with and therefore breathes life into the character of Petrushka on a physical and emotional level:

The way I try to do it is to make everything look very painful for him, so that when he tries to separate his knees, he experiences not just frustration, but actual physical suffering... The first time I played the part I was violently sick after the second scene because it hurt so much (Meisner, 1986, p.51).

Bintley, perhaps, is one of the last choreographers of English ballet to be interested in creating demi-caractère roles. The style, exploring nuances of personality and physical traits of characters through a ballet-based vocabulary, was typical of many of Ashton's ballets. The dance critic and author, John Percival points out that Bintley's predecessor, Ashton was as much concerned with expressivity as he was by technical virtuosity (1996, p.29). For Ashton, characterisation and pure classicism were part of one artistic whole.

It is important to note that Bintley's ballet training and introduction to choreography was influenced by this blend of classicism and dramatic characterisation. This can perhaps be termed the English style of dance. The late associate editor and chief dance and drama critic for the *New York Post*, Clive Barnes, supports this definition claiming the English style is a mix of lyricism, classicism, dance drama, characterisation and English reserve (2006, p.36). As discussed earlier in the chapter, it is a style that requires not only expressivity, but also musicality and acting ability. These qualities have certainly become associated with the English ballet tradition, however I would also add to them a belief in accuracy, simplicity of line and grace. There is an attention to detail about the English style of dance, along with an intrinsic sense of glamour that has been inherited from Ashton. The sense of Englishness also extends to De Valois' policy in the 1930s for commissioning English composers and designers and locating her works in English culture as with the series of Hogarth paintings on which she based the scenario and choreography for *The Rake's Progress* (1935). It was within this context of the so-called English ballet heritage that Bintley's artistic formation took place.

According to Stuart Beckett (2004), a contemporary of Bintley's at SWRB and a performer in some of Bintley's early works, as a young dancer Bintley was singled out by De Valois for his dramatic interpretation of character roles such as the Red King in *Checkmate* (1982). The critics agreed with De Valois and noted his extraordinary capacity to transform his young, athletic body into the enfeeblement of old-age (Clarke, 1981, p.683). It is Bintley's presence as a dance-dramatist rather than his role as a dancer in the ballet that makes his portrayal so striking as Nugent explained: "David Bintley's aged Red King, whose performance as he staggers to certain and pitiable death already belongs on that shortlist of legendary players" (Nugent, 1987, p.5).

Bintley has carried his understanding and experience of dance-drama into his choreography. The libretto for his first professional choreographic work, *The Outsider* (1978), was based on a "distillation" of two books by Albert Camus, *The Outsider* (1942) and *A Happy Death* (1970) (Beckett, 1992, p.46). Bintley associates *The Outsider* with film noir. The characters communicate a sense of moral ambiguity and pure sexual motivation and the ballet is very loosely based on the concept of existentialist anxiety (Bintley, interview 2004a). *The Outsider* was praised for its "theatrical impact" (Clarke, 1978, p.517) and "meaty" dramatic content (Williams, 1978, p.26). The work was also considered sensational (Temin, 1990) perhaps on account of its semi-nude principal ballerina. Although the ballet was not full-length, it was based on a narrative and offered a blend of classical ballet and dramatic characterisation.

It was not just Bintley's dramatic sensibilities that first caught the attention of De Valois. Bintley recalls that it was his artistic and personal sense of independence as well as his choreographic promise that also appealed to her (interview 2004a). For her hundredth-birthday tribute, he created *The Protecting Veil* (1998), a company work danced to John Tavener's *Meditation* (1989) for cello and strings. The religious iconography in the ballet refers to the Virgin Mary in her capacity as Mother of Christ and to the casting of her veil or mantle over her son's followers and worshipers encompassing them all within her reassuring protection. The ballet is a symbol of religious faith. Five female dancers illustrate different phases of Mary's life from ordinary girlhood to deification. During the phases the veil takes on different symbolic meanings. It is a virginal headdress, then a swaddling cloth for the infant Jesus, and finally his shroud. The male dancers symbolise figures such as Jesus, the Angel Gabriel, Joseph and St John the disciple.

In the *Protecting Veil* Bintley sought to discover a theatrical language that would convey his spiritual and Catholic beliefs, and for him the work is a "lyrical icon" (in Parry, 1998, p.101). According to Bintley, in his ballet the figure of the Virgin Mary is a metaphor for the way in which De Valois dedicated her life to one goal. He has arranged the last section so that it expresses his personal and artistic relationship with De Valois: "The last section when Mary is old, and just before she dies, that little bit with the boy at the end who is supposed to be St John, that's a depiction of me and Madam" he said (in McCarthy, 2001). Bintley's affectionate tribute and the religious metaphor he delivers in *The*

*Protecting Veil* shows the seriousness with which he takes his place as an heir of De Valois and his role as Director of the Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB).

De Valois's mission in the creation of an English ballet tradition also included embracing various national dance forms and it is understandable that as De Valois's heir, Bintley would also follow suit. As a student at the Royal Ballet Upper School (1973-1976) Bintley would have been aware of the importance De Valois placed on preserving the English folk dance tradition in a mainly classical ballet environment. De Valois loved all forms of folk dance and established character dance classes at her first studio established in 1926, the Academy of Choreographic Art (Sorley Walker, 1987, p.64). These classes included various Central European folk dances as well as those of the British Isles (ibid). For the European forms, she was advised by a Hungarian-born folk dance recitalist, Derra de Moroda and was also able to draw on her own experience with the Diaghilev Ballets Russes, where many of the ballets in which she performed had strong links with Russian or Polish peasant dances. These included Russian dancer and choreographer Bronislava Nijinska's *Les Noces* (1923), in which the vocabulary fused Russian folk dance and classical ballet steps (McCarthy, 2003).

De Valois consulted Cecil Sharp House and the Morris Dance movement in order to discover more about traditional English folk dances (Sorley-Walker, 1987, p.64). English folk dance classes were included in De Valois's original syllabus (ibid) and continue to be in the curriculum at The Royal Ballet School in Richmond where pupils perform a selection of folk dances every year at the school or during the fair held annually in May on Richmond Green in Surrey

(Bintley, interview 2004a). Pupils at the Lower School take classes in Irish, Morris and Scottish dancing, whilst at the Upper School, they perform English folk dances at showcase events.

Ashton was particularly inspired by the stage dancing of the 1930s and the music hall, and made prominent use of its context generally and of the steps and dances specific to it (Morris, 1996, pp.3-4). However, he does draw on English folk dance forms in the ballet *La Fille Mal Gardée* (1960). The ballet is essentially French having been adapted from Jean Dauberval's classic, first presented by the Ballet of the Grand Théâtre in Bordeaux, France in 1789. Ashton's version of *Fille* is thought of as quintessentially English, largely because of his inclusion of English Morris and folk dance in the ballet, such as the clog dance performed by the Widow Simone in Act 1, Scene 2. There is a problem, however, as to the source of the clog dance's ethnicity. Clog dancing is widely acknowledged as having originated in Lancashire at the end of the eighteenth century. Mill workers wore clogs to work to keep their feet warm and would tap out rhythms and emulate the sounds of the cotton looms and machinery (Radcliffe, 2001, pp.87-88).

Wilfred Darlington argues that Ashton was inspired to create the clog dance following a visit to see the dancer Pat Tracey perform a version of a traditional Lancashire clog dance at a Folk Dance Festival at the Royal Albert Hall in 1959 (2002, p.191). Tracey herself confirms that it is possible Ashton did see her perform, but adds that he did not ask her about the steps or figures she danced (p.193). It has also been argued that the role of Widow Simone in *La Fille Mal*

*Gardée* was originally intended to pay homage to the legendary pantomime dame, Dan Leno. Leno played the music halls of Lancashire in the latter half of the 1870s, and in 1880 became Champion Clog Dancer of the World (Brady, 2002).

Stanley Holden, a leading character dancer at the Royal Ballet who created the role of the Widow Simone has also claimed that he provided Ashton with genuine Lancashire steps for the clog dance (Vaughan, 1999, p.310). However there is no evidence that Holden spent any time in Lancashire. As a young boy, Holden aspired to become a music hall performer (Clarke, 2007, p.30). He was born in London's East End and was an accomplished tap dancer, only taking up ballet classes at the age of 13 to improve his tap dancing (Perlmutter, 1995, pp.66-67). As an admirer of the music hall tradition, it is highly probable that Holden would have studied and been inspired by Leno's work. Thus, there is evidence to show that the clog dance is reasonably authentic in terms of its Lancashire associations, but it is perhaps more likely that Ashton drew on Holden's interpretation of the great music-hall artists such as Leno and from his experience of tap or step dancing. This does bring into question the idea of the dance as a 'pure' Lancashire clog dance. Ashton's references to English folk motifs in the ballet have helped to establish it as an anglicised pastorate.

References to English folk dance in *La Fille Mal Gardée* occur again in Act II. A group of harvesters perform a stick dance, reminiscent of an authentic Cotswold English Morris dance performed with staves. The twelve dancers clash the 'tips' and 'butts', or top and bottom of the staves in various formations. The Maypole

Dance in Act 1, Scene 2 is taken from a traditional folk dance taught at the Royal Ballet School (Vaughan, 1999, p.305).

As a senior student at the Royal Ballet School, Bintley found the time to go and watch some of the younger pupils at the Lower School perform folk dances (Bintley, interview 2004a). He was attracted to the intricacy of the patterns that are an intrinsic part of the dance style. Since he studied only at the Royal Ballet Senior School, he would not have had the opportunity to learn these dances, but as a principal dancer with SWRB, he became quite skilled in the folk dance form. For example, playing the role of the Widow Simone in *La Fille Mal Gardée*, introduced him to the clog dance (see p.66).

Bintley also joined the Bow Street Rappers, the Royal Ballet's Morris team (Bintley, interview 2004a). There is little information about the authenticity of repertoire performed by this side but according to the Morris Ring, an association formed in 1934 to encourage the performance of Morris dancing, the Bow Street Rappers performed at a number of 'Ales' or Morris Ring meetings in the 1980s and early 1990s (Maher, 2007). The Morris Ring is dedicated to maintaining traditions and preserving the cultural history of English Morris dance. In such a context, it would have been unlikely for the Bow Street Rappers to have been allowed to perform at an Ale, unless they were dancing genuine versions of English Rapper dances. The Rapper dance takes its name from the sword that is used in the dance, a highly flexible length of spring steel, about 28 inches long, with a fixed handle at one end and a swivel handle at the other. Five dancers form a circle and are linked by the swords. They perform a very fast series of

dance figures, weaving in and out, over and under each other. The swords are twisted and interleaved into complex configurations. The configurations require the dancers to be precise in their timing, nimble and deft, and to work seamlessly together as a team. Based on his experience of the Morris form and the roles he has danced, Bintley has had access to ethnic folk dance forms as taught by the tutors at the Royal Ballet School and Ashton's theatrical interpretation of English regional and traditional dance.

Bintley's experience of genuine and theatricalised folk dance finds its way into several of his ballets. In Act 1 of *Hobson's Choice*, for example, the choreography for the role of Will Mossop includes a Lancashire clog dance. Like Widow Simone's wood shoe clog dance in Ashton's *Fille*, the solo for Will Mossop is a performance within a performance. In the Ashton ballet, a group of enthusiastic harvesters cheer on the Widow Simone's stately rendition of the clog dance, whilst Mossop, also in clogs in Bintley's work, is covertly observed by Maggie Hobson who clearly admires his athletic manoeuvres. The Lancashire clog dance is normally performed with the feet in parallel but Bintley has set his version of the dance according to conventional ballet style in a turned-out position. Like Ashton in *Fille*, Bintley has borrowed and adapted a folk dance form in order to allow his traditional ballet style to take on the colours of a more localised English culture.

## **Realism in English ballet**

As I argued on page 59, the quest to identify a concept of Englishness can lead to an unrealistic or romanticised view of England's folk and pastoral history. This can raise a false sense of national consciousness or version of social identity, as promoted by Ashton in *La Fille mal Gardée*. Within the ballet he depicts an idealised view of the English countryside – the picturesque farmyard and joyful, colourful peasants. A benign English landscape also inspired other Ashton ballets such as the poetic and abstract *Symphonic Variations* (1946). For Anna Kisslegoff, the perfume of “eternal spring” permeates the ballet as the six dancers “fall in daisy chains when least expected” (1981). It is also Sophie Fedorovitch's symbolic white backcloth with its green wash and curved lines that helps evoke the rolling hills and gentle aspects of the English countryside.

Bintley's view of the English landscape and the people who populate it is darker and grittier than Ashton's. For example, his ballet based on the novel by Thomas Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1996) concerns the hardships as well as the joys of shepherds and thatchers, dairymaids and farmhands of a past era in English rural history. There is rustic heartiness, but this is country life that is far from idealistic for its hard-working inhabitants. People are bought and sold into labour at the ‘hiring fair’ and bad weather destroys crops, constantly threatening the livelihood of the villagers. The scenic backdrop with its ever-changing sky represents the climatic variability that dominates the open countryside. In *Hobson's Choice*, Bintley presents an entire spectrum of society from the less than perfect and often inebriated Henry Hobson to the moralising members of the

Salvation Army who parade through the local park. In both ballets, Bintley has chosen naturalistic texts as his subject matter and achieves a commensurate sense of realism in his depiction of character.

Bintley's inclination to confront the realities of the human condition is again evident in the full-length ballet *Arthur Pendragon* (2000). The picture that he paints of the legendary king is based on the traditional Arthurian legends, but veers towards the dark and turbulent struggles that Arthur undergoes in his quest for personal and public salvation. The central focus is on the human flaws and insecurities of the central character told through mime and steps drawn from the classical ballet vocabulary. Bintley's choreography does not tell the story of chivalry and courtly love normally associated with Arthurian legend. For example, there is no romantic pas de deux about Arthur's love for his queen, Guinevere. Although the ballet finishes with the couple's marriage ceremony, the scene is interrupted by images of the slaughter of innocent children shown on a video screen at the back of the stage. The disturbing images represent Arthur's attempt to kill his nemesis and incestuous offspring, the infant Mordred. The ballet comprises short, action packed scenes and the movement quality varies throughout the ballet depending on the characterisation. The warlords and soldiers struggle to control their aggression and Arthur's psychological and emotional anguish is emphasised in his frenetic turns. Bintley hints at an underlying mental insecurity in all the characters. They are flawed, imperfect and emotionally unstable.

In focussing on the dark side of human experience, Bintley shares a closer affiliation with Kenneth MacMillan than he does with Ashton. MacMillan re-introduced into English ballet the concept of social consciousness, a point of view he shared with De Valois. De Valois's *Rake's Progress* (1935), for example, deals with the disastrous consequences that arise when an individual's personal sense of social responsibility is replaced by greed and debauchery. MacMillan also deals with the reality of experience. His *Romeo and Juliet* (1965) are not idealised lovers, but flesh and blood people "sexually alive and full of passion" (Mead, 2006). Bintley's *Edward II* (1995) almost exceeds reality in its violent extremes. Considered as unsuitable for young people under the age of 16, the production throbs with sexual and harrowing images. Based on Christopher Marlowe's play *Edward II* (1592), the ballet tackles the homosexual subtext of Marlowe's drama by focussing on Edward's relationship with his lover Piers Gaveston.

The movement language Bintley uses to convey the story is brutal and erotic. Bintley moulds each duet for Edward and Gaveston into "rhapsodies of equality in strength" and "tests of balance that loop and wind and tumble into wrestles that emerge into homo-erotic gestures" (Palmer, 2007). There is an emotional intensity about the lovers' foreplay that is frank in its portrayal of desire. The erotic passion is set against a backdrop of physical violence. Edward's execution scene is played out as though it were a macabre seduction. Taunted and goaded by his executioner, Edward is impaled on a red-hot poker and meets his horrifying death. The dying character is strung up on the iron bars of the wall of his cell, and his unbearable suffering is symbolised through the deafening rattle

of the cell bars. Visually and emotionally disturbing, Bintley proves in *Edward II* that he is capable of revealing the most depraved and darkest aspects of human behaviour.

An important figure amongst the pantheon of British based choreographers well-known for their dramatic, full-length ballets, is the South African John Cranko who joined the Sadler's Wells Ballet in 1945. Bintley states that he was influenced by Cranko who he claims is a “typically English” choreographer (in Boccadoro, 2000). For Bintley, Cranko’s dramatic ballets with their finely drawn characterisation were nevertheless deeply rooted in the classical vocabulary. Barnes argues that although Cranko borrowed themes for his dances from literature as, for example, with his version of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* (1969), he also looked to other art forms such as opera for inspiration and readily responded to the “ever-growing demands of a dance public freshly eager for evening-length ballets” (1997, p.130). Cranko’s full-length works such as *Beauty and the Beast* (1949) were often a powerful fusion of comedy, tragedy and romance and as Percival states: “none of his contemporaries could tell a story so well, nor bring characters so clearly and distinctively to life” (1997, pp.61-62). Barnes agrees with Percival and borrowing an Italian term associated with opera, calls Cranko’s ballets “dramma per musica” or a theatrically unified experience (1997, p.130). Bintley is similarly celebrated for his artistic integration of dance and theatre in the service of narrative. His version of *Beauty and the Beast* (2003) is noted for its specially commissioned rich musical score by the composer Glenn Buhr, imaginative staging and complex story-telling (Percival, 2003).

The choice of the dramatic, full-length ballet as a means to communicate human emotions, expressions and stories is a connection Bintley also shares with the former Director of BRB, Sir Peter Wright. In 1961, Wright went to Stuttgart as teacher and ballet-master to the company formed by John Cranko after he left the Royal Ballet in 1960 (Percival, 1983, p.147). His interpretations of the classics including *Giselle* (1965), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1968), *Coppélia* (1995), *Swan Lake* (1981) and *The Nutcracker* (1984 and 1999) address the human drama in these ballets, extending them beyond mere fairytale stories. For instance in a reworking of his 1984 staging of *The Nutcracker* (1999), rather than treating Clara as a child on an adventure, Wright presents her as a girl on the cusp of womanhood, ready for her first taste of love with the nutcracker prince. In reworking the ballet to include adult emotion, Wright expands the scope of its dramatic power.

Perhaps Wright's greatest contribution to the reworking of nineteenth century classics is his revival of the mimed scenes. For instance in Act 1 of his production of *Giselle* (1965), Wright reinstated the scene when Berthe (Giselle's mother) tells a story entirely in classical ballet mime (McCarthy, 2002). Berthe relates the legend of the Wilis, or the ghosts of betrothed young women who were betrayed by their lovers and died before their wedding day. Wright's conviction that the meaning that lies behind each gesture must be thoroughly understood and embodied was evident when he worked with the Royal Ballet dancer Ludovic Ondiviela on a mime scene from Act 2 of *The Nutcracker* (Tchaikovsky: Masterclasses with the Royal Ballet, 2007).

Cranko encouraged Wright's early artistic development and in turn, Wright has supported and recognised Bintley's talent. It was Wright who offered Bintley his first opportunity as a choreographer which resulted in *The Outsider* (1978) (see p.69), acclaimed for its combination of classicism and expressionism (Percival, 1978, p.88). Bintley acknowledges Wright's support and assistance from his early years as a choreographer in the late 1970s to his appointment as resident choreographer at SWRB in 1983. Clearly Wright was astute in recognising Bintley's artistic promise. However he also noticed his managerial potential and Wright's mentorship came to fruition when in 1995 Bintley became his successor as Artistic Director at BRB.

### **Bintley and the Birmingham Royal Ballet**

The company that Bintley inherited had developed in line with specific principles established by Wright. He wanted it to be an institution which brought people from all backgrounds and walks of life together and to create a meaningful artistic and social centre able to reach out to the community which supported it (Wright, 2006). Aligning himself with these goals, Bintley continues to place the interests of the City of Birmingham at the heart of the BRB's artistic policy and in particular to maintain its links with and involvement in the social fabric of the community. The strength of Wright's social awareness is evident in the way he forged the structural position of the company. Bintley has inherited Wright's social conscience and ability to realise the potential within English classical ballet to involve and inspire a wide social spectrum. The success of *Ballet Hool!*, an 18-month collaboration between BRB and the charity, Youth at Risk (March

2005-September 2006) (see p.14) is proof that ballet, a form of dance often regarded as appealing mainly to the social and economic elite, can engage and stimulate young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

With his policy of forming business and community partnerships within the Birmingham region and his concentration on negotiating with local organisations or tapping into regional resources, Bintley adds to his credentials as an English artist. Here again he follows De Valois who in the early years of the development of English ballet, sought out local artists (Sorley Walker, 1987, pp.59-61). She looked to the London region's creative outlets such as the Royal College of Music and the Chelsea School of Art (ibid) to provide musical and design talent for the future of her London-based English ballet company. In 2003, Bintley also turned to a local artist, Nahid Siddiqui, a kathak dancer and choreographer located in the West Midlands and invited her to create a dance for the BRB.

*Krishna* (2003), a company work to music by the classical composer Hariprasad Chaurasia illustrates episodes from the life of the Indian deity most often associated with divine love. It fuses classical ballet and kathak, thus merging two dance cultures which represent a twenty-first century view of English culture as rich in its diversity. In so doing, Bintley extends the future of an English ballet tradition by recognising its capacity to absorb multiculturalism.

I would argue that as Artistic Director of BRB, Bintley also wanted to find a way of building on his roots in English ballet. After he took over from Wright, he went on to create a wide-ranging repertory including the lighthearted and vivacious *Nutcracker Sweeties* (1996), the spiritual and pious *Protecting Veil*

(1998), the witty *Shakespeare Suite* (1999) and the full-length dramatic ballets - *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1996), *Arthur Pendragon* (2000) *Morte d'Arthur* (2001) and *Beauty and the Beast* (2003). It is most likely that in being recognised as a leader in his field, Bintley found the level of confidence to tackle such ambitious ballets. His range extends from sombre dance dramas to the tongue-in-cheek humour found, for example in *Nutcracker Sweeties* (1996) performed to the jazz music of Duke Ellington. The ballet blends jazz dance and classical ballet with the theatricality of an American musical and has proved popular with the critics and the general public.

Bintley has also been keen to introduce fresh choreographic talent from outside the English ballet scene (Bintley, interview 2004a) and chose the Canadian James Kudelka to lead the way (Parry, 1996, p.45) commissioning him to create a new version of Stravinsky's *Le Baiser de la Fée* (1996). Kudelka, former Artistic Director of the National Ballet of Canada, was already celebrated for the narrative ballets that he had made for his company and possessed a distinct choreographic style with a basis in classical ballet. Kudelka's ability to fuse classical and modern dance to produce ballets of technical invention and psychological depth (Crabb, 2008) was in line with Bintley's own sensibility.

### **2.3 An overview of Bintley's career**

Following the success of his first ballet *The Outsider* in 1978 (see p.69), Bintley went on to create a series of one-act ballets for SWRB including *Take Five* (1978), *Meadow of Proverbs* (1979), *Adieu* (1980) and *Night Moves* (1981).

These ballets are largely abstract and range from the high spirited *Take Five* inspired by Dave Brubeck's well-known jazz score to the darker *Meadow of Proverbs*, a ballet inspired by the paintings of Francisco Goya. These early dances gave some indication of the range of ballets that Bintley would go on to create for the BRB such as the aforementioned popular *Nutcracker Sweeties* (1996) and the grittier *Orpheus Suite* (2004).

His first three-act ballet, *The Swan of Tuonela* (1982), set to the music of Jean Sibelius was inspired by Finnish mythology. Created for SWRB and directed by Peter Wright, the narrative is based on a battle between the forces of good, represented by the character of Prince Lemminkainen, and evil, personified by Tuoni, the lord of the demons. Although it met generally with critical acclaim, this ballet was also criticised for failing to show evidence of a "distinctive choreographic personality" and for being too reminiscent of Bintley's forerunners or "elders" (Anderson, 1982).

Shortly before the premiere of *The Swan of Tuonela*, Bintley had already decided to embark on a period of self-development, because he was aware that he needed to broaden his "choreographic personality". He announced in the press that he was about to take a three month personal-development sabbatical from the company and that he wanted to explore American and German dance (Anderson, 1982; Dromgoole, 2000). However, in actively researching other national dance styles it can be suggested that he was searching for new sources of creative inspiration outside of the English ballet tradition. According to Bintley, the sabbatical extended his imaginative range, but more importantly had the effect of

cementing his commitment to the English tradition (Dromgoole 2000).

Nevertheless, the first three ballets he created for the SWRB following his appointment as the company's choreographer in 1983 - *Choros* (1983), *Consort Lessons* (1983) and *Young Apollo* (1984) - were heavily influenced by Balanchine.

These three plotless, neo-classical ballets were acclaimed by the critics with *Choros* and *Consort Lessons* earning Bintley the Evening Standard Award in 1983. The son of a composer, Balanchine had received musical training early in life which made it possible for him to communicate with composers such as Stravinsky. Bintley has also been admired for his musical awareness in commissioning new scores (Flatow, 1996, p.74), the first of which was the music for *Choros* by the adventurous English composer Aubrey Meyer. The ballet for nine dancers is based on dances associated with ancient Greek drama and is lyrical and expressive. Bintley's movement vocabulary in *Consort Lessons* is characterised by the strongly delineated and geometric use of the body line, a style which recalls Balanchine's steely and precise choreography. In *Consort Lessons* Bintley again echoes Balanchine in achieving a contrapuntal tension between the jazzy quality of Stravinsky's score and "the refined neo-classical purity of the dancing" (Poesio, 1997a, p.37).

In 1986 Bintley moved from being resident choreographer for SWRB to resident choreographer for the Royal Ballet. During this period he continued to create abstract ballets such as the one-act *Galanteries* (1986) to Mozart and *Allegri Diversi* (1987) to Rossini. However I propose that it was after the death of

Ashton in 1988 that Bintley fully embraced and returned to his English roots. From 1988, Bintley assumed Ashton's mantle and began to create full-length narrative works such as *Hobson's Choice* (1989) and his first version of *Cyrano* (1991).<sup>6</sup> In this period he also created ballets with wider appeal such as *Still Life at the Penguin Café* (1988), and in 1993 *Tombeaux*, Bintley's homage to classical ballet and a lament on the death of Ashton. It is worth noting that Bintley only used musical scores by English composers for all four of these ballets which reaffirm his growing sense of nationalism.

The poor critical reception to *Cyrano* (1991) appears to have been a set-back to Bintley's growing confidence as a possible successor to Ashton. This first version of the ballet was dropped from the Royal Ballet's repertoire in 1992 and he left the company in 1993 to work as a freelance choreographer until 1995. Bintley has admitted that he was not happy at the Royal Ballet at this time and that the failure of *Cyrano* compacted his overall sense of dissatisfaction (in Turner, 2007). At this period, Bintley created ballets for international companies including *Job* (1993) for the San Francisco Ballet and *Edward II* for the Stuttgart Ballet (1995). Despite working with foreign companies within an overseas environment, he continued to make ballets in the English style following De Valois's *Job* (1931) by providing his own interpretation of the music by Vaughan Williams.

According to Cyril Beaumont, Geoffrey Keynes prepared the original scenario for *Job* based on William Blake's *Book of Job* (1938, p.761). He approached

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<sup>6</sup> He later reworked this production for the Birmingham Royal Ballet in 2007.

Vaughan Williams to compose the music and submitted the project to Diaghilev who rejected it on the grounds it was “too English” and “too old-fashioned” (p.762). Following Diaghilev’s rejection, Vaughan Williams scored his composition for a large orchestra and the work was first performed on 23rd October 1930. De Valois became interested in the ballet, proposing it to the Camargo Society for production (ibid). The Society approved her choice and Vaughan Williams’s music was re-scored by Constant Lambert for a small orchestra. The ballet was first performed in 1931 and subsequently added to the Vic-Wells Ballet repertory.

Other ballets that Bintley has created for the international stage also have traces of his English heritage. In 1988, *The Sons of Horus* (1985) was premiered by the San Francisco Ballet. This one-act ballet about the death rituals of the ancient Egyptians is based on the process involved in an Egyptian embalming ceremony but testifies nevertheless to Bintley’s English cultural roots. Anna Kisselgoff for the *New York Times* claimed that the scenario and imagery for the ballet appeared to spring from research into the Egyptian artefacts found only in that most English of institutions, “the British Museum” (1988).

Another of Bintley’s ballets to be taken into the repertory of the San Francisco Ballet is *The Dance House* (1995). This one act ballet for nineteen dancers is a meditation on the effects of AIDS within the dance community and, more specifically, is Bintley’s response to the death of a friend from the disease. *The Sons of Horus* and *The Dance House* are both preoccupied with images of Bintley’s interpretation of grief and mourning. In both ballets, Bintley is making

a social comment about the reality of confronting, or facing up to the often taboo subject of death. The lack of any sense of redemption in these ballets contradicts Bintley's Catholicism and this seems to suggest that confronting the unpalatable subject of death in his life may have been a test of his religious faith.

In May 2006, Bintley was invited by the Royal Ballet's Artistic Director, Monica Mason to contribute to a celebration at the Royal Ballet to mark the Queen's eightieth birthday. Frederick Ashton's *Homage to the Queen*, created originally in 1953 to mark the Queen's Coronation, was revived for the celebration. The original work set to a specially commissioned score by Malcolm Arnold, depicts the four elements. Only the choreography for the section, *Air*, remains, so Mason asked three English choreographers to re-create the lost sections of the ballet.

Bintley provided the choreography for *Earth*, Christopher Wheeldon, *Fire* and Michael Corder, *Water*. Although Bintley's contribution to this prestigious event confirms his status in English ballet, the Royal Ballet has not, as yet, presented any of his full-length story ballets at the Royal Opera House. It could be argued that this is a decision based on the identity of each company. Even though there is an affiliation between them, both strive to attract audiences and Bintley's full-length ballets are a hallmark of BRB's identity. Since Bintley's departure as resident choreographer from the Royal Ballet in 1993, there have in fact been no new commissions for full-length story-ballets, with the exception of Twyla Tharp's *Mr Worldly Wise* (1995).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The ballet, with a very loose story line, was not particularly well received and has not been revived in subsequent seasons.

The scarcity of choreographers engaged in the creation of full-length ballets in the English style reinforces Bintley's position in English ballet, not only as a guardian of the tradition, but as a living practitioner of this tradition in performance. In the footsteps of De Valois, Ashton and MacMillan, Bintley has set out on a path towards the preservation of the ideology of a national heritage.

#### **2.4 David Bintley: A summary of his creative process and practice**

When watching Bintley rehearsing in the studio (see p.12), I was able to observe on the one hand how much he seeks inspiration from the dancers themselves, and on the other that he produces choreography tailor made for them. Unlike Ashton and MacMillan, who were inspired by particular dancers or muses such as Margot Fonteyn and Lynn Seymour, Bintley is more democratic in the way that he is interested in all his dancers. This may be because he has most often personally selected them for the company. He often experiments with a step or sequence, abandons it and then returns to it another day. He also admits to having days when he does not produce or create anything that he wants to include in a ballet (interview 2004a). Since he knows the dancers well, he is able to give them directions in his own form of "shorthand" (ibid) and they respond with the quality of movement Bintley is seeking to achieve. Since taking up the position of Artistic Director of the BRB in 1995, Bintley has rarely choreographed for other dance companies, probably because he has developed such close relationships with the dancers in the company.

In the studio, Bintley has always been physically active. In addition to describing how he wants a movement to go, he also demonstrates a step, arm movement or pose. On the other hand, he encourages the dancers to research their roles in order to thoroughly embody and personify the characters they are playing. A chief concern is that the dancers translate the story or theme of the ballet they are performing so that they can make an emotional connection with it and communicate this to the audience. For *The Dance House*, he asked the dancers to find the depth of emotion required to express the grief that is felt at the loss of a friend as portrayed through the contorted movements he designed for this ballet. In line with De Valois and Ashton, for Bintley the rehearsal process is just as much a place for nurturing dramatic expression as it is for learning and perfecting the dance material.

Bintley maintains the high technical and artistic standards inherited from his training at the Royal Ballet School, skills which he is always at pains to pass on to his dancers. He is concerned to preserve the traditions of *danse d'école* and of the English style and encourages them to work for maximum flexibility of the torso so that this area of the body becomes fully expressive in relation to the subject matter of a ballet. A supple torso or *épaulement* can enable dancers to take full advantage of the dynamic range and stylistic nuances inherent in the ballet vocabulary. Purity of line is also of major concern to Bintley and like his predecessors, De Valois and Ashton, he urges his dancers not to distort the balance of design in an arabesque for the sake of extreme virtuosity. Critics like Luke Jennings have complained that stylistic nuances such as *épaulement* used to be the hallmark of the English style for Royal Ballet's performances of the

classics. Such fine-tuned movements have in recent years disappeared in favour of the virtuosity of multiple turns, over-long balances and extremely high and distorted leg lines (2006a).

When making work for large groups of dancers, for example, the corps de ballet section in Act I of *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1996), Bintley explains that he begins with the structure of the dance (interview 2004a). He chooses movements that will make an effective impression en masse, such as a moving shape or pattern. He claims that the group scenes should not be complicated. The scene of the ‘hiring fair’ in Act I of *Far From the Madding Crowd* is an example of this strategy. Bintley uses folk-influenced floor patterns or figures such as the whole round (see p.135). In this Cotswold Morris figure, the dancers travel clockwise in a circle holding hands. It is a simple floor pattern, but effective when performed by the corps de ballet purely because of the number of dancers who perform the figure. Bintley states that in this particular scene he wanted the corps de ballet to represent a peasant society and so he asked the dancers to move in a naturalistic “earthy, loose” manner (interview 2004a) and to abandon the elegance of *épaulement*. Bintley says that he worked with a palette of steps which were particular to the story he wanted to tell. He employed what he calls “intuitive distillation” which is a sifting and filtering process which results in finding the steps or actions appropriate for the “particular little world” he wants to create (Bintley, interview 2004a).

Although his dancers are the main source of creative motivation for Bintley, he also finds inspiration from everyday life. When planning to create a new work he

says that he has a “psychic-antenna” attuned to pick up useful ideas circulating in the media (interview 2004a). For instance in his reinterpretation of the Orpheus legend, *The Orpheus Suite* (2004), Eurydice falls into a drug-induced coma. Rather than having Eurydice imprisoned in Hades he places her in the underworld of drug addiction and in so doing makes reference to the dark side of British society. A newspaper photograph of a teenage girl found dead in her bedroom from a drugs overdose had shocked him deeply and it was this image that he had in mind when trying to convey the plight of the enslaved Eurydice. With the *Dance House* (1995) Bintley again responded to the problems of real life in modern society by bringing AIDS to the forefront of his artistic vision (see p.87). In the ballet, a male dancer, with blue-tinged skin, enters the dance studio and claims a number of the dancers’ lives. The scene of carnage left by the death figure represents the speed and ferocity of the AIDS virus.

It is not only the more significant social issues that interest Bintley. His creative vision is stimulated by small things around him such as a gesture, a picture or an action, for example he was inspired by the action of a woman taking a tube of lipstick out of her handbag and applying the make-up to her lips. He created a repetitive movement based on this action for the characters of the women in the Southern Cape Zebra section of *Still Life at the Penguin Café*. At the same time as he is attuned to such detailed actions or small events as ongoing stimuli, Bintley allows ideas for ballets to gestate over a period as long as ten or twenty years. He considers such a protracted period to be necessary particularly if he is to stage a full-length ballet. The timing for such a venture has to be right if he is to avoid either creative or financial errors. As an Artistic Director of a national

ballet company, it stands to reason that he has to be cautious and responsible about committing the company to expensive productions. He learnt his lesson in 1991 when his full-length ballet, *Cyrano* was labelled one of “the costliest flops in the Royal Ballet’s history” (Craine, 2007). Bintley waited sixteen years to re-stage the work for the BRB in 2007, at which point it received widespread critical acclaim and has become a key addition to the company’s repertory, an indication of Bintley’s artistic and personal tenacity.

### **2.5 *Still life at the Penguin Café* and the preservation of culture**

In many respects, *Still Life at the Penguin Café* (1988) stands alone amongst Bintley’s ballets because it is a suite of dances with each dance based on a separate topic but linked by a common theme concerned with environmental conservation. This structure is a departure from Bintley’s normal style since as we have seen sometimes he dispenses with stories altogether or, conversely, tackles full-scale narratives. The first section of *Still Life* presents the dancers in couples performing a series of steps inspired by ballroom and Latin American styles. The dancers are watched by other members of the cast who form an audience on stage which reminds the theatre audience that this is a performance within a performance. The ballet comprises of a series of divertissements. Prior to the success of romantic ballet, most opera-ballets, a form of theatrical dance usually consisting of three to five acts of unrelated plots held together by a theme presented in the prologue (Lee, 2002, p.351), took the form of divertissements. Divertissements are a feature of the classical ballet tradition and are presented as

interludes in many nineteenth century ballets. Bintley has taken the tradition and played with the classical model.

*Still Life at the Penguin Café* is designed to be like a floor show or cabaret which takes place within a café environment. Every divertissement springs from the idea of an endangered species. These are either animals or people from the rainforest, whose way of life is threatened by the encroaching modern world. Bintley represents each animal's behaviour with a corresponding dance genre. For example the flea's hopping movements are borrowed from English Morris dance and the Brazilian Woolly monkey's side-to-side hip wiggles correspond to the samba of Latin American carnival.

For Bintley, *Still Life*'s cultural and creative domains run parallel to one another (interview 2004a). Although he invokes an unfamiliar exotic world, there are nevertheless resonances with the everyday. This can be seen, for example, in the first scene, where the 'penguins' perform their duties as waiters, interspersing the serving of drinks to the on-stage audience with bird-like movements. They are rather comic characters as with feet in first position, they execute a waddling step, whilst flapping their arms in penguin style (see fig.2, p.101). The Utah Longhorn Ram is represented by a dancer in a long apricot dress and the full animal head. She performs a sequence of steps borrowed from a range of American popular dance styles including the charleston, lindy hop and jazz. The animal figures intermingle informally with the humans using an array of different dance styles. Bintley has created a world that is both ordinary and extraordinary, familiar and yet unfamiliar. In so doing he softens what is in fact a stark reminder

of the ever-increasing threat of environmental destruction and the erosion of land and resources supporting small groups and tribes of indigenous peoples and the continuation of their culture and ways of living. In some respects Bintley rewrites the rules for presenting animals in ballet. The familiar fairy-tale figures of Marius Petipa's *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890) and Ashton's very English creatures of the *Tales of Beatrix Potter* (1971) give way to an altogether different realm of the animal world. He turns the tables on Joann Kealiinohomoku's criticism of ballet's western-centrism (1983). Rather than reiterating the long tradition of swans and horses or the endearing animal inhabitants of Ashton's ballet pastorals, Bintley foregrounds the 'other' in his portrayal of fleas, monkeys and zebras.

Bintley acknowledges that the choreography for *Still Life* merely taps into the dance styles or idioms used by the characters in the ballet (interview 2004a). By this he means that he relies on the memory or impression of various styles of dance that he has picked up along the way, including English Morris dance. He makes no claims to having researched these dance forms in any detail believing that too much rigorous delving would restrict the creative process. Nevertheless, close comparison between the folk-dance inspired movements used in *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance and their traditional counterparts, as discussed in chapter three, reveal that in many respects Bintley has created a dance which is very close to the traditional form (see p.121).

Bintley's inspiration for *Still Life* came from Simon Jeffes' album of idiosyncratic, folk-inspired music entitled *Penguin Café Orchestra* and from the

illustrations on its sleeve produced by Emily Young (see fig.1, p.101) (Bintley interview 2004a). Bintley chose eight tracks from the album which were then re-orchestrated in a more western and traditional form for the Royal Opera House Orchestra. This resulted in some of the effects used in the original recording, such as the sounds produced by strumming on a stretched rubber band, being omitted from this version. The elimination of such homespun sounds made the music sound more suitably orchestral as befits a major ballet (Sanders, 2000, p.19). The graphics produced by Emily Young for the Penguin Café album: human bodies topped by penguins' heads - were the models for the animal characters in the ballet and for the costume designs (see fig 1, p.101). For Bintley these images stimulated the ideas for his “imaginary territory” and for his theme of harmonious co-existence on the planet between human and animal life (interview 2004a).

Jeffes's style of world folk music as realised in the Penguin Café Orchestra provides the background for Bintley's blend of folk dance forms. In *Still Life* Bintley places references to English Morris as represented in *Humboldt's Hognosed Skunk Flea*, alongside references to American step-dance as performed by the Texan Kangaroo Rat. Much of the research that Bintley carried out for this ballet came from the *Doomsday Book of Animals* (1981) (re-issued as *The Encyclopaedia of Vanished Species*, 1989) in which he found a list of endangered species. Having decided on his animal characters, he matched the qualities of each animal's movements and behaviour with an appropriate track from Jeffes's album (Armstrong, 2009, p.39).

As already discussed *Still Life* is based on the human abuse of the earth and promotes the notion that society has a responsibility to conserve global diversity, both in terms of native communities, their cultures, lifestyles, music and dance forms and the continuation of animal species. It is generally acknowledged that certain folk music and dance forms such as English Morris dance could become extinct. Morris dance is not a part of popular culture and tends to be practised by small specialist groups within local communities. Organisations such as the English Folk Dance and Song Society have attempted to guard against extinction by providing some national and local outreach services to increase access to folk song and dance. Responding to the idea of human societies and animal species that are in danger of eradication in *Still Life*, Bintley has created a Noah's Ark on stage, an image which lends the ballet a strong biblical association. Bintley is religious, as discussed on pages 70 and 88, and it is therefore not surprising that he should be inspired by religious themes. The dance action is set against images drawn from the Old Testament book of Genesis and from Aboriginal mythology with its story of a flood that arrived to cleanse the world. Bintley became aware of this particular Aboriginal myth in a scene from the Australian film *The Last Wave* (1977).

*Humboldt's Hog Nosed Skunk Flea* dance is performed by six dancers, the female flea and the five accompanying male dancers representing the Morris men. A Cotswold Morris team usually consists of between six or eight dancers and the fool or hobbyhorse is a separate figure. Bintley's flea is his version of the Morris dance fool, annoying the dancers, meddling with the floor patterns and

interfering with the figures and steps (see fig 4, p.103<sup>8</sup>). She disrupts the otherwise serious dance with her amusing antics. By placing the character of the fool within the Morris dance set, Bintley complicates the choreography in the way that he departs from Morris tradition. If the flea is performing a solo or mischievously refuses to join in a formation or floor pattern, it means that one of the Morris dancers is left without a partner. This is problematic as Morris dancing is based on partner work. So, when for example, the flea does not take part in the stick striking sequence in the dance, Bintley has to adapt the partner work to accommodate an odd number of dancers. He does this by setting the sequence in a circle, or in a whole round. In this Cotswold Morris figure, all the dancers move in a clockwise direction around a circle. Typically the dancers would travel around the circle using some type, or combination of Cotswold Morris travelling steps (see pp.123-125). However Bintley adapts the stick-striking sequence so that it is performed in the round in order that each of his dancers will have a dancer beside them with whom they can clash staves (see p.141).

The vocabulary for the role of the flea includes pointe work from half-way through the dance. As Sanders suggests, when the dancer's leg line is fully extended on pointe, it allows her to move nimbly and to seem weightless (2000, p.34). This is what we would expect the movement quality of a flea to be.

However, at other times, the dancer uses a *demi-plié* position taken on pointe and in a parallel leg alignment. The bend in the knee accentuates the downward

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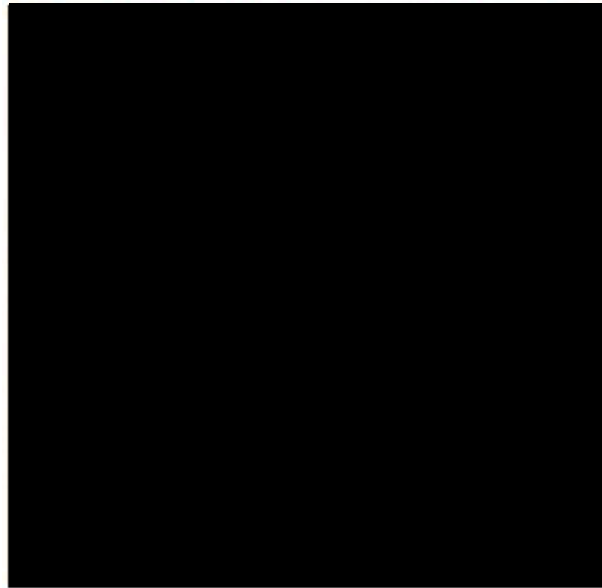
<sup>8</sup> Fig 4 illustrates the chaos that the flea creates for the Morris dancers after she has meddled with a floor pattern. In this image the orchestra are on stage because the picture was taken at a performance of the dance at Birmingham Artsfest 2008 and involved a collaboration between the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Birmingham Royal Ballet. Normally the orchestra would be in the pit.

pressure into the floor and allows her to establish more connection with the ground. With the lack of full extension in the leg, her movements take on an earthy and weighty quality. For example, towards the end of the dance, the flea is encircled by the Morris dancers and is forced to crouch down to avoid the blows from the staves clashing overhead. She emerges from this predicament by stepping onto pointe with her knees touching in an inverted *demi-plié* position as though she is wounded (see fig 5, p.104). Her crushed and dishevelled body adds a note of comedy, but also highlights the robustness of the Morris dancers in contrast to her spindly figure. It is as though Bintley is indirectly reinforcing the gender stereotypes perpetuated by the English Morris dance tradition. This convention promotes the idea that women do not have the physical strength or required attitude to perform alongside men.

Nevertheless, the character of the flea is integral to Bintley's Morris dance. She even performs some of the Cotswold Morris inspired travelling steps on pointe such as the single step. The single step is a step and hop on one leg and when performed in a sequence of steps, alternates between the right and left leg to form a skipping action (see p.124). Thus, Bintley treats the flea as agile in body and quick witted in mind which contrasts with the seemingly simple minded brawny men. The characterisation of the flea is enhanced by her costume: unlike the other animals represented in the ballet, her head is not entirely encased in a mask. Instead she wears a helmet-shaped headdress which leaves the lower part of the face visible (see fig. 3, p.102). Since this headgear is lighter than the other animals' all-over masks, the flea is better able to execute her speedy, darting movements.

There is some correspondence in the character of the flea with the hobbyhorse or fool in Cotswold Morris dance where the head or mask of a horse is worn by the male dancer, but it is the taunting and teasing antics she performs which are closer in spirit to the authentic Morris fool. Having analysed the concept of Englishness and surveyed Bintley's career as a choreographer in the English ballet tradition, the next chapter comprises a discussion of Bintley's experiences of the traditional Morris dance form and explores the ethnographic research conducted with the Ravensbourne Morris Men. It also compares the variation between the traditional Cotswold Morris motifs with Bintley's selection of steps, figures, arm movements and stick striking motifs in *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance.

Fig 1. Emily Young's illustration on the Penguin Café Orchestra album sleeve



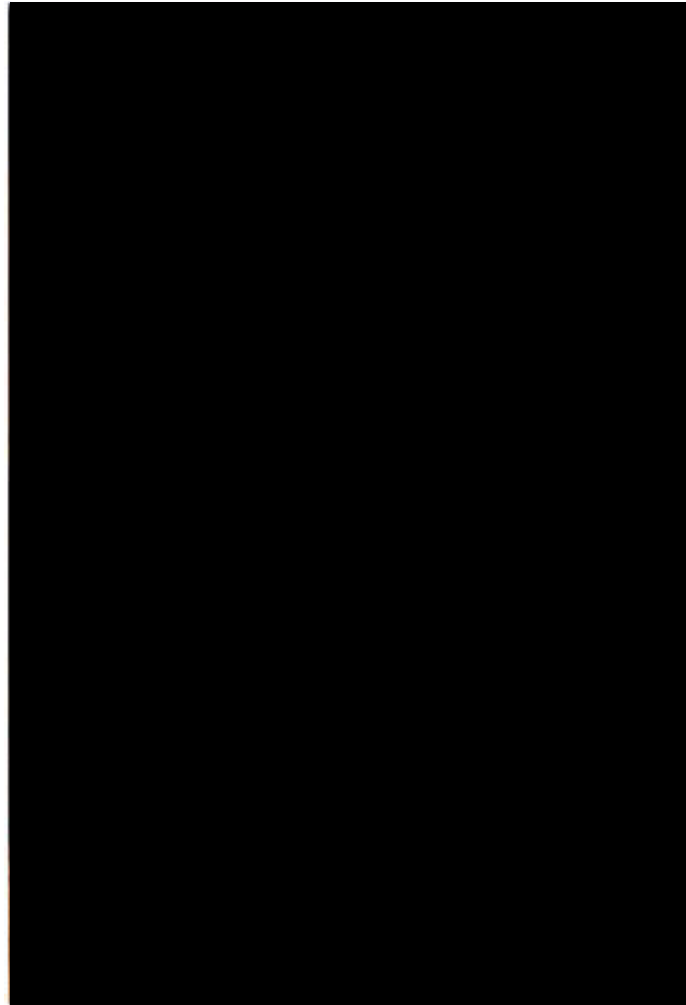
Note: From The Penguin Café Orchestra. (2006). Retrieved February 4, 2008, from The Official Penguin Café Web site:  
<http://www.penguincafe.com/home.htm>

Fig 2. The character of the penguin from *Still Life at the Penguin Café*



Note: From *Still Life at the Penguin Café*. (n.d). Retrieved September 15, 2008, from The Birmingham Royal Ballet Web site:  
<http://www.brb.org.uk/200809-penguin.html>

Fig 3. A scene from *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance



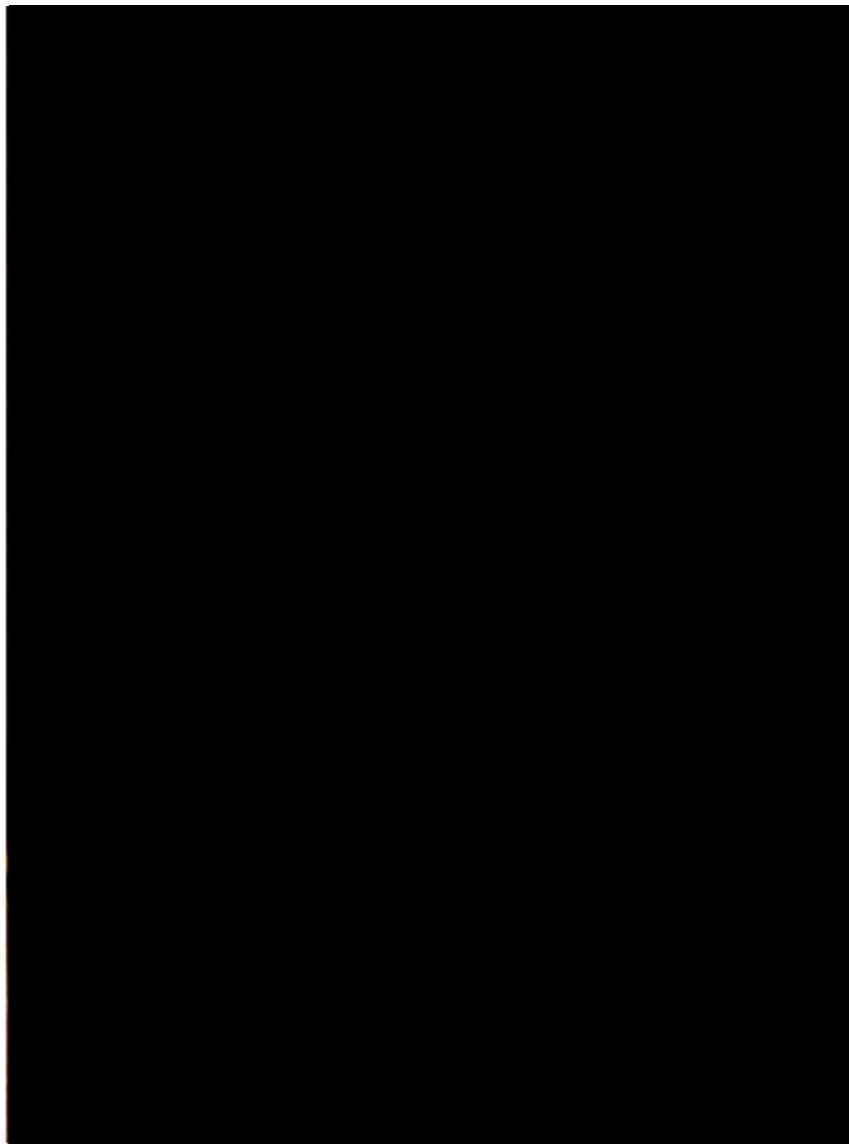
Note: From Image gallery for *Still Life at the Penguin Café*. (n.d). Retrieved May 9, 2009, from The Birmingham Royal Ballet Web site:  
<http://www.brb.org.uk/masque/index.htm?act=production&tsk=gallery&urn=12468>

Fig 4. A scene from *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance



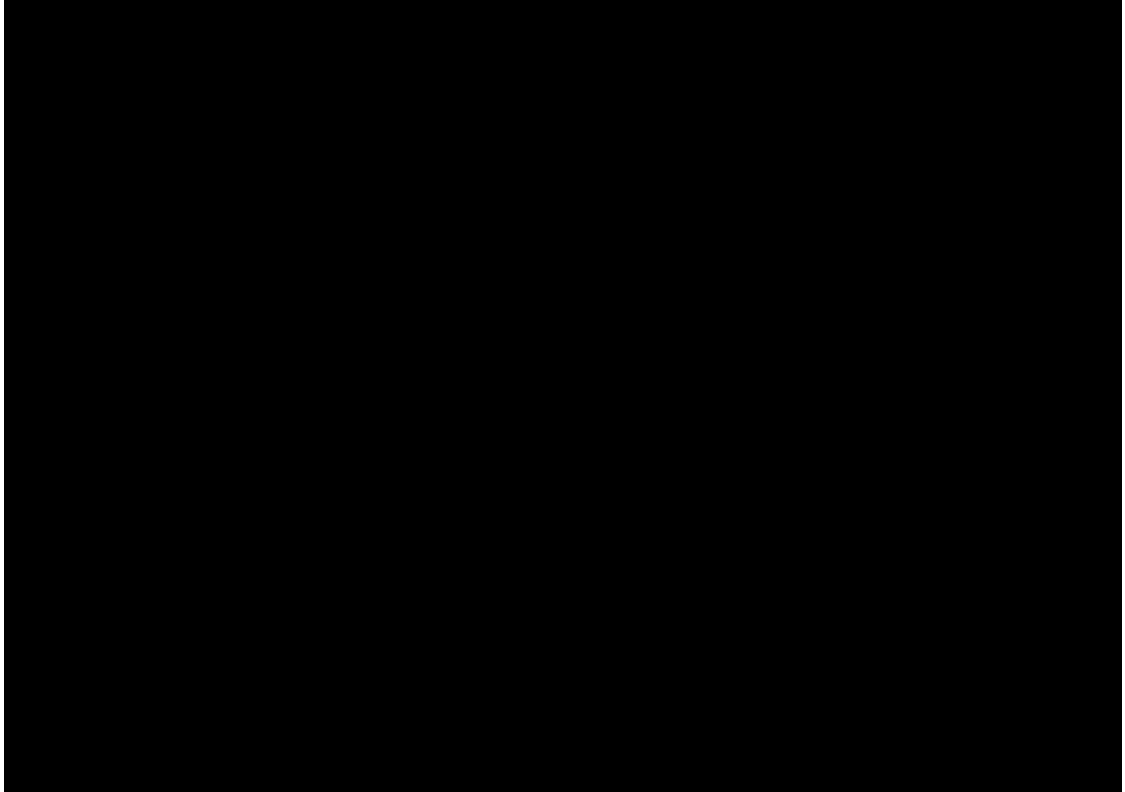
Note: From Birmingham Artsfest 2008. (2008). Retrieved September 18, 2008, from Flickr Web site:  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/14113765@N00/2869082452>

Fig 5. A scene from *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance



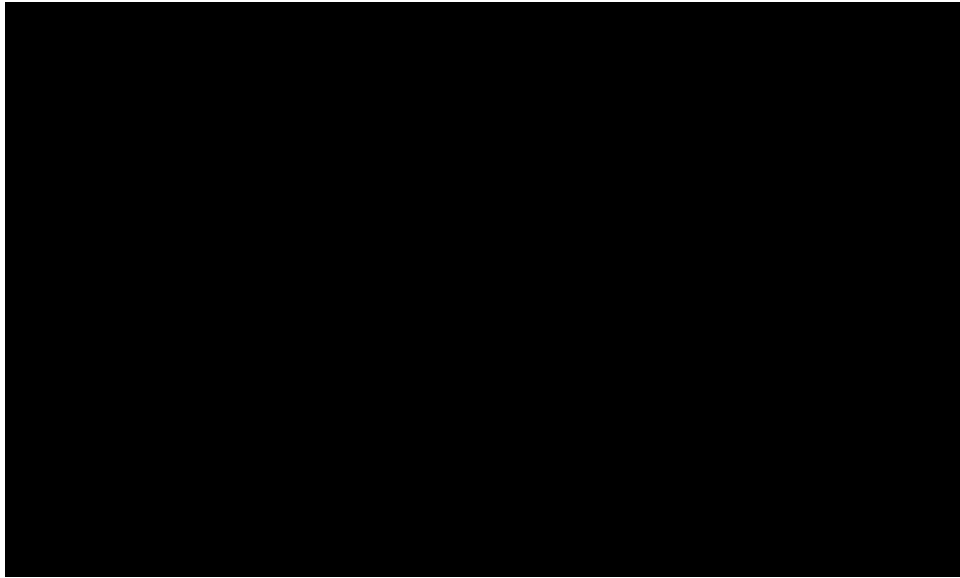
Note: Birmingham Royal Ballet. (2009). Retrieved May 21, 2009, from Ballet.co Web site:  
[http://www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr\\_09/may09/ck\\_rev\\_brb\\_0409.htm](http://www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr_09/may09/ck_rev_brb_0409.htm)

Fig 6. The Ravensbourne Morris Men performing in Trafalgar Square, London at the Westminster Day of Dance on 10 May, 2008.



Note: Ravensbourne Morris Men: Gallery 2. (2008). Retrieved May 14, 2009, from Ravensbourne Morris Men Web site: <http://www.ravensbourne.org/>

Fig 7. The Ravensbourne Morris Men performing at the Tenterden Folk Festival in Kent on 6 October, 2007.



Note: Ravensbourne Morris Men: Gallery 1. (2008). Retrieved May 14, 2009, from Ravensbourne Morris Men Web site: <http://www.ravensbourne.org/>

## **Chapter three**

### **In the field: Ethnographic study with the Ravensbourne Morris Men.**

Having established Bintley as a choreographer in the English tradition, the study now moves to an exploration of the Ravensbourne Morris Men and the issues that arose during the period of ethnographic research with the side. The chapter also discusses Bintley's experiences of traditional Morris dance and finishes by comparing traditional Cotswold Morris motifs, steps, patterns and figures, with similar choreographic devices in Bintley's *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance in *Still Life at the Penguin Café*.

#### **3.1 The Ravensbourne Morris Men and questions of identity, age, gender and personal style**

I established (p.12) that Bintley's *Still Life at the Penguin Café* draws mainly on Cotswold Morris dance for its folk-related vocabulary. Cotswold Morris originated in the regions of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire but is not restricted to these areas (Burgess, interview 2003a). The style is now prevalent across Britain, but is predominantly danced in the south of England, and has long been performed in Kent (ibid). As explained in chapter one (p.31), I chose to research the Ravensbourne Morris Men from the village of Keston in the north west of Kent because the side has over sixty years of experience of dancing Cotswold Morris.

Cotswold Morris dance sides can be identified as 'traditional' or 'revival' sides. A traditional side can claim an almost unbroken link with the past within their village or town and was in existence prior to the folk dance revival initiated by Sharp in the early twentieth century (Rippon, 1975, p.21). There are few traditional teams that are still performing today, but they include sides such as the Abingdon Traditional Morris Dancers, Bampton Traditional Morris men, the Headington Quarry men and Chipping Campden Morris men (ibid). The Ravensbourne Morris men were formed subsequent to the folk dance revival in 1946 and are therefore known as a revival side.

The Cotswold Morris dances differ according to the village in which they originated. Lionel Bacon records Cotswold Morris traditions from the following villages: Abingdon, Adderbury, Ascot-under-Wychwood, Badby, Bampton, Bidford, Bledington, Brackley, Bucknell, Chipping Campden, Ducklington, Eynsham, Field Town, Headington Quarry, Hinton-in-the-Hedges, Ilmington, Kirtlington, Longborough, Oddington, Sherbourne, Stanton Harcourt and Wheatley (1974). The Ravensbourne Morris men perform dances from many of these traditions (see list of DVD footage, pp.229-230). However they also create new dances using the Morris steps, figures, arm movements and stick striking actions (see DVD footage, chapter 7, for an example of this creativity). Their attitude is progressive in relation to invention within the Morris dance form. However, for the Ravensbourne Morris men, any new Cotswold Morris dance should always emulate and embody the spirit, attitude, technique and style of the tradition.

There is thought to be a common structure to Morris dances. A dance will generally begin with a foot up, in which the dancers face up to the top of the set and then take a 180 degree turn and dance back towards the bottom of the set (see p.134). The dance then alternates between what is referred to as the verses and the chorus (Burgess, 2005). A series of figures correspond to the verses, which are then followed by a repeated sequence or chorus. The chorus is generally unique to a particular dance, whereas the verses, or sequence of figures, can be used across different dances.

Most Morris dance tunes have a 4/4 time signature (Chandler, 1993, p.173). The musical phrases are even in tempo and the different sections of a tune, arranged in eight-bar phrases, are referred to as A or B music. Musicians can watch the dance and listen to the calls from the squire and thus play the appropriate section of music. Typically there are two A and two B sections within the music for a Morris dance, making up a total of 32 bars (Rippon, 1975, p.82). However this does vary and there are some dances that have 48 bars in which the musical phrasing would normally take the form of A1, A2, B1, B2, A3, B3 (ibid). Some Cotswold Morris dance tunes such as 'Sweets of May' have a three part tune, in which the different sections of the dance would be arranged as A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 (ibid).

However Bintley digresses from this usual Cotswold Morris structure and musical phrasing in *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance. For example, he does not divide the structure of the dance up into verses and chorus and does not commence with a foot up. There is little repetition across the various sections of

his dance. His work is based upon a piece of pre-existent music by Simon Jeffes which has a faster tempo than that of a traditional Morris dance tune. It comprises of 56 bars of music and has a polyrhythmic nature.

Throughout my ethnographic research, there was constant debate surrounding the structure of Morris dance, and I found exceptions to the typical verse and chorus format. Thus, I decided to concentrate on the actual movement motifs used in Morris dances. I also choreographed my dance to the same piece of music that Bintley used because, as discussed on page 36, I wanted to approximate the theatrical nature of Bintley's work and therefore, be able to identify what issues Bintley would have encountered in creating his Morris inspired dance to a non-traditional Morris dance tune. I will now go on to briefly discuss the history of the Ravensbourne Morris side, taking the information from the recollections of the former Squire of the team, Paul Burgess, although his oral account is supported by the team's collection of notes, newspaper cuttings and archival documentation. These documents are held by Ben Dauncey who became Squire in 2007.

The Ravensbourne Morris was formed in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War (Burgess, interview 2004b), a time when many men involved in Morris dancing had been killed or seriously injured. In the post-war years, those who were prepared to continue dancing were nevertheless financially stretched or psychologically damaged, and English Morris dance teams found it hard to retain their members or attract new recruits (Adams, 2009). Consequently, several Morris clubs that were active before the war dispersed (Burgess, interview

2004b). Such was the case with the South London Morley College side and the Kentish Balgowan side. On 28 October 1946, men from Morley College and Balgowan met and agreed to form a new Morris team located in North West Kent, and this became the Ravensbourne Morris. Although the team are a revival side, they also share strong links with the past as the first elected squire of the team was Geoff Metcalf, formerly of the Balgowan side. Metcalf trained with William “Merry” Kimber (1872-1961) (see p.27).

The Ravensbourne Morris Men first appeared in public as part of a lecture demonstration given at Beckenham and Penge County School in Kent on 10 March 1947. Douglas Kennedy, then Director of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, included the demonstration by the side when he spoke about the Cotswold Morris dance form. Ten days later, the club was invited to perform at the first post-war meeting of the Morris Ring held at Cecil Sharp House (20 March, 1947). The Ravensbourne Morris Men’s performance so impressed members of the Morris Ring, that they qualified for membership of the association and received its staff of office in the same year. The criteria for membership include the promise to maintain the traditions of the Morris and preserve its history, upholding the standards and dignity of English Morris dance (Morris Ring Constitution, 1934). Membership of the society is an indication of superiority in the execution of the Morris dance form.

Throughout the early 1950s, the side became even stronger in its standard of dancing because the men who joined were relatively young and had previous Morris experience (Burgess, interview 2004b). In the twenty-first century the

team still regularly perform and attend Morris Ring meetings across the UK, although in the current side all the members are predominantly aged over fifty years. The impact increased age has had on the physical vigour of the dancing means that the dancers cannot achieve as much elevation in their jumps, but it has not affected the side's emotional expression, pride in performing or Morris attitude (see p.23).

My research with the Ravensbourne Morris Men during 2003-2006 included participating in rehearsals and social gatherings, and attending performances, and I have since remained in regular contact with the side. The problems that I encountered during my research concerned attempts to satisfactorily embody the Cotswold Morris dance style as I go on to discuss.

### **Local identity and discretion**

When I first joined the side in October 2003, some members of the Ravensbourne team were anxious about entrusting me with elements of their cultural heritage. Within the team there is a desire to preserve close links with the past and to continue to produce accurate performances of the side's repertoire. The former Squire of the Ravensbourne Morris Men, Paul Burgess explained that by ensuring the choreography and steps are not widely taught to outsiders, the team can retain control over the traditional practice and monitor standards of performance (interview 2005c). There is also a social aspect to the group and in addition to guarding the tradition, dancers who join the team must commit to performance schedules and enter fully into its social life. To gain insider status,

one must not only recognise the Morris form's importance but also appreciate its place at the heart of the local community. In this way Ravensbourne Morris Men are active and responsible members of their community, taking part in charitable fund raising events, and helping to support the promotion of local businesses. The lighter side to this social aspect of Morris dancing is to be able to down several pints of ale with fellow dancers.

On my first visit, I realised that the best way of understanding the team's values was to mingle and engage with them informally at the post-rehearsal gathering where they were relaxed and open to my questions. The team are serious about keeping records of their performances and any new choreography developed by the side is documented on film as well as in note form using Lionel Bacon's system of notation. Although the side relies on printed sources such as Bacon's handbook, the Ravensbourne Morris men believe that the dance form should be passed on orally, via practical tuition and by absorbing the style and learning the steps via a process of osmosis in the rehearsal sessions. They do not recommend that a dancer attempts to learn the nuances of the form by purely studying the Morris dance literature.

Therefore the lexicon of steps, figures and patterns is passed on by word of mouth in a rehearsal session and the side will only consult Lionel Bacon's *Handbook of Morris dances* (1974) (see p.33), if they need to verify any queries or concerns over a step or aspect of the musical accompaniment. The time spent observing, dancing and socialising with the side resulted in the breaking down of any barriers I had initially encountered. These barriers concerned the protection

or ring-fencing of the side's specialist knowledge and 'trade secrets'. The Ravensbourne Morris side are not unusual in wanting to retain control of their cultural legacy. In chapter one (p.50), I mentioned that in December 2003, I applied to visit the Britannia Coconut Dancers, a traditional Clog dancing side from Rossendale in Lancashire which dates back to 1903. The side was unwilling to disclose any information about their dances or steps because the Squire, Ronnie Searle, held that allowing access to this kind of material threatened the preservation of the team's individuality (December 2003). Providing access to the unique steps and patterns performed by the side meant that they could be borrowed by other dance groups with the result that the Britannia Coconut Dancers could lose control of their highly prized exceptional style.

### **Age and gender**

As the first female in fifty years to participate in the all-male preserve of a Ravensbourne Morris rehearsal (see p.20), it is not surprising that my presence affected the dynamic of the group. My presence was even more anachronistic because a young, relatively lightly-built woman seemed at odds with the mainly middle aged, robust men. In the early stages of the research, the men were eager to show off particularly when it came to demonstrating their Morris skills. When clashing staves, they would hit the sticks together with such energy, that there was no doubt about the force of their superior masculine strength. Buckland has suggested that since the twentieth century, Morris dancers have distanced themselves from anything that may associate them with the feminine or effeminate (as cited in Pegler, 2001). Within this context, members of the side

told me that partner work in Cotswold Morris dance should be a meeting of physical equals. Physical equality in Morris constitutes the idea of weight as embodied in men of more than average build, certainly substantially heavier than the average woman. As noted in the discussion of attitude (p.23) for Morris men, the female physique lacks the strength required for the necessary forceful execution of the actions. The Morris purists believe that if women were permitted to perform Morris dance, the style would be robbed of its characteristic vigour.

With these issues in mind, I approached my first practical session with the side with some trepidation. We rehearsed a dance called *The Rose Tree* which in fact includes a woman, who under normal conditions is chosen at random from the audience, and placed in the centre of a circle of Morris men. The men dance around her and at the end of the dance, take hold of her legs and lift her into the air vertically. In many respects my introduction to Morris dancing as the ‘random’ woman in *The Rose Tree*, was relatively innocuous because I had little to do, other than submit myself to being lifted by several pairs of hands (see DVD footage: Chapter 2). The lift made me feel slightly vulnerable and powerless. As my research with the group progressed and I was taught the traditional steps, figures, patterns and the specific technique of stick striking, it became evident that Cotswold Morris men strive to achieve a balance between strength and delicacy. For example, the intricate hand movements involved in the galley step (see table of comparison, p.128 for description) or light flicks of the handkerchiefs are in stark contrast to the boisterous clashing of wooden staves. The male dancers’ respect for me as a woman was reflected in their teaching

methods. As noted in chapter one (p.20), when showing me how to clash the traditional wooden sticks or staves, they refrained from exerting their full force against me, for fear that I would not be able to sustain its impact. On the other hand, it did not occur to the men that I would have any problems with the delicate and intricate hand and wrist movements of the handkerchief dances as these movements required grace rather than strength. The Morris dancers were adhering to conventional gender constructs, that the male has qualities of strength and power, whilst the female is sensitive and fragile.

Despite the fact that women are not permitted to perform Morris dance in the Cotswold Morris tradition, they are allowed to study and teach it. The folklorist Pauline Greenhill (1997) proposes that such assertions of Morris masculinity are in fact ideological expressions of male power. For Greenhill, the cultural conditioning of Morris dance communicates ideas about what it means to be male or female. Male dominance in Morris dance is a form of masculine consolidation and identity. Clearly the wooden stave is a phallic symbol and the degree of force required when wielding it is a sure sign of sexual prowess. Thus, Morris dance promotes a conventional or constructed concept of masculinity. It is a male collective, and just as women as mother figures are permitted to raise, nurture and teach men, according to conventional gender divisions, the Morris men continue to hold the view that women physiologically cannot compete with them in the performance of Morris dance.

Changes in the rules about gender and age for those participating in Morris dancing affect the tradition of the style itself. The intricacies of the Morris dance

technique and vocabulary of steps should be acquired over time and therefore are better executed by those with knowledge and experience (Johnson, 2003). As a young dancer with some years of training behind me, I was often able to achieve greater elevation in the execution of the jumps than the Morris dancers. However this was of little concern to them because they claimed when younger, they were able to jump higher and it has to be acknowledged that at predominantly fifty years and over, the men were still remarkably agile.

In many respects, being young was an advantage for my research. I was treated as an apprentice or trainee, which meant that I was expected to ask questions, and to request that steps were broken down so that I could understand and analyse their structure. I was also able to ask for explanations about why movements were performed in a particular way. As already established (p.112), such information is normally closely guarded and the tradition tends to live on through close family relations (Burgess, interview 2003a). I developed a sense of pride and gratitude that as a woman I was accepted into this close-knit male preserve and as a consequence could contribute to the continuation of the Ravensbourne Morris Men by keeping the steps alive through discussions about my choreographic intentions.

### **The Morris tradition and questions of style**

I had to rely on informants within the Ravensbourne Morris dance community in order to gain an understanding of how the culture is embodied in the movements. Since individual informants have variations in style, I received contradictory

information about some of the dances I learnt, such as conflicting versions of floor pattern and arm line. For example, with the down and up arm action, where the dancer throws the arms down by their sides and vertically upwards over the head (see p.139 for full description), some dancers said that the arms should be flung upwards with an impromptu action and with an aggressive quality. Others agreed that the arms are thrown upwards with force, but that there should be some attempt at control.

Variations in an individual dancer's intention and range of physical motion also have an impact on their methods of thinking about and executing a movement. For instance, in a rehearsal with the side in 2003, one member of the Ravensbourne Morris Men demonstrated a common Morris action called a 'Show'. This is when all the dancers in the set finish the performance with both arms held straight up in the air, palms facing inwards. If a stave is used, it should be held with both hands. The movement can be performed standing on one leg or with both feet on the ground. In the demonstration, the dancer explained that the arms should be thrust up in the air to the vertical position to express the dancer's pride in the sequence that had just been performed. He was describing his own personal feelings of satisfaction that he had performed well and that he was expressing this quality in the movement.

Another dancer in the group explained that the action was just a signal to the audience that the dance had come to an end. He was describing the physical motivation behind the movement, but did not appear to share his colleague's sense of the need for emotional expression. Thus the meaning of the action itself

becomes slightly ambiguous – is a ‘Show’ merely an external sign from the Morris dancers to the audience that the performance is over and that they should begin to applaud, or is it an internal sign for the Morris dancers, a symbol of their satisfaction and pride in their dancing? I would argue that it is actually both an internal and external expression of a dancer’s achievement and if attitude, as discussed earlier in the study (p.23) is taken into consideration, then there should be a degree of emotional expression in the ‘Show’.

### **3.2 Bintley’s experiences of the authentic Morris dance tradition**

As noted in chapter two, Bintley had experience of genuine folk dance when he performed in the Royal Ballet’s Morris dance team, the Bow Street Rappers (see pp.74-75). According to the dancer and choreographer Jonathan Burrows, who was also a former member of the team, the Bow Street Rappers was an ‘authentic’ Morris dance side. The team were taught Morris dancing at the Royal Ballet School by visiting teachers Ron Smedley and Bob Parker between 1969-1989, and who, therefore would also have taught Bintley. In a conversation with Smedley on 7 February 2009 held during a day of celebration for the Morris dance practitioner Mary Neal (see p.45), Burrows claimed that Smedley and Parker had taken the Bow Street Rappers to study with the Bampton Traditional Morris Men. Burrows remarked that Morris dancing was particularly popular among the more rebellious boys at the Royal Ballet School who were having problems adjusting to the strict technique and restrictions of classical ballet. Bintley fits this description because (see p.65), he acknowledges that he had

trouble adjusting to the life of a professional dance student and to the strictness of the ballet.

Burrows explained that as Morris dancers with the Bow Street Rapper side, the young men enjoyed the aesthetic freedom they were unable to find in their ballet studies. Burrows also enjoyed the camaraderie found in their Saturday morning Morris classes where he and the other dancers could work as a team (7 February 2009). This, he said was a welcome change from struggling on one's own at the ballet barre. Burrows also appreciated the degree of "selflessness" that is required of a true member of the Morris side. An important aspect of Morris dance for the Royal Ballet students was the opportunity it gave them to embody a character on stage (ibid). In this respect, the Morris dance classes would have benefited Bintley's development as a dancer, especially in the demi-caractère style as discussed in chapter two (p.65). According to Smedley, during the era of the Bow Street Rappers, more than half of the male pupils at the Royal Ballet School were Morris dancers, a figure that reflects the enjoyment the dancers found in the dance form.

During the existence of the Bow Street Rapper team, according to Smedley (7 February 2009), the Royal Ballet was the only classical dance company in the world that had a street dance Morris team. The side used to perform in Covent Garden market in London and also internationally in China and Moscow (ibid).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Although the Bow Street Rappers Morris dance team no longer exists, it is a former member of the side, Simon Rice, who is currently responsible for teaching English Morris dance at the Royal Ballet School, thus in some respects the legacy of the team continues.

### **3. 3 English Cotswold Morris tradition vs. Bintley's theatrical form: A table of comparisons**

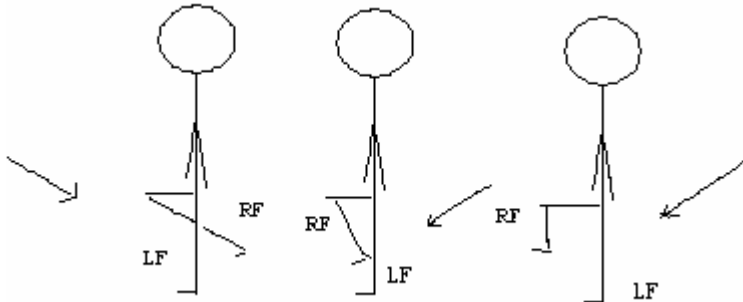
Burrows confirms that the experience of dancing with the Bow Street Rappers provided its members with a thorough background in Cotswold Morris dance and Bintley's *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* is clear evidence that he absorbed much of what he learnt dancing with the team. For example, Bintley's dancers execute an authentic grand chain for which they remain totally faithful to the traditional pattern (see table of comparison, p.129). Bintley also frequently makes use of the longways set in the dance, whereby the dancers are arranged in two rows facing each other (see table of comparison, p.130). Again, there are no variations from the traditional formation. However, there are also adaptations to the traditional steps. For example, Bintley has adjusted the single step where, for balletic reasons (see table of comparison, p.124), the dancers point rather than flex the foot and this has the effect of increasing or exaggerating the height of the hop. In order for the dancers to be able to move at speed around a Morris figure, the step has again been adjusted so that it adopts a lighter and sprightly balletic skipping action. There are also instances in the dance when Bintley has created completely new steps that do not appear in authentic Morris. One such action occurs when the dancers perform a series of star jumps with the assistance of a partner (see table of comparison, p.127).

The following table gives further detailed information about the variation in Bintley's selection of steps, figures, arm movements and stick striking motifs in *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance with that of their traditional

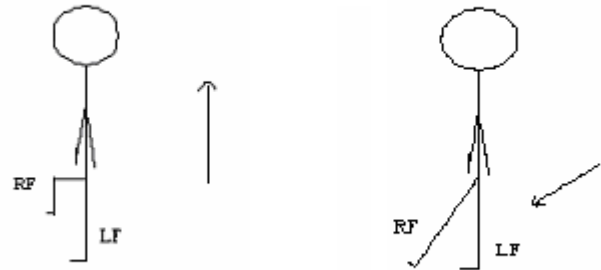
counterparts from the English Cotswold Morris tradition. The similarities and differences will be listed in the table provided in this chapter. Further analysis of the results will be discussed in chapter four of the thesis. This will be devoted to the series of Morris dance workshops I conducted with eight women representing the field of professional dance. I shall also deal with the issues involved in the creation of a more authentically ‘Morris’ version of Bintley’s *Humboldt’s Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance.

## TABLE OF COMPARISON

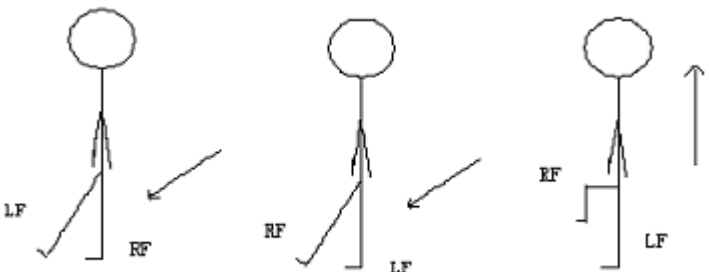
### STEPS: CAPER

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Diagram:<br>RF = Right foot LF = Left foot → = Direction of travel                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>A caper is a leap from one foot to the other. The working leg should bend behind as far as possible from the knee before being swung through to a front kick with the working leg bent at a 90 degree angle and the weight transferred on to that leg. The foot should be flexed and in line with the mid-calf. The action is then repeated on the other leg.</p> <p>The leap should aim to achieve height, with an emphasis on the initial kick up at the back and not the front to balance the movement. As the foot is brushed through, it may or may not touch the floor. The movements are often accompanied by a natural parallel swing in the arms and a relaxed feeling in the torso, generating a feeling of weight in the shoulder girdle. The dancer's weight should remain slightly forwards and the dancer should always land on the flat of the foot. The emphasis of the movement should be down, even though the dancer should aspire for elevation in the step.</p> <p>The caper is a motif that often appears in Cotswold Morris dance. It is used to begin a figure, as a linking action or to complete figures. In many dances a series of capers can be used as travelling steps.</p> <p><i>Note: All Morris dance steps begin and end with bent or relaxed knees in parallel.</i></p> |  |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the caper:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley has adhered to Morris tradition and used a series of capers for travelling steps, as well as to connect and end figures in the dance.</p> <p>The ballet dancers achieve good elevation, but do not find the required level of bound flow needed to achieve a feeling of weight. The dancers perform the step with the body weight in a central position. Thus the torso remains stable, with no movement in the ribcage and shoulder girdle. The dancers also perform a series of travelling capers with an exaggerated angular arm line. The arm is bent at the elbow and rotated to a horizontal position at waist level. This suggests an insect-like quality, as the arm position imitates the shape of an insect's wings and implies that Bintley has adjusted the arm line for comic effect and to make the step more visually dynamic.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                     |

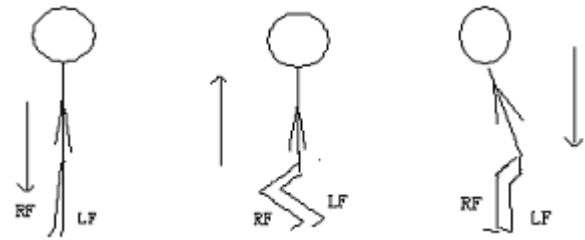
## **STEPS: SINGLE STEP**

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Diagram:<br>RF = Right foot    LF = Left foot    → = Direction of travel            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The single step in its basic form is a step and hop and when performed in a sequence should alternate between the right and left feet to form a skipping action. The non-working leg should be bent at a 90 degrees angle and is placed just underneath the knee. A single step starting on the left should commence with a hop on the left foot and a step on the right. When beginning the movement, the dancer should hop on the last beat of the previous bar to begin the series of steps.</p> <p>The movements are accompanied by a natural parallel swing in the arms and a relaxed feeling in the torso, generating movement in the ribcage and shoulder girdle. The dancer's weight should always remain slightly forwards and the dancer should always step on to the flat of the foot. As with the caper the emphasis of the movement should always be heavy, even though the dancer should aspire for elevation in the single step.</p> <p>Although there are Cotswold Morris dances that use the single step, unlike the caper, it is not a frequently used motif. The single step is a travelling step and is more prevalent in Border Morris dance where it tends to allow the dancers to move around the floor more quickly in a particular figure.</p> |  |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the single step:</u></b></p> <p>The single step appears frequently in Bintley's dance because it allows his dancers to travel across the stage more quickly. Bintley has also adjusted the step for the ballet style as the dancers perform the single step with a pointed rather than a flexed foot. This change of the foot position exaggerates the height of the hop, but works against the feeling of weight in the execution of the step. The single step resembles a balletic style of skipping in Bintley's dance. Bintley uses the step in the traditional Border Morris sense to allow the dancers to move at speed around a Morris dance figure. However he has also noticed that as a means of travel, the single step is more conducive to the ballet genre than the caper.</p> <p>The dancers perform the single step with elevation and the appearance of weightlessness, predominantly due to the free flow in their use of weight. The dancers perform the single step with the body weight in a central position. Thus the torso remains stable, with no movement in the ribcage and shoulder girdle. This ensures the arms, although swung by the dancers' sides, are controlled and placed.</p>      |                                                                                     |

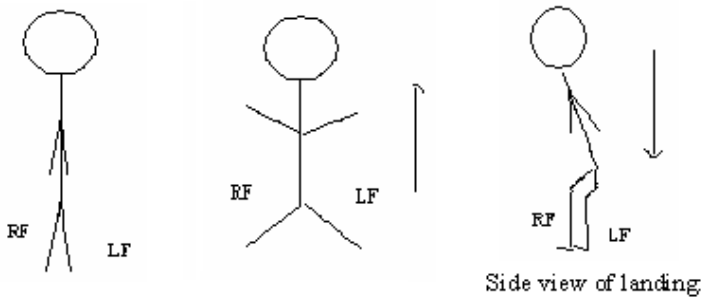
## **STEPS: DOUBLE STEP**

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Diagram:<br>RF = Right foot    LF = Left foot    → = Direction of travel            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>A double step starting with the left foot forwards begins with a spring onto the right leg, step forwards on the left foot, followed by a step on the right, and finishing with a step and hop on the left foot. The step takes 4 counts.</p> <p>Left and right double steps should alternate when performed in sequence. The working foot should always remain in a flexed position with the steps executed using the flat of the foot and leading with the heel.</p> <p>The dancer's weight should always remain slightly forwards with strong emphasis on a heavy step forwards to create a sense of resistance with the floor. The movement should be accompanied by a natural swing in the arms.</p> <p>Unlike the single step, the double step often appears in Cotswold Morris dance. It is a travelling motif which allows the dancers to move around the floor in a specific figure, although not as quickly as with the single step.</p> |  |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the double step:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley's dancers also perform double stepping sequences in the dance. They are used in the traditional way as travelling steps.</p> <p>The dancers' leg alignment is slightly turned out and the foot remains pointed during the execution of the step. The dancers lead with the toe rather than with the heel in the execution of the step.</p> <p>The dancer's body weight remains in a central position. Thus the step becomes increasingly aerial, promoting a freer flow in the movement. There is little resistance with the floor in the implementation of the various components of the double step, thus emphasis is on achieving distance from the floor rather than pressing into the floor. The dancers perform the sequence of double steps within the grand chain figure.</p>                                                                       |                                                                                     |

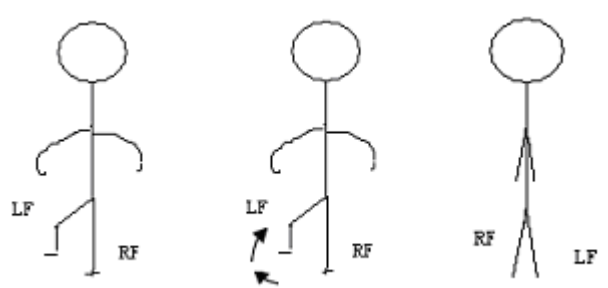
## **STEPS: FOOT-TOGETHER-JUMP**

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Diagram:<br>RF = Right foot    LF = Left foot    → = Direction of travel            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>For the foot-together-jump the free foot is closed to join the working foot, followed by a jump from both feet to land on both feet. The feet remain flexed during the jump.</p> <p>A preparatory hop may be added if setting off on a series of stepping after a foot-together-jump.</p> <p>The arms can swing naturally by the side of the dancer, or as the dancer jumps in the air, the arms can swing vertically up in the air in front of the dancer's body.</p> <p>The dancer should aim for height and elevation in the jump. The body weight is slightly tilted forwards.</p> <p>This jump is another frequently used motif in Cotswold Morris dance since it often completes a sequence of stepping and is used to signal the end of a figure.</p> <p>Note: Foot-together-jump is the authentic spelling of this step.</p>                                                                                                                |  |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the foot-together-jump:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley's dancers perform the foot-together-jump as a means of linking steps within a figure rather than its traditional use at the end of a figure to complete a sequence of stepping. The foot-together-jump adds height and energy to the dance. Thus, Bintley has compromised on tradition to increase the energy and vigour in the dance.</p> <p>The dancers perform the step with flexed feet, and achieve good elevation in the jump.</p> <p>In Bintley's choice of movement, the dancers bend the knees over a 90 degree angle in the elevated jump, bringing the feet up to sit just underneath the base of the spine at the highest point of the jump. The enhanced flexibility of the ballet dancers ensures they can achieve this increased range of motion.</p> <p>The dancers perform the foot-together-jump within the grand chain figure.</p> |                                                                                     |

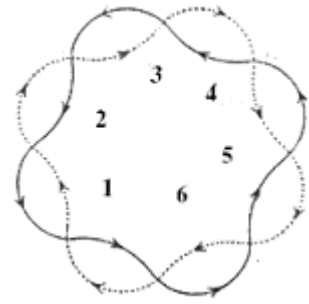
## **STEPS: STAR JUMP**

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Diagram:<br>RF = Right foot    LF = Left foot    → = Direction of travel                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The star jump starts with feet together and arms down by the side, palms facing inwards.</p> <p>The dancer jumps high with arms and legs spread out in a star-like shape and then lands with feet together and arms down again by the dancer's side.</p> <p>Although the dancer should aim to achieve elevation, the jump should have a weighty quality when the feet regain contact with the floor.</p> <p>Again this jump is a motif but does not often appear in Cotswold Morris and is in fact used sparingly across the tradition. For this reason it can make a Cotswold Morris dance seem unusual and therefore distinguished.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |  <p>The diagram shows three stick figures representing a dancer in different stages of a star jump. The first figure is in a starting position with feet together (labeled RF and LF) and arms down. The second figure is in a jumping position with arms and legs spread out in a star-like shape, with an upward arrow indicating the direction of travel. The third figure is in a landing position with feet together and arms down, with a downward arrow indicating the direction of travel. The text 'Side view of landing' is written below the third figure.</p> |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the star jump:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley's dancers perform a series of assisted star jumps with a partner. Assisted star jumps are not traditionally seen in the Cotswold Morris tradition.</p> <p>The dancer holds their partner's waist and lifts them up as they execute a basic star jump with the knees bent, and then assists a further star jump whereby the dancer, whilst completing the star jump with the legs extended, is lifted over the head of their partner.</p> <p>Bintley's choice of movement demonstrates a more athletic approach to the traditional folk dance alternative. However, according to Sutton (2000), folk dancers would have been the youngest, most virile members of the local community in the nineteenth century and would have performed lifts and stunts to demonstrate their strength, potency and masculinity. Although Bintley has adapted the star jump to make his dance more visually dynamic, he has in fact returned to a more traditional approach to the step.</p> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

## **STEPS: GALLEY**

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Diagram:<br>RF = Right foot    LF = Left foot    → = Direction of travel            |
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| <p>A galley starting on one foot begins with a step onto the other foot. The held leg is slightly turned out and raised, the knee bent to at least the height of the mid-calf on the supporting leg. The foot should be flexed and the heel pointing downwards. The foot then moves in a circular motion, on a horizontal plane to complete two small circles. The working foot is then placed back on the floor in a parallel leg alignment. A galley round is used to change direction in a dance. The dancer performs a galley on the spot but twists with the step to face the opposite direction.</p> <p>The entire movement traditionally takes four counts and can be performed, starting on the left or right leg. Note, if the right leg is raised the small circular movements should be performed in an anti-clockwise direction. If the left leg is raised, they should be performed in a clockwise direction. The arms can swing naturally by the sides throughout the movement. If holding handkerchiefs, the dancers should mirror the two small circular movements of the leg by moving the wrists in a circular motion anti-clockwise with the right hand and clockwise with the left hand. This complex motif is often used as a linking step in Cotswold Morris. It generally connects a series of travelling steps.</p> |  |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the galley:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley's dancers perform a movement similar to a galley, although there are several variations in Bintley's choice of step. Bintley's dancers, use a strong turned out leg alignment on the supporting and working leg which makes the movement look artificial. Instead of performing small circles with the working foot, the dancers kick the leg high to the side.</p> <p>Another variation sees the dancers transferring the weight directly from one foot to the other rather than stepping into the movement, or placing the working leg down after completing the circular movements. Bintley has used a more formalised arm line in which the dancers extend the opposite arm to the working leg in the air in a half V shape. Bintley has used the movement in the traditional sense to connect a series of travelling steps, however he has exaggerated the movement for comic effect. The dancers are lined up directly behind the 'flea' and the action of kicking the arms and legs out wildly imitate an insect's many legs.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                     |

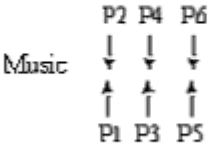
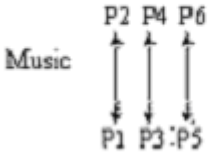
## **FIGURES: GRAND CHAIN**

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Diagram:<br>RF = Right foot    LF = Left foot    → = Direction of travel                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
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| <p>In the grand chain the dancer begins by facing their partner. He/she then passes their partner giving right hands and passing right shoulders.</p> <p>As the partner's hand is released, the dancer takes the left hand of the dancer coming towards them, and passes giving left hands and passing left shoulders. The dancer continues to pass left and right alternately until the end of the chain.</p> <p>The grand chain is an often repeated dance figure in Cotswold Morris and English country dance, although in Morris, the dancers also perform the figure without linking hands with their partner.</p> <p>Cotswold Morris dancers often carry staves or handkerchiefs, which prevents hand contact.</p> |  <p>The diagram illustrates the Grand Chain figure as a circular path with six numbered positions (1-6) arranged in a hexagonal pattern. Arrows indicate the direction of travel, showing a continuous loop that alternates between the right and left sides of the circle. The path starts at position 1, moves clockwise to position 2, then to position 3, 4, 5, and 6, before returning to position 1. The arrows show that the path is continuous and loops back on itself.</p> |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the grand chain:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley's dancers execute a grand chain figure and adhere to tradition by following the pattern of the chain exactly. There are no variations from the traditional figure.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

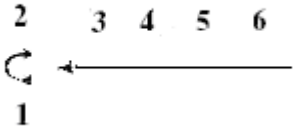
## **FORMATION: LONGWAYS SET**

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Diagram:<br>RF = Right foot    LF = Left foot    → = Direction of travel                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The longways set normally comprises of six to eight dancers (although this can be increased to any even number of dancers). The dancers are arranged in two rows facing each other.</p> <p>The set is the most frequently used dance formation in Cotswold Morris dance. The majority of Morris dances begin and end in a longways set and many of the stepping sequences also take place within this formation.</p> <p>The term partner refers to the pairing of dancers. See diagram (opposite) for more detail.</p> | <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Music</p> <p>P2 P4 P6</p> <p>P1 P3 P5</p> </div> <div style="text-align: right;"> <p>F= Partner</p> <p>Pairings:</p> <p>P1 + P2</p> <p>P3 + P4</p> <p>P5 + P6</p> </div> </div> |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the longways set:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley arranges his dancers in the longways set formation throughout his dance. There are no variations from the traditional formation.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

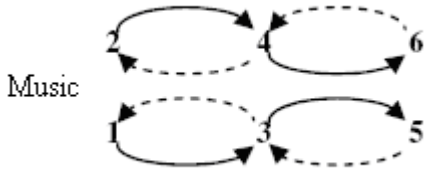
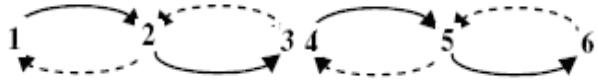
## **FIGURES: HALF GYP**

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Diagram:<br>RF = Right foot    LF = Left foot    → = Direction of travel                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The half gyp figure starts from a longways set.</p> <p>Two partners dance forwards to each other's places passing right shoulders. The partners do not pass fully however, but dance backwards following their original path. The half gyp is then repeated on the other side.</p> <p>This is a figure that promotes movement in Cotswold Morris dance and allows the dancers to interact with their partner.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p>Direction of travel in Half Gyp:</p>  <p>The diagram shows a vertical arrangement of six positions: P2, P4, P6 at the top and P1, P3, P5 at the bottom. To the left of the top three positions is the word 'Music'. Between P2 and P1, P4 and P3, and P6 and P5, there are vertical double-headed arrows indicating movement in both directions.</p>                                             |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the half gyp:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley has choreographed a figure that is extremely similar to the traditional half gyp, but has changed the direction of travel for the dancers.</p> <p>Starting from the longways set, the dancers follow the same floor pattern as the traditional half gyp, but instead of travelling forwards to meet their partner, Bintley has directed his dancers to move away from their partner and then return to their starting position.</p> <p>By altering the floor pattern, Bintley has made it easier for the audience to see the action on stage. If the dancers had performed a traditional version of the half gyp, they would face each other with their backs to the audience. This is not a problem for Cotswold Morris dance sides who are normally surrounded by an audience during their performance.</p> | <p>Direction of travel in Bintley's figure:</p>  <p>The diagram shows a vertical arrangement of six positions: P2, P4, P6 at the top and P1, P3, P5 at the bottom. To the left of the top three positions is the word 'Music'. Between P2 and P1, P4 and P3, and P6 and P5, there are vertical arrows pointing downwards, indicating movement from the top positions to the bottom positions.</p> |

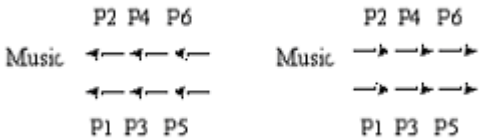
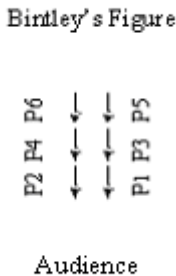
## **FIGURES: THREADING THE NEEDLE**

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Diagram:<br>RF = Right foot    LF = Left foot    → = Direction of travel            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Dancers begin the threading the needle figure from a straight line formation.</p> <p>Traditionally the second dancer breaks the line and forms a single-arm arch with the leader of the line.</p> <p>The third dancer in the line leads the remaining dancers by the hand underneath the arch. The first two dancers then join the end of the line.</p> <p>This figure can then be repeated.</p> <p>Threading the needle is a popular figure in English country dance, but sometimes appears in Cotswold Morris dance.</p> |  |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the threading the needle:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley performs a figure similar to threading the needle, however in his figure it is the dancer playing the role of the flea who leads the other dancers by hand through a single arm-arch.</p> <p>The figure is used as a comic device. The dancer playing the flea leads the dancers through the arch, but their limbs become entwined and the dancers become entangled.</p>                                                   |                                                                                     |

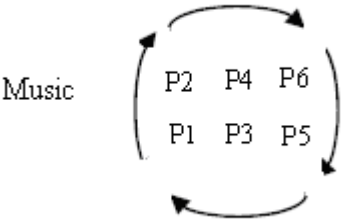
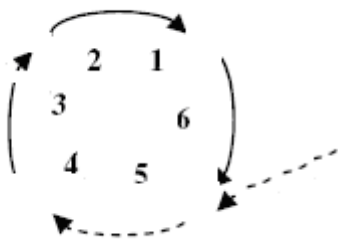
## **FIGURES: HEY**

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Diagram:<br>RF = Right foot    LF = Left foot    → = Direction of travel                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The hey normally starts from a longways set with mirror image heys on both sides of the set. In a group of six, all dancers would perform the hey. In a larger group, it is the top, middle and last dancer in the line who perform the figure. The arms should swing naturally by the dancer's side.</p> <p>The three dancers progress down the line following a figure of 8 shape and interweave with the other dancers as they pass along the line. So this figure involves three dancers moving in a figure of 8 shape from their starting position back to their original place (see diagram).</p> <p>The hey is a frequently used motif in Cotswold Morris dance.</p>                                                                                                                                          |  <p>Music</p>               |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the hey:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley's six dancers perform a variation on a hey. The dancers start from one straight line rather than a longways set.</p> <p>Bintley's dancers also take the hand of their partners as they pass them in this figure. This is distinct in English country dancing, but is not commonplace in Cotswold Morris dance.</p> <p>As with the half gyp, by altering the floor pattern, Bintley has made it easier for the audience to see the action on stage. If the dancers had performed a traditional hey, the audience would be prevented from seeing both lines in the longways set perform the figure. Similarly, this is not a problem for Cotswold Morris teams who are normally surrounded by an audience during their performance.</p> | <p>Bintley's figure:</p>  |

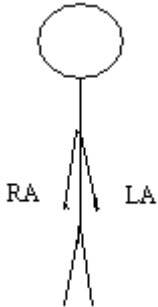
## **FIGURES: FOOT UP**

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Diagram:<br>RF = Right foot    LF = Left foot    → = Direction of travel                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Dancers commence the foot up from a longways set.</p> <p>The dancers all face up to the top of the set, where the musicians are.</p> <p>The dancers then take a 180 degree turn, and dance back towards the bottom of the set, away from the musicians.</p> <p>The foot up traditionally occurs at the beginning of many Cotswold Morris dances. It is a very popular motif and an introduction to the audience to show that the dance is commencing.</p>                                                                                         |  <p>The diagram illustrates the 'Foot Up' figure. It shows two sets of dancers, each with positions P1, P3, P5 at the bottom and P2, P4, P6 at the top. The left set is labeled 'Music' and has arrows pointing left (←) for all positions. The right set is also labeled 'Music' and has arrows pointing right (→) for all positions. This indicates that all dancers are moving away from the musicians towards the top of the set.</p> |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the foot up:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley uses a similar figure to the foot up, however there is a variation. The dancers do not execute the 180 degree turn and do not dance back towards the bottom of the set.</p> <p>If Bintley had adhered to tradition whereby his dancers danced back towards the bottom of the set, this would have meant that again the backs of the dancers would have been facing the audience. Thus, the proscenium arch setting confines Bintley's use of such figures.</p> |  <p>The diagram illustrates 'Bintley's Figure'. It shows two sets of dancers, each with positions P1, P3, P5 on the left and P2, P4, P6 on the right. Arrows point downwards (↓) for all positions in both sets. Below the dancers is the label 'Audience', indicating that the dancers are moving away from the audience.</p>                                                                                                          |

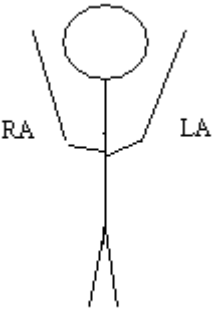
## **FIGURES: WHOLE ROUND**

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Diagram:<br>RF = Right foot    LF = Left foot    → = Direction of travel                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>A whole round generally starts from a longways set where the odd numbers in the set, as illustrated in the diagram opposite, turn to face up the set and the even numbers face down.</p> <p>The dancers all dance in a clockwise circle around the set and back to their starting position.</p> <p>It is a popular motif in Cotswold Morris dance that allows the dancers to travel quickly round in a circle. It enables the dancers to change positions and direction in the set.</p>                                                                                          |                             |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the whole round:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley's dancers perform a traditional whole round figure. However, the only variable is that Bintley's figure does not commence from a longways set.</p> <p>The whole round appears at the beginning of Bintley's dance and the dancers perform a series of single steps in a single line, from which they dance in a clockwise direction into a whole round. This enables fluidity in the movement and for balletic purposes Bintley has chosen not to interrupt the flow of the movement.</p> | <p>Bintley's figure:</p>  |

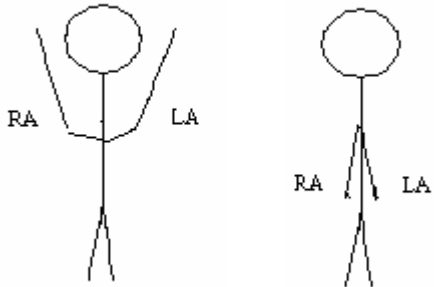
## **ARM MOVEMENTS: DOWN**

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Diagram:<br>RA = Right arm    LA = Left arm    → = Direction of travel                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>D = down</p> <p>The arms hang down by the dancer's side and may swing naturally forwards and backwards. The palms face inwards. The arms are very slightly relaxed at the elbow.</p> <p>The downward arm movement appears frequently in Cotswold Morris dance. It is used particularly to accompany travelling steps such as the double and single step and the caper.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>Down (D):</p>  |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the down arm movement:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley generally uses the down (D) position for the arms throughout his dance. The variation concerns the dancers' body weight which remains in a central position. Thus the torso is stabilised, with no movement in the ribcage and shoulder girdle. This ensures the arms, although swung by the dancers' sides are held or controlled.</p> <p>The down arm movement in some respects is very similar to a relaxed low port de bras in ballet. However Bintley's dancers do not achieve the appearance of relaxation in the arms which is required for the Cotswold Morris style.</p> |                                                                                                      |

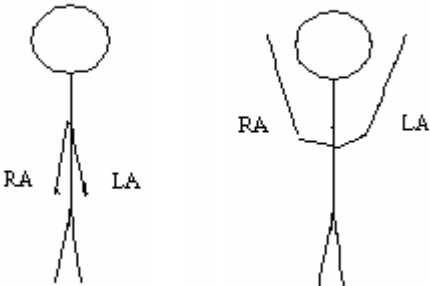
## ARM MOVEMENTS: UP

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Diagram:<br>RA = Right arm    LA = Left arm    → = Direction of travel                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>U = up</p> <p>The arms are extended vertically over the head. The palms facing inwards. The arms are very slightly relaxed at the elbow.</p> <p>The up arm movement also appears frequently in Cotswold Morris dance and can be used in a sequence of stepping or to accompany a jump. It is a visually effective movement when executed whilst the dancer is holding a handkerchief in each hand. However it can also be performed without handkerchiefs.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <p>Up (U):</p>  |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the up arm movement:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley uses a similar arm line to the up (U). There is no variation in the structure of the movement. However, Bintley's dancers perform the arm line with the palms facing forwards instead of inwards.</p> <p>The dancers also fully extend the arms at the elbow. The traditional use of the arm movement, despite being extended over the head should demonstrate a relaxed, loose quality with the arms slightly bent at the elbows. The up arm movement in many respects resembles ballet's fifth arm position. Thus, it is not an arm movement that would have been alien to Bintley's dancers, however, as with the down arm movement, it is the quality of the movement that appears too balletic and controlled against the Cotswold Morris dance style.</p> |                                                                                                    |

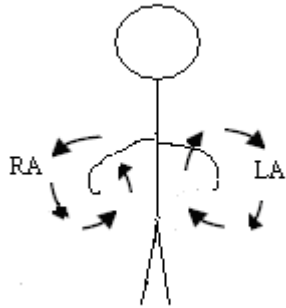
## ARM MOVEMENTS: THROW FORWARDS

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Diagram:<br>RA = Right arm    LA = Left arm    → = Direction of travel                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Tf = throw forwards</p> <p>The dancer throws the arms vertically upwards over the head, and punches the air with the fists. The arms are very slightly relaxed at the elbow.</p> <p>The arms are then dropped back by the side, so that they hang loosely.</p> <p>The throw forward is similar to the up arm movement in Cotswold Morris dance in that it can be used to accompany a sequence of stepping or to accompany a jump. It is also a visually dynamic movement when performed with handkerchiefs, but can also be performed without.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>Throw forwards (Tf):</p>  |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the throw forwards arm movement:</u></b></p> <p>There is a similar movement to the throw forwards (Tf) in Bintley's dance. The variation being that the dancers throw one arm forwards, instead of two and the arms are not extended vertically upwards over the head, but are thrown horizontally out in front of the dancer's body, so that the arm movement remains at shoulder height.</p> <p>The dancers also fully extend the arms at the elbow rather than achieving the relaxed quality of the throw forwards, which is promoted by a slight bend at the elbow. The relaxation at the elbow also ensures the position of the hand in the throw forwards is relaxed and almost limp.</p> <p>In Bintley's interpretation of the arm movement, the fingers on the dancers' hands are fully extended and rigid. This hand movement alludes to the characteristic make-up of the flea as a parasite. The dancers' hands are spiky and hint at the fact that the flea is covered with many hairs and short spines. These allow the flea to attach itself to an animal and live by hematophagy, or suck its blood.</p> |                                                                                                                 |

## ARM MOVEMENTS: DOWN AND UP

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Diagram:<br>RA = Right arm    LA = Left arm    → = Direction of travel                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Du = down and up</p> <p>The dancer throws the arms down by the sides, punching the air with the fists and then throws the arms vertically upwards over the head. The arms are very slightly relaxed at the elbow.</p> <p>The down and up is the reverse of the throw forwards and is not a frequently used arm line in Cotswold Morris dance as the down, up or the throw forwards. The down and up movement tends to appear at the end of a sequence of stepping.</p>                                                                                                                               | <p>Down and Up (Du):</p>  |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the down and up arm movement:</u></b></p> <p>There is a similar arm movement to the down and up (Du) in Bintley's dance. The structure of the movement is the same as the traditional use of the arm line, however Bintley's dancers do not achieve as much emphasis on the downward throw of the arms as is required by the Cotswold Morris dance style.</p> <p>The arm movement appears balletic and is performed with grace and precision by Bintley's dancers. It lacks the force and intensity of the traditional execution of the arm line.</p> |                                                                                                              |

## ARM MOVEMENTS: CIRCLE OR TWIST

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Diagram:<br>RA = Right arm    LA = Left arm    → = Direction of travel                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>O = circle or twist</p> <p>The arms hang loosely by the side of the dancer and the dancer moves the left wrist in a clockwise circular motion and the right wrist in an anti-clockwise circular motion to create small circles with the hands. The fingers remain relaxed throughout and the arms are slightly relaxed at the elbow.</p> <p>The circle or twist is an intricate hand gesture in Cotswold Morris dance and often accompanies the galley and the galley round step as the hands mimic the movements of the foot.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <p>Circle or twist (O):</p>  |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley's interpretation of the circle or twist arm movement:</u></b></p> <p>Bintley's dancers execute an exaggerated version of the circle or twist (O). The dancers' forearms however bend outwards from the elbow on a horizontal plane and the dancers circle the whole of the lower arm in a clockwise direction, rather than just a circle of the hands from the wrist.</p> <p>Bintley's movement is not as subtle or intricate as the traditional Cotswold Morris circle or twist. However on stage, the audience would have had difficulty seeing such a small movement. This is not a problem for Cotswold Morris teams who are generally closely surrounded by their audience. Thus, Bintley's adaptation of the arm movement provides greater clarity for the movement on stage. It also adds to the comedy value in the dance as the arm movement is executed at the same time as a series of travelling capers, which makes the dancers appear awkward and ungainly. In the Cotswold Morris dance tradition, the circle or twist arm line would never be performed at the same time as a caper because it does not compliment the step.</p> |                                                                                                                 |

## **STICK-STRIKING:**

| Description of action:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Stick-striking motifs:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The stick striking sequence normally begins from a longways set.</p> <p>The blows should be loud, clean and direct. The code (opposite) is a breakdown of elements involved in a Cotswold Morris stick striking sequence:</p> <p>There is no traditional set sequence in stick striking. This action varies according to the dance being performed.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>B – Partners strike butts<br/> T – Partners strike tips<br/> M – Partners strike the middle of the stave<br/> G – Dancer strikes the ground<br/> O – Odd numbers in the set<br/> E – Even numbers in the set</p> <p><u>OT</u> = odds tips strike<br/> EB evens butts</p>                         |
| <p><b><u>Variables in Bintley’s stick striking sequence:</u></b></p> <p>There are variations in Bintley’s arrangement of the strikes in his choreography. However he does commence the sequence from a longways set.</p> <p>The dancer playing the part of the flea does not take part in the stick striking sequence, but to theatrical effect is physically caught in the middle of the sequence. She crouches down and then <i>sautés</i> to avoid the blows of the sticks which take place above her head.</p> <p>As only five dancers perform the stick striking sequence, there is not an equal number of pairings and at one point in the sequence, one dancer is forced to mime a strike as they do not have a partner to clash staves with.</p> <p>Bintley resolves this issue in his choreography when the dancers continue the stick striking sequence in a whole round and alternately strike the stave of the dancer who is standing to the left and the right of them in the circle.</p> <p>The execution of the strikes is clean and direct. However, more force in the strike would</p> | <p>The following is a breakdown of the sequence Bintley uses:</p> <p><u>OT</u><br/> ET (strike takes two counts)</p> <p>G, G, G, G</p> <p><u>OT</u><br/> ET (strike takes two counts)</p> <p>G, G, G, G</p> <p><u>OT</u><br/> ET (strike takes two counts)</p> <p>G – (strike takes two counts)</p> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>have helped to achieve a greater sound on impact. The dancer playing the part of the flea is a woman, and as she does not take part in the stick striking sequence, Bintley, in many respects, adheres to Cotswold Morris tradition. Morris practitioners consider that a woman's slight physique would not allow her to attain the force required to strike a stave.</p> | <div> <div> <math display="block">\frac{OT}{ET} \quad \frac{OT}{EB} \quad \frac{OT}{ET} \quad \frac{OT}{EB}</math> </div> <div> <math display="block">\frac{OT}{ET} \text{ (strike takes two counts)}</math> </div> <div> <math display="block">G - \text{ (strike takes two counts)}</math> </div> <div> <math display="block">\frac{OT}{ET} \quad \frac{OT}{ET} \quad \frac{OT}{ET} \quad \frac{OT}{ET}</math> </div> <div> <math display="block">\frac{OT}{ET} \text{ (strike takes two counts)}</math> </div> <div> <math display="block">G - \text{ (strike takes two counts)}</math> </div> <div> <math display="block">\frac{OT}{ET} \quad \frac{OT}{ET} \quad G \quad \frac{OT}{ET}</math> </div> <div> <math display="block">\frac{OT}{ET} \quad G \quad \frac{OT}{ET} \quad \frac{OT}{EB}</math> </div> </div> |
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**Placement of Cotswold Morris motifs in *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea***

**dance:**

The following table shows the structure in which the steps, figures, arm movements and stick striking sequence appear in Bintley's dance. If a step is listed as undefined it does not apply to any Cotswold Morris dance motif.

| Steps              | Figures/formations   | Arm movements   | Stick striking          |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Single step        |                      | Down            |                         |
| Foot-together-jump | Whole round          |                 |                         |
| Single step        |                      | Down            |                         |
| Foot-together-jump |                      |                 |                         |
| Double step        |                      | Grand chain     |                         |
| Foot-together-jump |                      |                 |                         |
| Double step        | Down                 |                 |                         |
| Foot-together-jump |                      |                 |                         |
| Double step        | Down                 |                 |                         |
| Foot-together-jump |                      |                 |                         |
| Undefined step     |                      | Throw forwards  |                         |
| Foot-together-jump |                      |                 |                         |
| Single step        | Longways set         | Down            |                         |
|                    | Half gyp             |                 |                         |
| Galley             |                      | Up              |                         |
| Single step        | Threading the needle |                 |                         |
| Single step        |                      | Down            |                         |
| Double step        | Hey                  |                 |                         |
| Caper              |                      | Circle or twist |                         |
| Double step        |                      |                 |                         |
| Caper              |                      | Circle or twist |                         |
| Double step        |                      |                 |                         |
| Caper              |                      | Circle or twist |                         |
| Star jumps         |                      | Down and up     |                         |
| Single step        |                      | Down            |                         |
| Galley             |                      | Throw forwards  |                         |
| Undefined step     |                      | Down and up     |                         |
| Caper              |                      |                 |                         |
| Double step        |                      | Down            |                         |
| Caper              |                      |                 |                         |
| Double step        | Foot up              | Down            |                         |
| Caper              | Longways set         |                 |                         |
| Single step        |                      | Down            |                         |
| Undefined step     |                      | Up              |                         |
| Single step        |                      | Down            |                         |
| Undefined step     |                      | Up              |                         |
| Single step        |                      | Down            |                         |
| Foot-together-jump |                      | Down            |                         |
|                    | Longways set         |                 | Stick-striking sequence |
|                    | Half gyp             |                 |                         |
|                    | Whole round          |                 |                         |

## **Chapter four**

### ***Still Life at the Folk Café***

Having analysed the similarities and variations in Bintley's selection of movements in *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance with that of their traditional counterparts from the English Cotswold Morris tradition, the following chapter discusses the practice based element of the research carried out for this study. It comprises an analysis of the data gathered at a series of workshops conducted in 2005 and 2006 and discusses the issues involved in the creation and presentation of the performance of the group dance *Still Life at the Folk Café* (2006).

#### **4.1 Workshop analysis**

As established in chapter one (p.36), a significant aspect of my research involved the creation of a 3 minute 5 second dance for eight women based on the *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* section from Bintley's *Still Life at the Penguin Café*. In preparation for the performance of *Still Life at the Folk Café*, I conducted a series of one and a half hour introductory workshops followed by rehearsal sessions from November 2005- May 2006, (see DVD footage: Chapter 12). The main aim of the workshops was to take the traditional Cotswold Morris dance form I had studied during my fieldwork and to explore how it translated into a theatrical medium. As already noted (p.37), I also wanted to utilise an all-female side of eight dancers in order to test the effects of gender on the Morris form. The dancers had been trained in a range of dance styles – from ballet to

contemporary dance and were from different countries, including the UK, Sweden and Greece. They all had experience of performing in a theatrical environment and represented the field of professional dance. Although many were familiar with English folk dance, they had not had any practical experience of the Cotswold Morris style and found it quite challenging. Whilst the steps were not technically demanding for trained dancers, there were problems with embodying the Morris-specific quality of the movement as I will go on to explain in this chapter.

I began the first workshop by talking to the dancers about Bintley's choreography and explaining the background to his career. I then played the dancers a video of *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance and other excerpts from *Still Life at the Penguin Café*. I also showed them a video of a performance by the Ravensbourne Morris Men that I had made during my fieldwork. I wanted the dancers to note the differences in style between the traditional Morris dance side with their natural verve and attack and the more refined elegance of Bintley's trained dancers. With these differences in mind, I began the process of demonstrating and teaching the dancers some of the Cotswold Morris steps. The first of these was the caper, or the basic travelling step. As discussed on page 123, the caper is a leap from one foot to the other and is a frequently used motif in Cotswold Morris. The dancer's weight is pitched slightly forwards and she must finish the leap on the flat of the foot. The emphasis of the movement is down, into the ground, even though the dancer works for elevation in the step.

The dancers found it difficult to adapt to the posture of the Cotswold Morris men. In relation to body mass, the women were much lighter, since on the whole men have larger frames and are generally heavier. However this natural lightness was compounded by the fact that they tended to engage the stomach muscles, and 'pull up' in the body, and therefore they lifted rather than relaxed the rib cage. They were also held in the torso, shoulder girdle and core muscles which made it difficult for them to 'sink' the torso into the hips. This exaggerated sense of lift came as a result of their dance training and like Bintley's dancers in *Humboldt's Hog-Nosed Skunk Flea* dance, they performed the step with the body weight held centrally rather than pitched slightly forwards. The dancers' high centre of gravity resulted in a preponderance of free flow and this meant that their movements appeared weightless rather than grounded. Because Cotswold Morris dancers have a relaxed upper body, they do not fully engage their core muscles and so the shoulder girdle and upper back are often tilted slightly forwards. The bound flow arising from this type of alignment allows the dancer to move with force, strength and resistance.

During the execution of the caper, the women held their arms in a low, curved shape, rather than letting them hang loosely by their sides. The inability to 'let go' in the upper body and relax the shoulders meant that they could not fully disengage or loosen the arms. Body alignment and placement of body weight also had an impact on the execution of the step. The dancers' extended posture and tendency to control every aspect of the movement impeded their capacity to travel and so they did not manage to move the caper across the floor as much as the Ravensbourne Morris dancers were able to. On the other hand, men of a

larger build generally have a longer stride, so travel more using fewer steps. The Morris men's ability to travel a greater distance across the floor with the caper can also be attributed to their ability to go into the floor so that the emphasis on the movement is 'down'. If the emphasis of the step is 'up', there is a tendency to lift away from the floor and thus, cover less distance.

With the caper, it is important that the feet remain flexed at all times. This was something that the dancers found particularly awkward and even knowing they had to relax or flex the feet, they found it difficult not to point the toes elegantly. For the first workshop, they wore ballet and jazz shoes or were bare footed, and this did not help in adding additional weight to the step, nor did it encourage flexion in the foot as does the rigid sole of the Morris dancer's heavier shoe. The contemporary dancers found the flexed foot position marginally easier to adapt to than the dancers who had been specifically trained in ballet, but they all automatically controlled their breathing in accordance with the rise and fall of the caper, whereas a Cotswold Morris dancer breathes naturally throughout. In order to redress the issue of adding more weight to the caper, I asked the dancers to wear dance trainers or their ordinary sports trainers for the remainder of the workshop. The heavier footwear helped to increase a sense of weight because the rigid sole on the shoe encouraged greater flexion of the foot. To promote the natural breathing, I asked the dancers to work against their normal practice and breathe out when they wanted to breathe in during the step. Thus instead of inhaling to prepare for the transference of weight in the caper, they exhaled, and this added more weight to the step.

In the second half of this first workshop I went on to teach two additional Cotswold Morris travelling steps, the single step and the double step. The former, as discussed on page 124, is a step and a hop and when performed in a sequence alternates between the right and left feet to form a skipping action. The lifted leg should be bent at a 90 degrees angle and the foot is placed just underneath the knee. The double step involves a step forwards on the left foot, followed by a step on the right, and finishing with a step and hop on the left foot (see p.125). For both the single and double step, the working foot remains in a flexed position with the steps executed using the flat of the foot and leading with the heel. The dancer's weight remains slightly forwards with strong emphasis on a heavy step forwards to create a sense of resistance against the floor.

Whilst the steps were simple to learn and perform, embodying the stylistic qualities of the movement was again a challenge for the dancers. They found it difficult to achieve a sufficiently strong emphasis on the step forwards, partly because they did not bend in the knees as much as a traditional Cotswold Morris dancer would do. The dancers also used the preparative step for the hop in both the single and double steps as a springboard towards increased elevation in the hop. Similar to Bintley's dancers in *Humboldt's Hog-Nosed Skunk Flea* dance, the steps became increasingly aerial. Although Cotswold Morris dancers aim to achieve height in a hop, the movement should still give the appearance of being firmly rooted in the ground. To achieve this, the Morris dancers ensure that there are not many changes in the quality of the flow in all the steps that make up a single or double step, therefore the flow is gradual and even. My dancers made

abrupt changes to the flow for each step. So the overall flow quality fluctuated and appeared uneven.

The foot of the supporting leg stays flexed throughout the single and double steps. As with the caper, the dancers found it difficult to keep the feet flexed continually and this was particularly hard for most of them because, as noted above, they are used to pointing their feet. Maintaining flexion produced tight calf or gastrocnemius muscles, causing one of the dancers to complain about a slightly painful condition by the end of the first workshop. When I asked them to try and increase the amount of emphasis placed on each step, this again affected the degree of movement or travel. The dancers' concentration on embodying the loose, relaxed and grounded quality in each step meant that they focussed on increasing their contact with the floor and not on the progression of the step across the floor.

As they did with the caper, the dancers also found it difficult to adapt to the relaxed down arm position. The arms should hang with a feeling of weight in the wrists and the fingertips. Rather than allow the hands and wrists to hang loosely by their sides, some of the dancers began to add affectations to the hands by closing the fingers together and slightly cupping the hands. The ballet dancers had a tendency to involuntarily gesticulate with the hands and wrists. By the end of the first workshop, they had become surprisingly tired by the effort it took to perform the Cotswold Morris travelling steps, particularly because so much exertion went into their attempts at emphasising movements in order to embody the quality of the Cotswold Morris movement style.

In the second workshop I decided to introduce the dancers to some of the figures used in the style, so that I could explore how familiar they might become with its formations. I began with the grand chain, which as discussed on page 129, begins with the dancers in the chain facing their partners and then passing their partner giving right hands and passing right shoulders. As the partner's hand is released, the dancer takes the left hand of the dancer coming towards them, and passes giving left hands and passing left shoulders. The dancer continues to pass left and right alternately until the end of the chain. In the grand chain, the pattern is clearly defined and the dancers travel as much as possible depending on available space. As the dancers weave in and out, they almost touch shoulder to shoulder. Despite this being essentially a simple floor pattern, I was surprised that all eight women found the formation complicated, particularly when asked to execute the figure whilst performing a series of double steps.

Despite relatively high levels of proprioceptive skills,<sup>10</sup> the dancers found it awkward to keep track of where other dancers were in relation to their place within the chain. They were used to dealing with complex patterns of movement, but the task of performing an unfamiliar step in a prescribed floor pattern meant that they often became confused about the direction in which they were travelling. I decided therefore to draw diagrams of every floor pattern I taught so that the dancers could see what shape/figure they should be making. As discussed on page 71, English folk dance classes are part of the curriculum at The Royal Ballet School and thus the pupils (and possible future Royal Ballet and Birmingham Royal Ballet dancers) would be familiar with folk dance figures

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<sup>10</sup> The unconscious perception of movement and spatial orientation arising from stimuli within the body itself.

and floor patterns. However this is rare in professional dance training and most other dance students at dance academies do not have the opportunity to become familiar with such forms.

Dancers in general, therefore, are not accustomed to creating floor patterns that involve interweaving with other dancers in complex figures and have not developed the co-ordination or spatial awareness required to work closely on interlocking patterns. Contemporary dance largely evolves from personal movement vocabularies and often from improvisatory methods. Group work, if featured, is often designed in architectural formations typical of modern dance pioneers such as Martha Graham, Hanya Holm (Hering, 1951, p.95) or the much later work of choreographers like Hofesh Shechter. There are exceptions to the rule, for example in the choreography of Mark Morris who is influenced by a range of folk traditions including Spanish flamenco and Israeli, Bulgarian, Balkan, Russian and Balinese folk dances (Acocella, 1999, pp.164-168). Morris is celebrated for the variety and complexity of interlinking figures and patterns in his dances. His primary dance education, however, was in folk dance and he also performed with a folk dance company (Acocella, 1999, p.164).

Having introduced the dancers to the grand chain, the next figure I taught them was 'threading the needle'. This figure begins with the dancers in a straight line formation and traditionally the second dancer breaks the line and forms a single-arm arch with the leader of the line (see p.132). The third dancer in the line leads the remaining dancers by the hand underneath the arch. The first two dancers then join the end of the line. I noticed that my dancers had similar proprioceptive

problems to those they had experienced with the grand chain in that they struggled to sense where the other dancers were in relation to themselves. This was understandable at first as the floor pattern would have been unfamiliar to the dancers, however after practising the figure many times, the dancers still frequently got confused about their position and placement. It is most likely that these difficulties were because the group had not been working together for very long. In a Cotswold Morris dance side, the dancers tend to have performed and socialised together over a long period of time and they relate easily to one another in the dance situation.

I also introduced the dancers to the longways set. This comprises of an even number of dancers arranged in two rows facing each other (see p.130). In many respects, this is the most important formation to learn, as the majority of Cotswold Morris dance figures either start or finish in this formation. It was fortunate, therefore, that the longways set was the most natural to the dancers, perhaps because it is a formation that can be found in a variety of dance genres.

The third workshop progressed to the more intricate Cotswold Morris steps, such as the foot-together-jump and the galley. The foot-together-jump is where the dancer's free foot is closed to join the working foot, followed by a jump from both feet to land on both feet (see p.126). The feet remain flexed during the jump. A preparatory hop may be added if setting off on a series of stepping following a foot-together-jump. The arms can swing naturally by the side of the dancer, or as the dancer jumps in the air, they can swing vertically upwards in front of her. The dancers understood the concept of the step, but fully

straightened their knees when they performed the jump. Or, in common with Bintley's dancers in *Humboldt's Hog-Nosed Skunk Flea* dance, they also had a tendency to bend the knees beyond a 90 degree angle when jumping, bringing the feet up to sit just underneath the base of the spine at the highest point of the jump. This extra range of motion can be attributed to the increased flexibility of trained dancers. Some of my dancers also had a tendency to point rather than to flex the feet during the jump. All of these adaptations are not in keeping with the genuine Morris dance step which requires that the feet remain flexed throughout and the knees only slightly relaxed or bent.

The galley (see p.128) begins with a step onto the right foot. The left leg is slightly turned out and raised with the knee bent so that the foot reaches the height of the mid-calf on the supporting leg. The left foot is flexed and the heel points downwards. The left foot then moves in a clockwise, circular motion, on a horizontal plane to complete two small circles. The dancers found this step easy to pick up, however they had difficulties leading with the heel as they completed the two small circles with the foot and wanted to point rather than to flex the foot. They also had a tendency to exaggerate the movement, so that the circles were often too large. This was because with the foot flexed, the dancers found it slightly awkward to control the movement. The contemporary dancers did not struggle as much with this because they were more accustomed to dancing with flexed feet. I finished the workshop with a traditional star jump (see p.127). This is a movement that was familiar to my dancers and as with the foot-together-jump, they achieved maximum elevation, although struggled with trying to make the movement appear weighty.

For the fourth workshop, I returned to teaching more of the Cotswold Morris figures including the half gyp, the foot up and the whole round, as discussed respectively on pages 131, 134 and 135. These are all straightforward floor patterns and the dancers adapted to these figures extremely easily. They did however struggle when I introduced them to the figure of a hey (p.133). A hey involves the dancers progressing down a line following a figure-of-8 shape and interweaving with the other dancers as they pass along the line. As with the grand chain and the threading the needle, the dancers again struggled with their spatial awareness, probably because it was an unfamiliar floor pattern and they were at first confused about how the figure should look. Again, drawing a diagram of the figure helped the dancers to visualise the floor pattern they were making.

I also provided a detailed explanation and demonstration of the Cotswold Morris arm movements in this workshop. The ‘up’, the ‘throw forwards’ and the ‘down and up’ arm movements (pp.137-139) are not technically difficult and the dancers adapted easily to them, but there were variations in the amounts of force used. As with Bintley’s dancers in *Humboldt’s Hog-Nosed Skunk Flea* dance, the dancers’ arm movements were too controlled – or too even – in terms of flow. Cotswold Morris dancers’ arm movements are sudden and abrupt in the quality of the movement, and require a strong sense of force whilst also maintaining relaxation. These were dynamic qualities that my dancers could not reproduce. With the throw forwards for instance - where the dancer thrusts the arms vertically upwards over the head, and punches the air with the fists - the women fully extended their arms at the elbow, rather than achieving the relaxed quality

of the throw forwards, which is prompted by a slight bend at the elbow. The relaxation at the elbow also helps to ensure the position of the hand which should be relaxed and almost limp in the movement. Another Cotswold Morris arm movement is the circle or twist, in which the dancer moves the left wrist in a clockwise circular motion and the right wrist in an anti-clockwise circular motion to create small circles with the hands (p.140). Since the women had greater flexibility in their wrists than the Cotswold Morris men, they performed this gesture with more grace and precision.

In my series of workshops, I decided to concentrate on teaching the steps, figures and arm movements and did not go into detail about Morris stick striking sequences as I was aware that I was not going to include them in *Still Life at the Folk Café*. Towards the end of Bintley's dance, the Morris men dance off stage, collect a stave and finish by performing the stick striking sequence (pp.141-142). A traditional Cotswold Morris dance would either use staves throughout the dance or not at all, so in this sense Bintley thwarts authenticity. To make my dance more authentic, I decided to keep with tradition and not use the staves, but concentrate solely on the movements, steps, floor patterns and arm movements.

### **Key variations**

Three key differences emerged in terms of the variation between the traditional steps, as executed by the Morris team and by the female dancers.

## **Weight and flow**

As noted several times in this study, a male Morris dancer is normally quite robust in build and is certainly heavier than even a professional male dancer, generally because this type of build suits the low centre of gravity required for this folk dance form. In terms of 'flow', a Morris dancer's movements are 'bound', which means that they are typically strong, direct and sustained. In relation to the basic effort actions, the Morris dancer 'presses' the foot into the floor to accentuate weight (Dell, 1970, p.37). Likewise, the elements of the 'punch' effort action involve strong, direct and accelerated movements and this is exactly the quality that the Morris men achieve when they literally punch the air with their arms when completing a dance or sequence. In terms of flow, the Morris dancers use an indirect or light quality only for certain movements. For example, the delicate hand gestures that accompany a galley step are unconstrained and free flowing.

My dancers however were accustomed to gradations or fluctuations in the quality of their movements from free to bound flow. Despite this variation, they predominantly sought to achieve a light quality, whether the movement was sustained or unconstrained, direct or indirect. They 'glided' or skimmed across the floor in travelling steps, or seemed to 'float' when in the air. In order to create this effect they used the floor as a springboard especially for steps of elevation. Their high centre of gravity led to the appearance of weightlessness and their exaggerated lift in the rib cage counteracted the earthy, loose and substantial style or gait required of the Morris dancer.

### **Flexion of the knee and foot**

Morris dance steps are usually performed with the foot flexed and turned upwards and with a decrease in the angle between the foot and the leg (dorsi flexion). The Morris dancers wear boots or shoes with a hard and inflexible sole which limits the ability to point the foot. Maintaining flexion of the foot is difficult for a trained dancer who mainly points or stretches the instep and toes to full extension (plantar flexion) thus, increasing the angle between the foot and leg. Most trained dancers generally have tight gastrocnemius or calf muscles due to the amount of extension in the metatarsals of the foot, and this makes flexing the foot uncomfortable.

My dancers disliked continually working with flexed feet (see p.149), particularly as they normally trained in ballet or soft jazz shoes, which gave neither the weight nor support required for constant flexion in the foot. Bintley also claimed that his dancers complained that working with flexed feet when performing folk-inspired steps hurt their heels (interview 2004a). Tightness in the gastrocnemius muscle developed by the classically trained dancer as a result of constant extension of the foot means that sustained flexion of the foot puts pressure on the Achilles tendon. This in turn causes discomfort and even pain in the heel and surrounding area.

## **Flexibility**

A trained dancer has a greater range of motion developed through stretching techniques. They move the body or limbs and force them beyond the normal range of motion. Increased flexibility around the hip joints allows the dancer to rotate or turn out at the hip. Since Cotswold Morris is a folk dance, there is little in the way of stretching after practice sessions and as a consequence, Morris dancers have a standard or limited range of movement in their limbs and around the hip joints. Thus, in the execution of many of the steps or arm lines, the ballet dancers achieve a higher leg alignment or extension and greater range of motion (see description of the foot-together-jump on page 126 for example).

## **4.2 The rehearsal process**

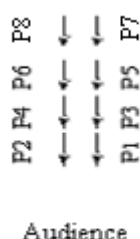
Following on from the series of workshops, I began the rehearsal sessions in which I endeavoured to create a more authentically ‘Morris’ version of Bintley’s *Humboldt’s Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance to the same piece of music that Bintley had used (see DVD footage: Chapter 13) and within a similar theatrical framework. The aim of the dance was to investigate the extent to which authentic Morris dance steps, figures and patterns can translate into a theatrical dance medium by testing how far it was possible to make Bintley’s Morris inspired dance more authentic. I did this by using additional figures and motifs drawn from the field study carried out in the practice of contemporary English Morris dance.

My dancers, like Bintley's, began with a series of single steps to bring them into the performance space. Although I encouraged the women to perform the single step with a stronger sense of weight and force to establish authenticity, they found it difficult to cover the distance of the rehearsal studio and to keep in time with the music whilst concentrating on the steps and embodying the Morris qualities. Despite all my efforts at authenticity, I noticed in fact that the single step slowly began to resemble the lighter balletic skipping action that Bintley's dancers used to move at speed across the stage.

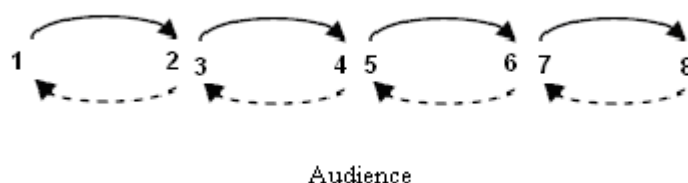
I then asked my dancers to form a longways set (see p.130), before beginning the foot up (see p.134), a figure which traditionally occurs at the beginning of many Cotswold Morris dances to indicate to the audience that the dance is commencing. In this figure, all the dancers face up to the top of the set, where the musicians are located and then take a 180 degree turn and dance back towards the bottom of the set, away from the musicians. In this case I substituted the position of the musicians for the position of the audience. Bintley's dancers, however, dance into a whole round (see p.135), so that all the dancers' movements can be seen as they energetically travel in a grand chain on a circular pathway. Such a figure would normally occur towards the middle of a traditional Morris dance.

During the execution of the foot up, my dancers subsequently performed a series of three double steps, followed by a galley to change direction. This sequence of steps was then repeated. However, I was concerned that the audience would be able to see only the action taking place at the front of the figure as the two front

couples masked the action happening towards the back of the set. As illustrated in the diagram below, couples P1 and P2 and P3 and P4 block the two couples behind them in the set:



My dancers then went on to perform a sequence of stepping in a traditional hey (see p.133). As the hey takes place within a longways set, the four dancers closest to the audience masked the four dancers at the back as they completed the figure. I was also concerned that if the dancers did not face the audience when performing the hey, and thus be able to interact with the audience rather than with their partners, that the action would lose its focus. Thus I had to adapt the figure so that the dancers completed it facing the onlookers, for example:



The hey was followed by a series of foot-together-jumps (see p.126), which traditionally are executed in the longways set whilst facing and interacting with one's partner. When I experimented with this, I was aware again that four of the dancers' backs were to the audience and also that the dancers blocked out their

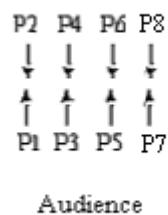
partners from the audience's view. I had to compromise with this sequence by having all the dancers perform the foot-together-jump facing the audience. I also wove the foot-together jump into a series of stepping movements after this sequence. I was concerned, however, that the step lacked the necessary dynamism and I asked the dancers to complete a full 360 degree turn at the same time as executing the jump. This additional turn meant that I was manipulating the traditional form for dramatic effect and thus departing from my goal of Morris authenticity.

My dancers then formed a whole round in which they danced in a clockwise direction around a circle (see full description on p.135) and performed a grand chain using a sequence of double steps. The accompaniment for Bintley's dance is *Pythagoras's Trousers*, by Simon Jeffes of the Penguin Café Orchestra. The music has a faster tempo than that of a traditional Morris dance tune. Since I was using the same music, the dancers struggled with executing a series of traditional double steps in the chain at this accelerated speed. Achieving a sufficient sense of weight and a grounded appearance to the double step was slightly compromised here in order for the dancers to gain momentum and move faster. It is perhaps important to note that Bintley's dancers travel around the grand chain with a light hop step and gallop action that helps them increase their mobility and pace around the circle.

In the next section of the dance, in place of assisted star jumps which Bintley uses, some of my dancers lift and hold their partners as this athletic movement

chimes with the energetic, muscular approach that Sutton ascribes to the type of younger, virile Morris dancers found in the local community of the nineteenth century. According to Sutton, the young men performed stunts to demonstrate their strength and masculinity (2000). I chose lifts that the dancers would have to sustain for a longer period of time than the assisted star jumps (see fig 10, p.179) in order to challenge the women's strength and athleticism. Some of the women dancers in my group were strong enough to support and maintain a lift with an equivalent amount of power to a male dancer, whilst others with less upper body strength found this section of the dance more challenging.

The final section of my dance also adheres to tradition. The dancers perform a half gyp (see p.131) starting from a longways set whereby the couples dance forwards towards each other's places, passing right shoulders, and then dance backwards along their original pathways, for example:



I was concerned that because four of the dancers' backs were to the audience, it would obscure the audience's view of the dance and also ensure that they would miss any interaction between the dancers who were positioned facing each other in the set. Bintley uses a figure that is very close to the traditional half gyp, but starts from a longways set, the dancers move away from their partners so that the

audience can see the action. I also adjusted the figure so that all the dancers faced the audience, but moved towards their partners. The half gyp is a figure that promotes movement in Cotswold Morris dance and allows the dancers to interact with their partners. In the theatrical environment, it is not a figure that readily encourages audience participation. When choreographing a dance for the theatre, most often the placement and position of the audience and the dancer are paramount and the choreographer does not want action to be obscured from audience view or mask the interaction between the dancers and the audience. In this sense, Cotswold Morris figures and floor patterns do not lend themselves readily to the theatrical environment.

From the above, it is clear that I had to make adjustments to the traditional Morris steps and figures in order to adapt them to a theatrical setting. These adaptations included the need to accommodate the fixed placement of the audience. In a theatrical environment, the performers are separated from the audience and become the focus of attention. Under the conditions of Morris dance the audience are integrated with the performers. They often stand surrounding the dancing or walk around at will and can watch the dance from a variety of perspectives. The audience's proximity to the action allows them to pick up on the energy and interaction between the performers. The idea of the freedom of the audience brings Morris dance closer to the idea of the Merce Cunningham type event or other forms of post modern and site-specific work, where boundaries between art and life have been redrawn.

I was surprised at how much I had to tamper with or adjust the steps and Cotswold Morris motifs in order to transfer them to a theatrical setting. I have already noted (p.161) that this was for practical reasons, for example, so that the dancers could keep in time with the music and make use of the large performance space, but I also had to increasingly exaggerate the movements so that the detail and character of the movements were visible from a distant perspective. Morris dances often repeat set motifs consecutively, so the same sequence of steps and figures could appear many times in any one phrase. I did repeat key sequences or motifs at the beginning and end of my dance, but felt that a theatre audience would expect more variety, and so added in other Morris-inspired steps to vary the audience's experience.

In the more informal outdoor environment of traditional Morris such as a May Day event, there are often other distractions for the audience such as games, stalls, musicians and various dance displays taking place concurrently. The audience's attention is not necessarily focussed on the Morris dance and as with a site-specific contemporary dance the audience can leave or return at will. Therefore several repetitions of set motifs and sequences ensure that spectators who come and go do not miss too much. However, in the theatre the audience is more or less captive and unified as a community only by the shared experience of the choreography and performance. The Morris event works differently from the point of view of community. This is because the event arises from an existing social environment and the Morris dance is a reflection of a part of the life and soul and people of that community. Thus the boundaries between the audience and the performers are indistinct.

### **4.3 The performance of *Still Life at the Folk Café***

The performance of *Still Life at the Folk Café* took place on May 18, 2006 in the Studio Theatre at Laban, London (see DVD footage: Chapter 16). The dance was designed to be performed under theatrical conditions to approximate the theatrical nature of Bintley's work. The main characteristic of a theatrical dance production is its 'framing' in terms of the proscenium arch, the use of artificial lighting, musical accompaniment of the live orchestra or recorded music played through a sound system and as noted, clear separation of performer/audience space. Laban's Studio Theatre is a relatively intimate space and allowed me to preserve as much of the informality of the Morris dance form as possible whilst also testing how authentic Morris dance worked under theatrical conditions. In order to create a stage picture, I used blackouts to hide the dancers getting into and out of their positions, although in a traditional Morris dance display, there are no wings or curtains, so taking up position before dancing, and leaving the area after performing, take place in full view of the audience. Theatre is highly ritualistic, the audience enter the auditorium and a series of rites begin: the audience are expected to remain seated and silent throughout the performance, the performers seamlessly appear and disappear from the stage and the action is applauded. A Morris dance display can be more spontaneous, unstructured and the audience are often invited to take part in the action, by physically and verbally interacting with the Morris dancers and the Morris dance fool.

Another important difference is that Morris dances normally happen in natural daylight and in an everyday environment. As a consequence, the dance form is

more closely associated with ordinary, everyday life or with street theatre. The use of artificial lighting in the production of the dance performed at Laban, helped to isolate it as theatrical spectacle and this resulted in it losing some of its impromptu qualities and the spontaneity of the folk dance on which it was modelled. As mentioned above, Morris dance thrives on informal and close interaction with the audience; the addition of even minimal artificial lighting and theatrical presentation made the audience at Laban passive and detached from the dance. I became aware of this transformation during the technical rehearsal when, for the first time, I saw the dance framed as a theatrical event. Having experimented with the theatrical setting, I propose that the combination of staged formality and authentic Morris might be better realised in the outdoor ‘amphitheatre,’ a round, grassy area on Laban’s campus.

As mentioned earlier, my dance was accompanied by the same music from the Penguin Café Orchestra that Bintley uses for *Humboldt’s Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance, and like Bintley, I began the choreographic process from the music. Jeffes’ *Pythagoras’s Trousers* captures the lively characteristics of a flea. The music features brass instruments, the piano and the maraca. The music could be described as *allegretto vivace*, or played at a quick, brisk tempo. This degree of speed affected the fluidity of my dance, as the dancers sometimes found it difficult to keep up with the fast pace of the music. The traditional accompaniment for Morris is normally provided by a single musician playing either an accordion, melodeon (a small diatonic button accordion) or concertina. The advantage of having live accompaniment means that the Morris dancers can

communicate either before or during the dance with the musician and instruct them to slow down or speed up in relation to their dancing.

As established, in Bintley's dance, the female dancer plays the part of the flea, or the equivalent to a Morris dance fool who interrupts the action. In Cotswold Morris sides the fool interacts with the audience and can take the form of a hobbyhorse, a Morris man dressed in women's clothing or more traditionally, a 'bladder-man' who carries an inflated dried ox bladder attached to a stick by a short length of leather lacing. The fool traditionally announces the titles of dances to the observers, acting as a link between the audience and the Morris dance team and providing a focal point for the proceedings. He will often dance in and around the set of dancers during the performance, providing counterpoint and making light-hearted banter with the audience at the expense of the dancers' concentration. Despite being called a fool this character is often a very accomplished dancer, and 'playing the fool' is demanding, in the same way that a circus clown is far from clumsy and stupid, and is in fact a skilled entertainer (Sharp, 1907, pp.26-27).

Bintley's five male dancers look like genuine Morris men, because they are dressed in white shirts, complete with baldricks, or a sash as traditionally worn by Cotswold Morris dance teams, and they have ribbons tied around their knees. They also wear hats decorated with flowers. The Ravensbourne Morris Men also wear hats for a performance, but they are decorated with rosettes and ribbon. It is thought that wearing a hat may have originally been a way for Morris dancers to allude to a garment worn by the village squire or some members of the local

gentry (Burgess, interview 2004b). The flea, however takes on the role of the Morris dance fool as she teases and goads the men. It could be argued that she is making fun of the Morris dance form itself and that Bintley uses the parasitical nature of the flea as a metaphor to imply that ballet rather playfully feeds off folk dance forms like Morris.

I wanted to develop this idea by questioning the superiority of ballet over Morris dance. The women in my dance perform traditional Morris dance steps, even to the extent that they wear boots to help approximate the grounded, weighty quality of the form. But the female dancer playing the fool attempts to mimic and copy the other Morris dancers' steps wearing flat ballet shoes in order to suggest that she, as a symbol of ballet, is not only feeding off Morris dance, but is also performing a poor imitation of the dance style. Morris dance is often thought of as unsophisticated, especially when compared to the elegance and refinement of ballet. I wanted to turn this notion on its head. Having introduced the idea in chapter one that Morris dance was influenced by the upper-class English social dance tradition (cited on p.47), it seems anachronistic that in ballet productions Morris is often portrayed as the dance form of the peasants or 'rustics'. The special skill and qualities required to perform traditional Morris are often overlooked when, in fact, like any formal dance technique, Morris skills are specific in their demands.

In Bintley's dance, the flea is on pointe, and this emphasises her insect-like appearance. She is often crushed by the Morris dancers as she meddles in the choreography. Her steps play between several qualities, sometimes stabbing the

floor or the air with her feet, at others, skimming the stage with delicate bourrées, giving the impression that, at one and the same time, she is a spindly and vulnerable, yet resilient creature. The dancer frequently bends her knees and turns her legs inwards to create an inverted and weighted use of the pointe and at other times there is a spiky quality to the foot and leg work. Although I tried at first to work with pointe shoes (January 2006), I was concerned that they were not suitable for the traditional English folk dance steps. Having to rapidly transfer weight from one foot to another in many of the steps, and stamp the foot using all the body's weight meant that my dancer was liable to injury. Other issues arose, because she found it hard to maintain balance on full pointe when applying the necessary amount of attack required for many of the steps.

In Bintley's ballet, the men wear ballet shoes for his lighter Morris style, so there is not a great deal of difference between the dynamic of their movements and the flea's steps on pointe. Since seven of my dancers danced in Wellington boots, it was extremely challenging for the one in pointe shoes to match the characteristics of their movements. As noted above, seven of the dancers performed in Wellington boots in order to correspond as closely as possible to the traditional Morris footwear of heavy walking shoes. In general, contemporary Morris dancers provide their own footwear which most often is a pair of black leather boots or shoes. I noticed that the heels of a Wellington boot are similar to those on the boots and shoes of Morris dancers. As one of the dancers found, the boots enabled her to give movements the necessary extra weight and force (Freya Westdal, 17 May 2006).

During the performance, it was exciting to see the Morris dance figures and motifs presented in the larger performance space of Laban's Studio Theatre. The design of the patterning was clear and the transition from one figure to another worked well, since there was a continual flow and momentum of movement on stage. Folk-dance influenced dances are strong in terms of design because the patterns and changes of direction are varied and complex. For the dancers, the figures and patterning offered a new approach. They acknowledged that the majority of pieces they had danced in prior to the Morris-inspired work had concentrated on the complexity of steps or creative movement, but did not often feature set floor patterns or formations, thus they had tended to work as individuals with their own material within a group. They also considered that they had developed a powerful sense of teamwork, realising that in folk dance, one has to work closely with a partner to achieve the set figures and configurations. They had enjoyed working on a collaborative dance and I noticed that they had developed strong friendships which had led to socialising after rehearsals. In many respects, the dancers were acting like a typical Morris dance side, enjoying the shared sense of artistry, teamwork and companionship.

Morris dancers also sometimes express their enjoyment in performing a dance by shouting as they execute a particular jump or complete a sequence of intricate stepping. I encouraged my dancers to vocalise the energy they were putting into the dance. Once they had overcome their initial inhibitions, they found that being allowed to shout or cry out in the middle of a performance was a refreshing way of giving vent to their energy. They revealed that by the time of the presentation, articulating the vigour of the dance had become a natural and intrinsic part of the

performance and they enjoyed the freedom of expression. I asked some members of the audience after the presentation what they thought about the dancers' shouts and one person enthusiastically replied that she would like to have joined in with the dancers when they cried out in order to show her appreciation for their spirited performance. When attending Morris dance displays by the Ravensbourne Morris Men, a number of people watching do vocalise their enjoyment of the dance and I was delighted that in the theatrical setting, the audience wanted to express a similar reaction to the dance.

I also asked members of the audience whether they had seen a similar display of folk dance in a theatrical environment before and they acknowledged that they had never seen or were aware of anyone trying to convert Morris dance or indeed other forms of folk dance to the theatre. I must note however that there was a relatively small audience for the performance which was, therefore, not necessarily representative and there were no Morris specialists among it. It was a new form of expression for the majority of the audience members who observed the performance, and as a consequence, they did not have access to the history or background of the tradition and had to appreciate the dance purely on its own aesthetic. Some people found the dance energising, because the grounded, weighty quality of the movements was a welcome change from the over refined elegance of some ballet and contemporary dance styles. My Morris-inspired dance was not particularly polished, but concentrated more on creating the effect of boisterous folk dance. In many respects it broke some of the conventions of traditional dance productions, in that it was not intended to seem carefully crafted, but to appear un-choreographed, spontaneous and naturalistic. One

person in the audience remarked on the differences between the dancer performing the steps in ballet shoes and the other seven women who danced in boots. She noticed how robust the Morris dance movements were and how the ballet dancer's execution of the steps appeared delicate and fragile alongside the Morris dance display. I was satisfied with the fact that the Morris dance inspired steps were appreciated for their dynamic, strong and vibrant qualities, thus confirming their richness as a resource for choreographic invention.

I was impressed with how the women had taken on what, for them, was a completely alien dance style and I realised how hard they had worked to embody and represent the tradition on stage. This involved changing much of what they had assimilated as natural through long years of formal dance training including principles of alignment, posture, breathing and muscle control. They also had to adapt quickly to one another in order to form a team capable of performing accurately the unfamiliar and often complex floor patterns and shapes of Morris dance. It is worth noting that whatever their country of origin, the women had never studied their native form of folk dance and had always tended to specialise in one particular aspect of dance for instance ballet or contemporary. Nevertheless, the new Morris-based experience inspired them to consider working creatively with both children and adults in other forms of folk dance.

In response to the practice based work, the Ravensbourne Morris men's comments and observations supported the analysis of the issues involved in the translation of authentic Morris dance into the theatrical environment as detailed throughout this chapter. For example, the Morris men agreed that the speed of

the music that Bintley, and subsequently, I chose for *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance and *Still Life at the Folk Café* would make it extremely difficult for the dancers to achieve a sufficient sense of weight in any of the Cotswold Morris travelling steps (see p.161). However, the men also expressed appreciation that the Cotswold Morris dance tradition was being kept alive within a new environment.

#### **4.4 Reflections on the creation of a folk-inspired ballet dance**

Considering the findings of my workshops, rehearsal sessions and performance, I have a greater understanding of the aspirations and challenges that Bintley faced in the creation of *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance. If Bintley's ambition had ever been to represent Morris dance authentically, he would have had to adjust the dance considerably in order to fit the theatrical context rather than the informal outdoor environment for which it is generally intended. Having examined a number of Bintley's works and taking account of his training at the Royal Ballet School, I propose that he wanted to reflect English ballet tradition by offering a flavour of Morris dance rather than recreate a traditional Morris display, which he has achieved by translating his experiences of traditional and theatricalised Morris dance. Moreover, after my own experiments, as detailed in this chapter, I can appreciate the extent to which Bintley had to adjust the directions and placement of the Morris dance figures in order to accommodate the fixed position of the audience. He mentioned, in fact, that he has a tendency to work out folk dance inspired formations or floor patterns in advance (interview 2004a) when working in the folk idiom.

Differences in size of the performance spaces are also an issue. Dancing outdoors, the Morris team often remains in the longways set and does not travel a great deal outside these boundaries. The audience surround them, thus they do not have a great deal of space at their disposal. Bintley on the other hand had to fill the large stage of the Royal Opera House, and therefore had to stretch the traditional figures to keep the space alive for the audience. Consequently, there had to be some adjustment to Morris dance travelling steps such as the single and double steps and the caper in order for them to translate to a large performance space.

As already noted the audience is normally extremely close to Morris performances and viewers can see the detail in the hand movements and figures. In order to reach audiences viewing from a distance, Bintley exaggerates movements. For instance, with the galley, his dancers use a strong turned out leg alignment on the supporting and working leg which sharpens the movement but also makes it look artificial. Instead of performing small circles with the working foot, the dancers kick the leg high to the side. The visual dynamics of the action is theatrically effective in a way that the more intricate movements involved in a traditional galley are not. Smaller and more detailed gestures tend to be lost when viewed on the grand stage. This exaggeration also applies to arm movements and arm lines. For instance, rather than just circling the hands from the wrist (see p.140), Bintley's dancers execute an embellished version of this gesture. The dancers' forearms bend outwards from the elbow on a horizontal plane and they circle the whole of the lower arm in a clockwise direction. This movement again

is not as subtle as the traditional circle or twist, but Bintley's adaptation provides greater clarity for the movement as performed on a large stage.

Bintley is also working within the framework of the English ballet tradition, thus *Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk Flea* dance has to embody the qualities of this tradition, which over and above the Morris style require high levels of expressivity, dramatic characterisation and musicality. Bintley's characterisation of the flea and the Morris dancers is finely drawn and calls for his dancers' acting abilities in order to convey the humour of the situation. As suggested on page 167, Cotswold Morris dancers introduce comedy into their performance via the Morris dance fool. I have already noted that Bintley follows this tradition by characterising the flea as the Morris dance fool. In the theatrical context, this humour takes on an almost pantomimic effect. There are similarities here with the art of clowning whereby the characters must create a strong identity or personality on stage. Bintley's dancers have exaggerated the comedy to ensure that the humour can translate to the audience no matter where they are sitting in the auditorium.

Working within the genre of ballet demands a specific range of aesthetics in terms of both style and technique. The female ballet dancer attempts to defy gravity and as discussed on page 36, the maintenance of a high centre of gravity allows her to appear weightless and at times entirely air-borne. The feet are pointed, and increased flexibility around the hip joints allows the leg to turn out and give a greater range of motion. This is a complete contrast to the male Morris dancers' emphasis of weight produced through a much lower centre of gravity.

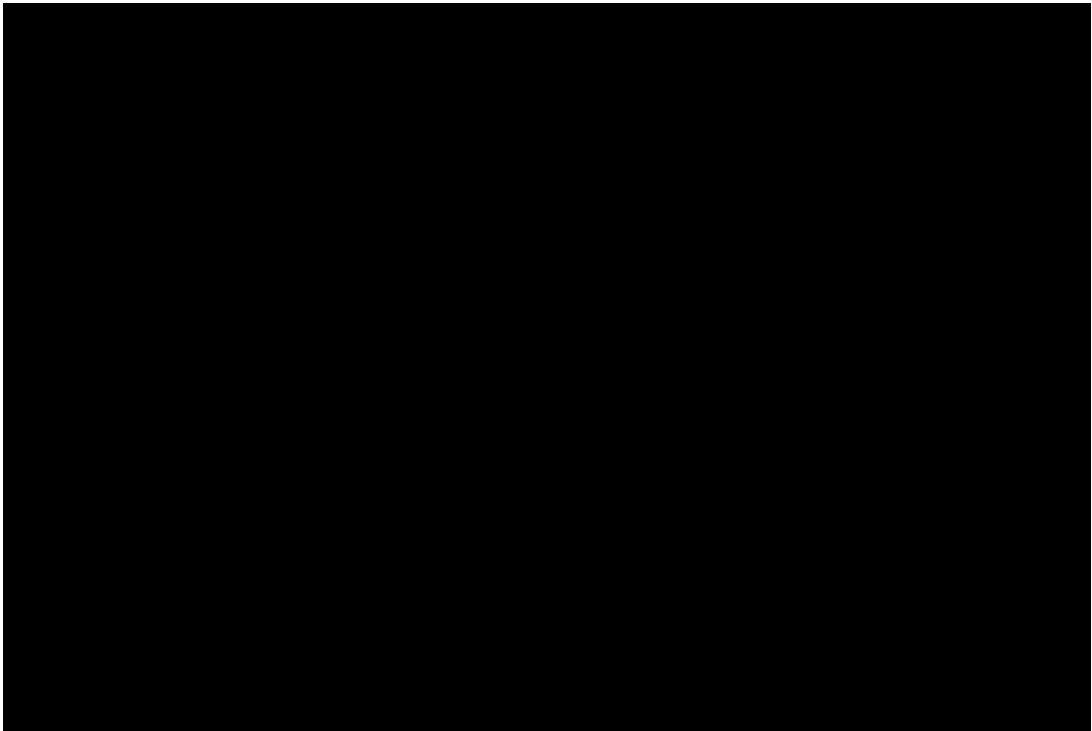
Female ballet dancers generally are slender with light frames and they have trained to execute finely-honed footwork. Male Morris dancers flex their feet and accentuate the groundedness of their movements. The authentic style does not lend itself readily to being ‘balleticised’ and as I have demonstrated earlier, the Morris steps, figures and motifs are difficult to translate to a theatrical context. For example, in Bintley’s variation on a hey, to accommodate the fixed position of the audience, the dancers begin from one straight line rather than in a longways set. In the line formation no dancer is obscured. Similarly when performing a figure similar to the threading the needle, Bintley seizes the opportunity to transform the complex figure into a moment of comedy. As the flea leads the dancers underneath a single arm arch, he makes a visual joke through the way that the dancers’ limbs almost inextricably become entangled.

Bintley’s knowledge and experience of traditional and theatricalised folk dance allowed him to produce a work that takes the form and translates it into a language that can be interpreted within a theatrical setting. Such a task requires a great storyteller to be able to narrate or use this particular language on stage. As discussed in chapter two, Bintley, is a powerful narrator and as a legatee and pupil of the De Valois/Ashton/Macmillan tradition, he has been exposed to and has embraced the choreographic traits inherent within an English ballet style, perfecting the art of choreographing not just a dance, but a piece of theatre. The ability to be able to create a piece of pure theatrical dance that can fuse a consideration of the theatrical context with an understanding of a folk dance form is not prevalent in choreography today.

Bintley is a master of translating English folk-inspired dance to the theatrical stage. As noted, it is a craft that requires an artistic sympathy and respect for the folk dance form and a familiarity and understanding of the foundations and motifs of the tradition as well as the choreographic sensibility or nuance to be able to take two contrasting styles and reconcile them without destroying their creative or fundamental nature and the ability to stage this in a way that is entertaining, dramatic and meaningful to an audience in a theatrical framework. Such a craft has contributed to Bintley's iconic status as an 'English' choreographer, but it is also a complex skill that is difficult to pass on to other choreographers. As a consequence, it may well be a skill which is in danger of disappearing if younger choreographers do not continue to bridge the gap between folk and theatrical dance. From interviews carried out with Bintley, it would seem that he is not altogether aware of his accomplishments in this field. What is certain is that he has special skills which might usefully be passed on to new generations of classical ballet choreographers. This way, awareness could be raised in the professional world of dance of the complexities and rewards of working with folk dance forms which will inspire other British artists to experiment with old and new traditions.

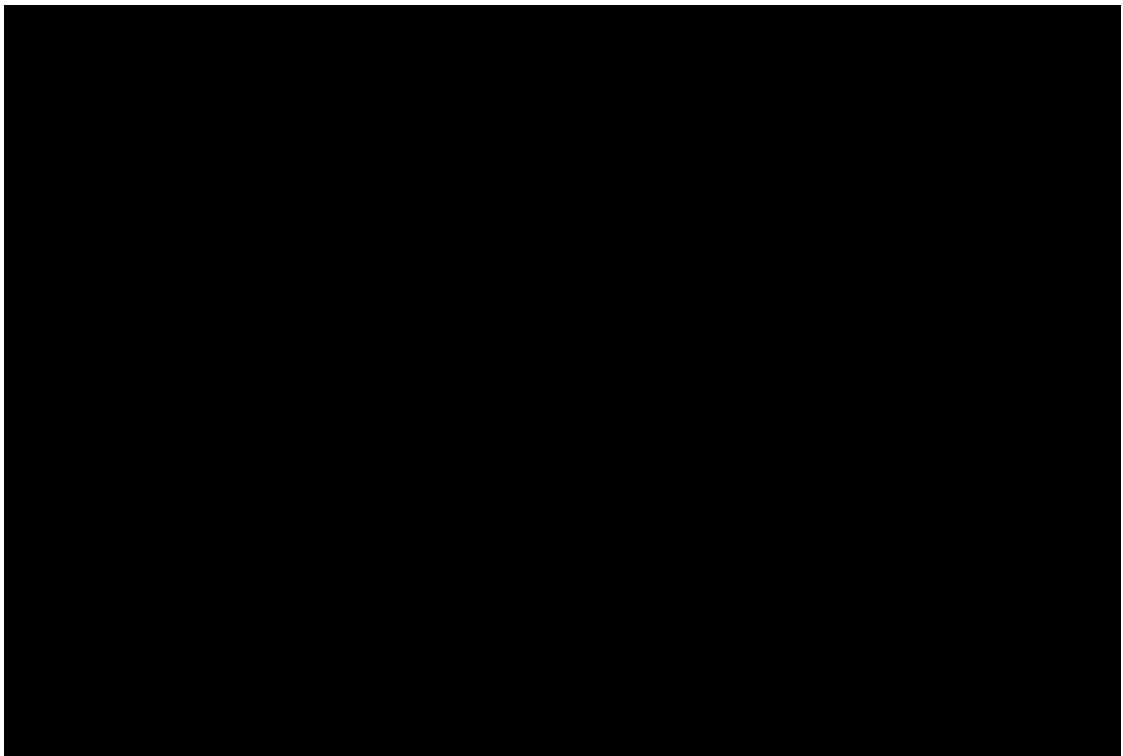
Having established the level of skill involved in translating English folk-inspired dance to the theatrical stage, chapter five examines the results of a training workshop conducted with some of the dancers involved in the performance of *Still Life at the Folk Café* and the Ravensbourne Morris Men.

Fig 8. A scene from *Still Life at the Folk Café*



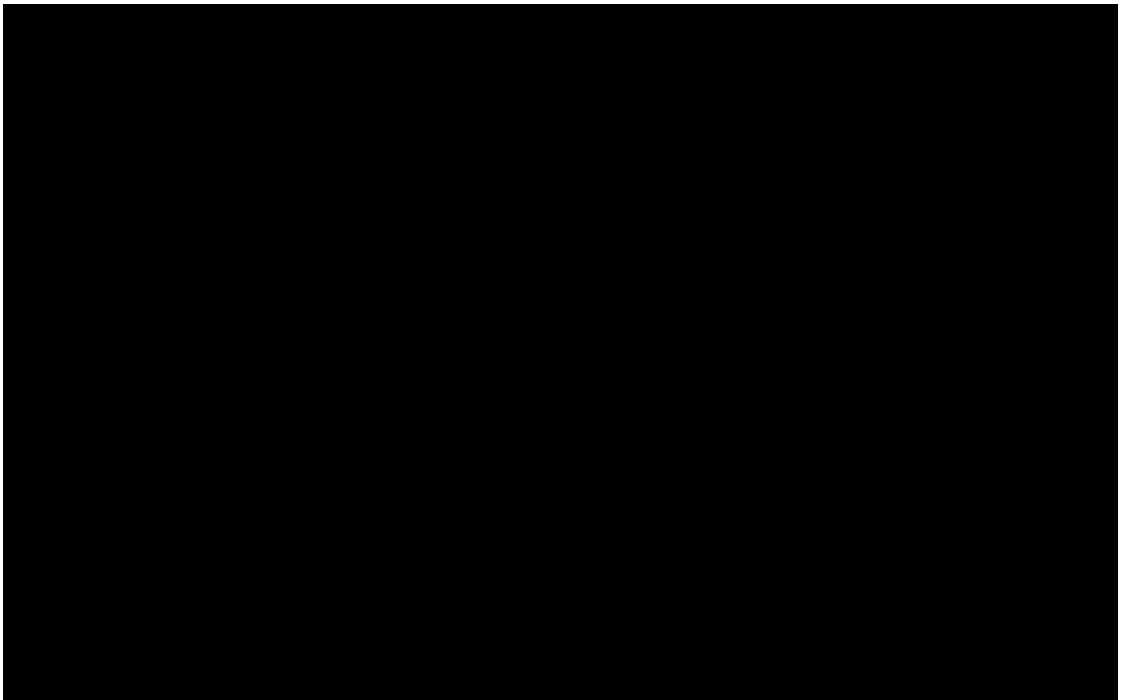
Note: *Still Life at the Folk Café* (2006). Screenshot taken from DVD

Fig 9. A scene from *Still Life at the Folk Café*



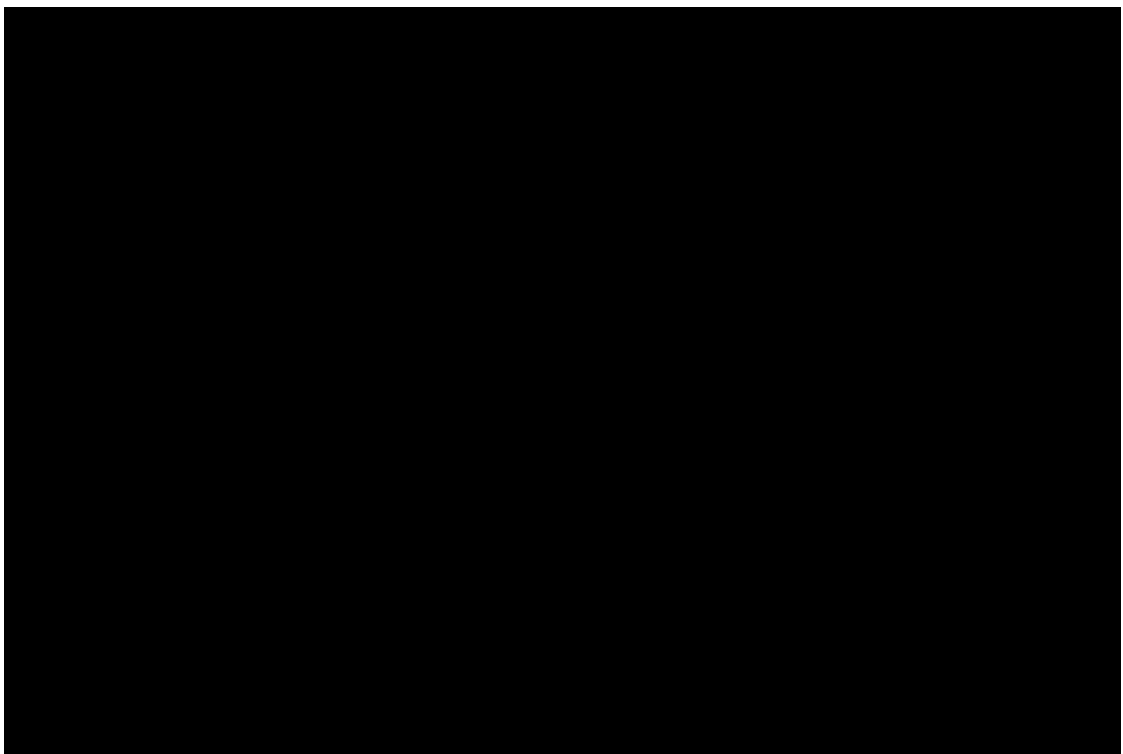
Note: *Still Life at the Folk Café* (2006). Screenshot taken from DVD

Fig 10. A scene from *Still Life at the Folk Café*



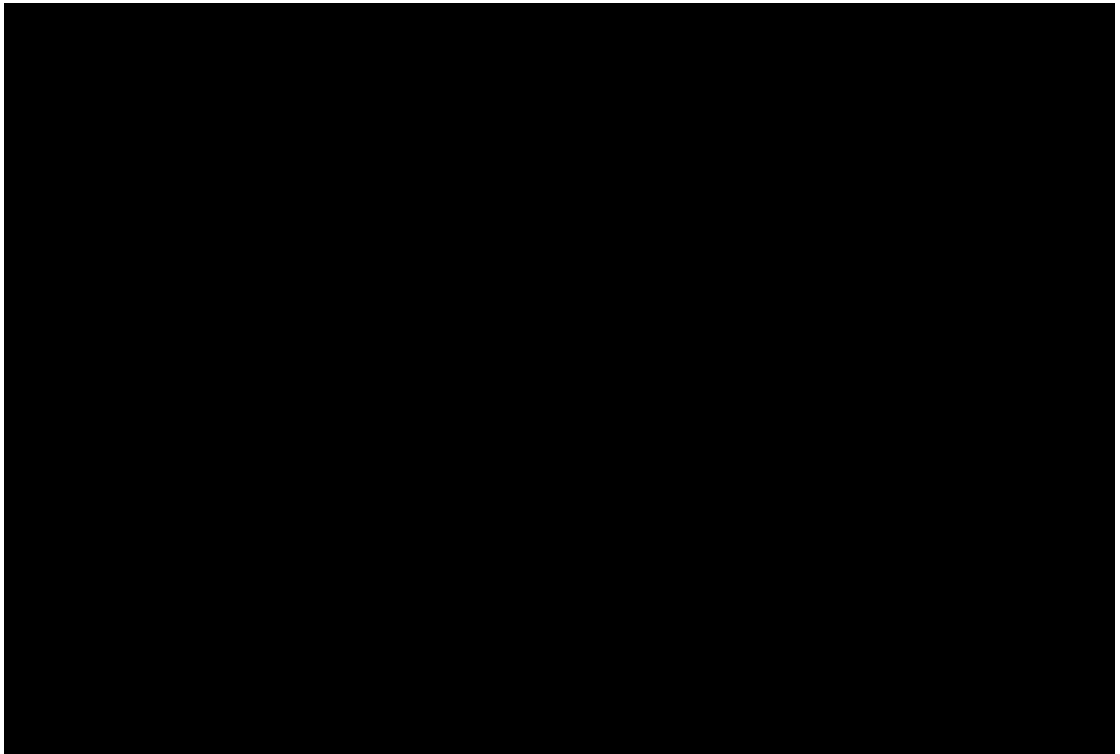
Note: *Still Life at the Folk Café* (2006). Screenshot taken from DVD

Fig 11. A scene from *Still Life at the Folk Café*



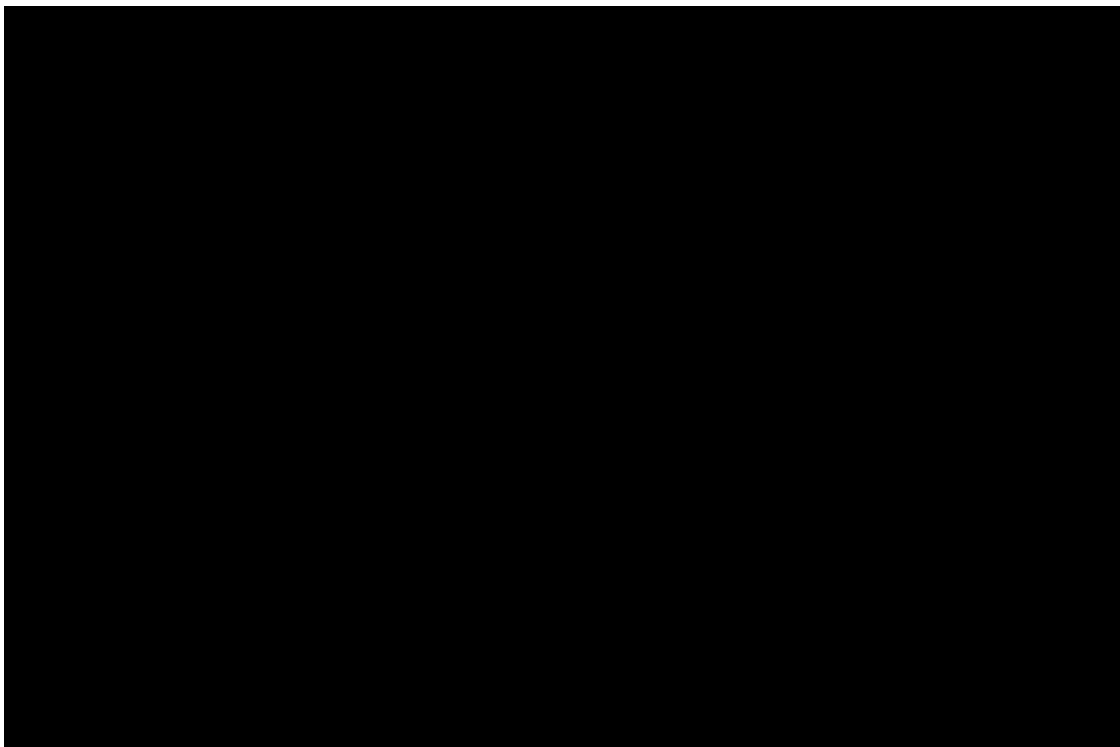
Note: *Still Life at the Folk Café* (2006). Screenshot taken from DVD

Fig 12. A scene from *Still Life at the Folk Café*



Note: *Still Life at the Folk Café* (2006). Screenshot taken from DVD

Fig 13. A scene from *Still Life at the Folk Café*



Note: *Still Life at the Folk Café* (2006). Screenshot taken from DVD

## **Chapter five**

### **Training workshop with the Ravensbourne Morris Men**

Having tested traditional Morris dance as theatre in *Still Life at the Folk Café*, the thesis goes on to explain how the dancers who took part in the production and its process responded when taught by the Morris men. The following chapter discusses the findings, results and observations from a workshop conducted in September 2006 with the Ravensbourne Morris dance team and some of the trained dancers.

#### **5.1 Crossing of genres: Professional versus folk dance practice**

The workshop was held in the Morris side's normal rehearsal space at the village hall in Keston in Kent and involved only two of my dancers because the Morris side were concerned about the lack of rehearsal space. I chose the dancers on the basis of the interest they had shown in learning more about the Morris dance style and also for practical reasons such as availability. The idea behind the workshop was for the dancers to have the opportunity to go deeper into Cotswold Morris dance with experts in the style. I was able to act as an informant since I was already familiar with Morris dance as well as having trained in ballet and other styles of dance. This level of expertise enabled me to translate from one style to another when necessary.

The workshop was led by Paul Burgess, who was the Squire or leader of the side at the time, and it took place in an ordinary room in the village hall. For my

dancers this was a totally alien and not very appropriate dance rehearsal space. The purpose-built studio they had been used to with its sprung floor, air conditioning, and built in CD system was replaced by a carpeted floor, cluttered surroundings and a live Morris dance musician. One of the men was already taking orders for tea and coffee in preparation for the customary break in the middle of the rehearsal session. Again, my dancers were not accustomed to such informality and had come prepared with bottles of water so that there would be no need to break for refreshment.

Since I was used to participating in Morris rehearsals, I did not find the rehearsal conditions out of the ordinary, but in introducing them to the student dancers who had little experience of dancing outside the hot-house environment of the dance conservatoire, I became aware of how strange all this must have seemed to them. In addition to the casual atmosphere, they were at first surprised that the Morris men danced on carpet. Since they wore dance trainers which were similar to the Morris men's hard-soled shoes and boots, they found that it was in fact beneficial to dance on carpet. In some ways it offered a similar effect to a sprung floor in that it cushioned the impact on the dancers' joints and ligaments as they executed the steps.

The rehearsal room was also much smaller than even an average sized dance studio, so the women found the space rather constricting. However the smaller space ensures that the dancers in a longways set always remain relatively close to one another. This is beneficial for the Morris dancer because it leads to greater connection with the other dancers in the set and thus achieves a heightened sense

of unity, symmetry and balance within the figure. The lack of mirrors in the rehearsal space was also slightly disconcerting for the women. In a dance studio, it is possible to use the mirrors to keep track of the positions of the other dancers without searching for them in the studio. In the Morris rehearsal, the women were constantly watching other members of the team in order to work out which movement came next, or what direction they should be travelling in within a figure. While the absence of mirrors was unsettling, it was also beneficial in encouraging teamwork and greater interaction with the Morris men because the dancers were always aware of themselves in relation to the other members in the set. Interestingly, rehearsing in a dance studio with mirrors would not benefit a Morris team. Since the dance thrives on the relationships between the dancers, the personal interaction and close physical contact in the training sessions helps to develop a close-knit bond within the team and to improve responsiveness to other members.

In the Morris form, the dancers make contact with each other in various ways including striking each other's staves and interlocking hands. Morris dance encourages the men to become relaxed and comfortable with their training partners, particularly in figures such as the half gyp. In this figure each couple travel towards each other's places, right shoulders forward and dance backwards along their original pathway (p.131), making eye contact with one another. I expected my dancers to find this degree of eye contact and intimacy discomfiting. However the friendliness of the training atmosphere put them at ease and they readily adapted to the environment and to the Morris style.

As noted the Morris men perform to live musical accompaniment and this extends to the rehearsals. The dancers practise facing the musician and again there is eye contact and interaction between the dancers and the musician. This offers a greater connection and communication between the dance and the music. The musician tells the story of the dance and in turn the dancer connects with the music via interaction with the musician. Dancing to live music in a training session was not unfamiliar to the women because ballet and contemporary dance classes have live accompaniment – pianists for ballet and often a percussionist for contemporary styles. However it is usually the teacher rather than the dancers who interact with the accompanist and the roles are normally clearly demarcated. This is less so in the Morris dance rehearsal because the musicians and dancers often swap roles and will take it in turns to dance or play. This blurring of boundaries between musician/dancer is practical in that it offers greater flexibility at performances or Morris dance displays when dancers and musicians can substitute for one another.

The hierarchy in the Morris dance side is equally fluid and democratic. There are set roles such as the squire, who is the leader of the team and generally leads or calls the dances. The foreman normally teaches and trains the dancers and is accountable for the standard of the Morris dance style. The bagman monitors and controls the side's finances or funds and the ragman co-ordinates the team's costume and props such as the staves and handkerchiefs.<sup>11</sup> However, these roles are often rotated around the team, and therefore decisions that need to be made are arrived at democratically. This egalitarianism is traditional for Cotswold

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<sup>11</sup> See the Ravensbourne Morris men's web site for further explanation of these positions within the side - <http://www.ravensbourne.org>

Morris teams and is also noticeable in the Ravensbourne side's dancing as no single member of the team is selected to be the main focus of attention, no matter their expertise or experience (see p.170). This sense of equality has been shaped through their rehearsal process because the men are there as a collective to embody, protect and preserve tradition. Therefore, they are all working towards the same objective and this has helped to produce a unified team.

At the workshop there was a marked difference between the women and the Morris men in the style of their practice clothes. The women were in the sort of loose fitting trousers and tops that are usually worn in contemporary dance classes and, therefore, they had the freedom to move the entire body. The men wore casual clothing such as shirts, jeans or trousers, not normally considered appropriate for a dance rehearsal situation, but this everyday style of clothing is perhaps, a reminder of how the Morris form was practised in the past – as a social rather than as a specialist activity.

The all-important tea and coffee break in the middle of the session gave the dancers an opportunity to talk to the men and to find out more about the individual personalities in the side. The break was also a time for the Morris dancers to talk in more detail about their customs. For instance, some members demonstrated how to hold the handkerchiefs and the staves whilst others discussed how important they felt their role was in keeping the tradition alive. Another dancer described how proud he was when every team member works in harmony with the others in the dance. As I had discovered throughout my research, the tea break or socialising after the rehearsal session are the times

when the Morris dancers are more open to share knowledge and they were prepared to answer any questions we wanted to ask about the tradition.

The tea break can also be a time for the men to discuss the business of the team relating perhaps to matters of finance and future performance opportunities. The dancers found this kind of behaviour particularly strange as it was a total departure from the atmosphere of a dance workshop or rehearsal. Dance classes are more often based on a warm up which raises the heart rate and gradually prepares the dancer's body for the exertions to come. At the end of the class there is a short period of cool down and stretching exercises to regulate the heart rate and body temperature. The structure of a professional dance class is designed to prevent injury (Weltman, Stamford, Fulco, 1979, pp.677-682). Since a Morris rehearsal is just as much a social occasion as it is a practice session, the men do not warm up, cool down or stretch at any time during the workshop. About a third of the side complain of pain around the knee joint and in the lower back. At each session, the Morris dancers practice the dances they need to work on and do not plan the rehearsals so that they begin with the slower dances.

## **5.2 Style specific variations and teaching methods**

The workshop began with Burgess teaching a traditional Cotswold Morris dance called '*Old Woman Tossed Up*' (see DVD footage: Chapter 21). The two women were placed in the middle of a set with four other men. As they worked through the steps and figures, the men described and demonstrated what they were looking for in the quality of steps such as the caper (see DVD footage: Chapter

20) or in arm movements like the throw forwards. This close interaction enabled the immediate breakdown of any barriers that might have arisen between the men and the ‘outsider’ dancers. The men were not worried about protecting the secrets of their tradition; rather they were keen to assist their new recruits in achieving a genuine understanding of the style of the dance. I was also surprised at how modest the men were. Even though they were the experts in the tradition, they were nevertheless aware that my dancers with their specialist training might be able to perform a step better than they could, especially in achieving extra height and more grace in the jumps.

*‘Old Woman Tossed Up’* is performed with the Morris handkerchiefs. There are many theories about the use of handkerchiefs in Morris dancing ranging from the idea that they ward off evil spirits, to the notion that they accentuate the action of the arm movements. Although I had discussed the use of handkerchiefs during the rehearsals for my dance, it was interesting for the dancers to be taught how to use them with such detailed explanation from an authentic Morris side. For instance, the men demonstrated precisely how the handkerchief should be gripped relatively lightly between the index, middle and ring finger. Although they were working with ordinary white cotton handkerchiefs, I noticed that my dancers held them exceptionally carefully as if not wanting to damage them. When they finished dancing with the handkerchiefs, they placed them together with all the other props with great respect as if they were precious objects. I realised that the dancers were very aware of the value of an honoured tradition and that they wanted to treat every aspect of it with a great deal of respect even bordering on reverence.

I noticed that the Morris men's execution of '*Old Woman Tossed Up*' made the movements appear casual and spontaneous. Although clearly there are structured steps such as the use of the galley (see p.128), figures and motifs, the dance did not in any way seem set or choreographed. The women on the other hand gave the movements a sense of polish which made the dance look more formal and studied. Since they were still learning the dance, it is understandable that they were less at ease with the movements than the Morris men. However comparing the differences in execution, I would argue that rather than occurring through unfamiliarity, these differences can be accounted for by the changes in flow that I had noticed during my own workshops and rehearsal sessions with the women. As I discussed on page 148, there are not many variations in the quality of the flow in Morris dance steps. For example in the single or double step, the flow is constant and even, and these steps seem almost natural. My dancers continued to articulate the dynamics for each step in such a way that the overall flow quality fluctuated. Thus, the steps lost their unstudied look and seemed artificial and contrived compared with the ease of flow quality in the Morris men's dancing. However as they progressed in the workshop, I noted a marked improvement in the women's quality of flow. It was extremely valuable then for my dancers to learn at first hand how the Morris style is embodied by its practitioners, proving that such nuances of execution can only be passed down through live interaction.

The Morris men also taught a Cotswold Morris stick dance entitled *Bean Setting* (see DVD footage: Chapter 23). I was impressed with the way in which the men entered so wholeheartedly into their teaching. Two of them partnered the women in order to demonstrate, whilst some of the other men left the set in order to help

take them through the stick striking sequence. As discussed on page 155, I had not focussed specifically on this aspect of Morris during my rehearsals, so this was relatively fresh material for the dancers to work with. We have seen that in Morris culture, the wooden stave is a phallic symbol (p.116) and that the degree of force required when wielding it is a sign of virility. I was interested to see how the women would cope with this symbolism. In my workshop session I had addressed this topic and the idea that Morris dance is often associated with the general idea of fertility. Cecil Sharp notes that the stave should be held in a special way - grasped, at the tip, middle or butt and, except when otherwise directed, lies in the hollow of the hand at the base of the thumb, supported by the second finger, and with the forefinger and thumb meeting together above it, to hold it in place (Sharp, 1907). Whilst the Morris men appeared to adhere to this manner of holding a stave, the women's grip was less stable.

Morris dance is also thought to be linked to traditional methods of agriculture, for example farm labourers beating the ground to harvest the crops. The associations of the Morris dance form with male aspects of fertility need not affect how women perform the dances. In many respects it is woman as representative of nature, who metaphorically supplies the harvest and, therefore, is the major symbol of reproduction, renewal and new life. The phallus is an ancient and powerful symbol of the generative power in nature, but this image goes hand in hand with the personification of the earth as a woman. I would argue that these two images are brought together within the Morris dance and therefore there is no reason to disassociate women from the Morris dance

tradition. On the contrary women have the ability to breathe new life into the form.

I was surprised however at how difficult it was for the women to pick up the stick sequence which involved hitting the ground with the stave and then striking the tip and butt of one's partner's stave. The dancers were preoccupied with trying to hold the staves correctly and struggled to remember the order or pattern of the sequence, thus frequently were behind in their timing. I attributed the dancers' confusion in part to the men's teaching methods and the dancers' unfamiliarity with such methods. Generally I have found it useful to analyse a sequence of movement and then break it down into accessible phrases. In my workshops I took the dancers through the counts for each step and often taught the step first before introducing the accompanying arm line or gesture. In this way they became accustomed to understanding what they should be performing and to what particular beats in the bar. I also described and demonstrated the quality, feeling and overall appearance of the movement that I wanted them to achieve. I also found that how quickly a dancer learned depended on the individual and how responsive they were to the material.

The dancers had not been formally trained in Morris dance and it was therefore understandable that they might not pick up the steps very quickly. I noticed however that in their teaching method the Morris men used some shortcuts for the Morris dance terminology that my dancers could not follow. For example, the men did not explain the timing for each movement and did not count the dancers in at the beginning of the dance. Instead they shouted 'this time' which meant the

dance was about to begin. After this call, I noted that there were four beats before the dance began. It was clear that the men did not make the instructions sufficiently clear and did not realise that the terms they used were confusing for the women and this meant that they were often late beginning the dance.

I also noticed that the Morris men described segments within dances rather than giving detailed explanations of the individual motifs or steps, floor patterns, arm positions or stick striking sequence. Sections of the dance were taught all at once. The Morris men are so familiar with every motif that they can readily reproduce them. My dancers were sometimes confused about what each motif meant or how it should be interpreted. I would say that the men used teaching shortcuts because they were aware that I had already taught the dancers some of the set motifs; however they also seemed acutely aware that they were working with trained dancers and therefore took it for granted that the women would also be experts in following Morris principles.

In many respects the men were natural teachers because they are accustomed to responding to each member of the team's strengths and weaknesses. The Ravensbourne Morris Men do not attract many new recruits and when they do, they tend to be older men; however, the team take the time to nurture any new members. New Morris dance members tend to learn via a process of osmosis or a subtle and gradual absorption of the information over time during the rehearsal/practice process. It is worth noting that these new members would typically not be trained dancers, therefore they would not come to the practice room having already been educated in the nuances of a specific movement style

such as ballet. Therefore may be able to adapt more quickly to certain qualities required of the Morris dancer such as the earthy, loose gait. The terminology employed and motifs of the Morris dance form become more familiar as they are repeated across the various sequences and dances. In this way new dancers are gradually initiated into the code of steps, patterns, stick striking sequences and arm positions that comprise the foundations of the dance form. In only one two-hour workshop, my dancers had to absorb a great deal of highly specialised information. The shortness of time available also accounted for the speed at which the Morris men taught some of the sequences and movements.

When the women learnt a dance called *The Wembley*, they struggled again with the figure of the hey (see p.133). Although it is a figure we had practised, I was surprised that the women became so confused about the shape they were making and put this down to the fact they had trained with a different set of dancers.

When the men took this more slowly and walked through the pattern with them, the women immediately recalled the figure confirming that it was unfamiliarity with the dancers rather than the pattern that had confused them. Members of the Ravensbourne dance side take turns to perform the dances and so dancers are interchangeable in the set. No dancer generally has a fixed position or partner. The men's familiarity with the tradition and with the motifs and figures mean that they can step in and out of a dance very easily. I noted that this fluidity is a fundamental skill that the Morris dancers have developed, and that it has a practical advantage in that if dancers are sick or on holiday they can easily replace one another, just like the musicians and dancers are often interchangeable (see p.184). However this fluidity of role also reveals the importance of

teamwork. The dance does not aim to highlight the proficiency of any particular person, because it is more about ensuring that the dance itself is the main focus. In contrast, my dancers were accustomed to taking a specific place in a choreographed dance often working with the same partner. Following the interchangeable characteristics of authentic Morris in my own rehearsals would have resulted in uncertainty and confusion for the dancers.

One of the major benefits of the workshop was that the women could directly experience the men's degree of energy. Their heavily built physical appearance in fact belied the degree of their agility and vigour when dancing. In fact I noticed that the women began to increase their own range of motion and attack the steps more in order to match the men's verve. This was not a competition for equality between the Morris men and the women dancers; however it was clear that both sides were keen to demonstrate their skill at the highest level possible. The men wanted to set an example of good practice for the women, and the women wanted to prove to the Morris men that they were attempting to execute the style as faithfully as they could. There was, to some extent, an implicit rivalry here. Members of the all-male Ravensbourne team would not normally compete against other dancers in the side because the Morris dance ethic promotes teamwork. However, in this scenario, the women dancers wanted to prove their capacity to embody the dance style, whilst the Morris men wanted to establish their mastery of the form.

Another challenge to the women came in the *Shepherd's Hey* or what the Morris men colloquially refer to as the 'Old man's dance,' largely because it is

performed by the eldest members of the Morris dance side (see DVD footage: Chapter 24). The dance involves a handclapping sequence which accompanies the simple lyric: “I can sing, I can play, I can dance the Shepherd’s Hey”. However, the men did not teach the song, possibly because they wanted to concentrate on the movements. On the other hand, since the women would never be allowed to perform the *Shepherd’s Hey* in a public performance, there was no need to learn the song.

The handclapping sequence calls for the dancers to clap the hands both in front and behind the body; underneath the right and left legs and also to touch other parts of the body such as the head and the torso with each hand in between some of the hand clapping actions. Although the women’s arm lines were elegant compared with the Morris men’s, they tended to place the hands together whilst clapping rather than using the gusto needed for a resounding clap. The women probably found the action difficult because there are very few, if any, such gestures in contemporary dance and if and when they occur in ballet, they are stylised. Thus, the women found it hard to reproduce the vigorous Morris handclapping sequence which means responding lustily to the rhythms of the music.

The ‘Old man’s dance’ actually requires a good level of flexibility in order to be able to lift one’s leg up high enough to clap underneath it, and there were notable differences between the women’s execution of this movement and the men’s. The women lifted and held the leg as they clapped the hands underneath and controlled it as it came down, whereas the Morris men performed the movement

with more abandon. Another difference occurred in the shape of the lifted leg, the men did not bend the knee as much as the women dancers did. Since the Morris men do not engage the core, they use the thigh muscles to swing the leg upwards so that the knee bends only slightly, whereas the women used their core strength to help raise the leg from the hip flexor so that the knee was bent at a sharp ninety degree angle. This made the movement appear more stylised and artificial.

It was evident that generally the women's graceful movements were informed by years of technical training. The Morris men are athletic and agile but not schooled in dance techniques so that the range of movement available to them depends on natural strength and aptitude. Thus, there was always a raw edge to the quality of their style of moving. On the other hand, the women were closely attuned to their bodies in such a way that they could isolate and control each set of muscles without expending large amounts of energy or effort. Perhaps this goes some way to explaining why when executing the Cotswold Morris dance motifs, the women did not appear to demonstrate as much vigour or energy in their performance as did the Morris men. On this evidence, it would seem that trained dancers need to release or sacrifice some of their schooling in order to achieve the Morris dancer's relaxed, informal style.

This is a complex challenge for any dancer or choreographer who has become accustomed to and accomplished in their own movement patterns and style of performance. In the case of David Bintley and his company of ballet dancers, they had to reconcile the studied elegance of ballet with the relatively robust

Morris dance style. It is a process that is worth pursuing however, and amply rewarding as I have discovered. Fully embracing the Morris dance form can lead to discovering new choreographic patterns and alternative movement processes, all of which offer greater diversity in the range of dance actions.

There are many topics arising from the interaction between the Ravensbourne Morris Men and my dancers, however for the purpose of space, I have focussed on four particular areas – my changing role as a researcher; gender issues; a Morris dancer's 'invisible' techniques and the passing on of the tradition; and Bintley's translation of the folk dance form.

### **5.3 My changing role as a researcher**

The Morris men were deferential in their attitude to the women and were clearly in awe of them as skilled dancers, but they also wanted to ensure that the women were aware of the lighter side of Morris and often joked about certain aspects of the practice. For instance two of the dancers at one point during the workshop went to clash staves together and comically pretended to miss each other's stave. They then pretended to hit each other over the head with the wooden sticks. The men would never normally miss the clashing of staves, but the action was part of the horseplay that ensured the workshop was entertaining as well as a formal learning process. I noticed that although the men demonstrated gestures and movements, they did not 'show off' their skills as much as they had done on my first visit to the side. Perhaps, because I had been a lone young woman amongst them, the men had flaunted their dancing skills seeking to impress with their

displays of physical strength. Since this was clearly a lesson and I had brought my dancers along for specialist instruction, the men took a more sober and responsible role as representatives of the Morris tradition.

However I experienced a change in my role as an ethnographer. I felt a nurturing type of protective attitude towards the dancers who I had taken out of the cocoon of the dance studio and exposed to the hurly burley of the Morris dance territory (see p.182-183). The men's sociable nature ensured however that the experience was instructive and entertaining. Nevertheless, my sense of protection worked both ways because I was aware that the men were in danger of being too generous in the way they were divulging privileged information about the side's training and stylistic principles. As I had initiated the workshop, I felt a keen sense of responsibility both to my dancers and the men. In my capacity as researcher, it was essential that my dancers and the Morris men found the experience of working together enjoyable and beneficial.

The men treated the women as apprentices to the tradition. They taught them how to craft the movements and, for example carefully explained how high a jump should be or why a certain arm movement should accompany that particular jump. The women dancers were not treated as novices, but as trainees honing their craft. My position as researcher shifted so that I became the "resident academic" a term given to me by the men. In this capacity I could ask them to take the dancers through a particular step or figure. I realised that I was no longer the apprentice and although as a woman I would never be permitted to dance with the group at a performance, I was now an honorary 'man'.

Any inhibitions the side had previously had about me as a female amongst them seemed to have been overcome when one of the men spoke openly about the sexual symbolism of a particular arm movement. In this action, both arms are thrown vertically upwards, palms facing the front and then brought back down and swung out to the side, with the palms facing front. This is a gesture, I was told, that is thought to represent the male genitalia. I had never before been told about the more vulgar symbols in Morris but now the men did not seem to worry that this might be offensive to me. I realised that the social barriers of gendered sensibilities were down and in my more sexless capacity as an academic the men were less aware of what they understood as womanly foibles. They were prepared to recognise me as a tried and trusted part of the team, a role which I intend to continue to fulfil.

For the Morris men the workshop was an enlightening experience in their approach to teaching new, younger members of the side. They discovered where there were difficulties with certain elements of the dance and in interpreting particular motifs. They realised how specialised the Cotswold Morris genre is and how clear as teachers they need to be when coaching and mentoring any future members of the side and in particular, younger members. The workshop thus heightened awareness of their role as the gatekeepers of the tradition.

For the Morris dance tradition to remain alive, I believe that it is important for its practitioners to impart their knowledge and experience of the art form so that it can encourage further debate and support new ways of preserving the ancient customs. As I am now an accepted Cotswold Morris dancer and academic I also

assume the responsibility of helping to protect, nurture and raise the profile of the tradition, ensuring that it is kept alive. In terms of choreographic potential, it is also a rich resource and one that should be shared with the wider dance community. The Ravensbourne Morris Men's willingness to open their doors to those 'outside' the tradition is an indication of their commitment to the form and their foresight in allowing it to become the subject of new discourses.

#### **5.4 Gender issues**

Throughout the stick striking sequences practised during the workshop, I closely observed how the Morris men responded to the women and the extent to which they exerted the full force of impact when clashing staves. I noticed that they were very considerate and careful when clashing staves with the women and the decrease in force may have arisen because of the work I had previously done with them, (see p.20 and p.116). However, the dancers would never be able to take part in the performance of a stick striking sequence with the Ravensbourne Morris Men. The men are adamant that their intention and goal is to preserve the beauty and tradition of the Cotswold Morris form and the inclusion of women in a performance would destroy the purity of their tradition. These strong principles did not prevent them, however, from readily sharing their knowledge about the stylistic nuances and qualities of their form of Morris with either myself or my two women dancers.

As we have seen, Morris is based on conventional notions of the masculine, but I expected my dancers to feminise the movements. The women were, in fact, less

forceful in the way they attacked the steps and more graceful for example in their execution of the hand movements or the placement of the legs and feet. There were also softer qualities of flow and lightness in regard to weight. Yet these more lyrical characteristics did not affect the masculine nature of the movements because the women could still demonstrate the boisterousness of the tradition. The Cotswold Morris dance style embodies traits associated with masculinity – such as aggression. However, if women are given the opportunity to study with an authentic Morris dance team, they can reproduce the masculine movements and sense of attitude that is an essential requirement of the tradition.

Having had the opportunity to be able to research the practices of the Ravensbourne Morris Men, I am acutely aware that as a male Morris dance side they are entrusted with the authentic form and conservatism of the tradition. Thus, performing with women would disrupt these conventions. They are the trustees of this dance form and guardians of its history and symbolism. This does not mean that women should not perform Morris dance and that it must continue as a male preserve. There are many all-female and mixed Morris dance sides across the UK. The creation and development of more of these sides must surely be encouraged along with the opportunity for choreographers and dancers outside the socio-folk sphere to be able to work with all-male Morris sides in order that the dance form can be interpreted in new contexts.

### **5.5 ‘Invisible techniques’ and the passing on of the dance tradition**

While watching the men and women perform, I became aware of the Morris men’s natural sense of rhythm and co-ordination. As discussed earlier (p.190), the men do not count either before starting the dance, or during it. They seem intuitively to listen to and follow the beats of the music at the same time as dancing a variety of steps, figures and sequences from many Cotswold Morris dances. They are also innovative in the way that they have produced new dances based on the tradition. Morris dancers therefore have what might be termed as ‘invisible’ skills, such as high levels of natural co-ordination, rhythm, agility and proprioception. However because this is an informal folk dance form, we do not necessarily associate it with what are, in fact, sophisticated skills.

The Morris tradition allows the men to share and also display these skills in their local community. Folk dance idioms are often regarded as non-technical or amateurish when compared with the chiselled vocabularies of professional dance. Yet, as I found at the workshop stage of my research, it was not as straightforward as might be expected for the trained dancers to adapt to and learn the Morris style. To some extent this supports the idea that folk dance is not necessarily a form of movement that any lay person can casually pick up and perform. It seems fair to claim that the Morris men are, within their own context, highly trained dancers. They strive to master their own dance style and to achieve this they need a range of dance skills that would not come easily to everyone.

Fortunately Morris has survived because as a practice the dance skills are shared among members of the various communities. Every member of the Morris dance side therefore becomes a living symbol of that tradition, able to embody and practise the art form and so keep it alive. Although the women could connect with the symbolism of the tradition at first-hand from the Ravensbourne Morris Men's workshop, I would argue that there was a need for me as a translator to help with the interpretation of the form. A translator can bridge the gap between folk and theatre dancers and assist in explaining the emotion and imagery bound up with the socio-folk dance form. Working with genuine practitioners of the Morris dance tradition, I realise how conscious dancers and choreographers should be in their engagement with the tradition and their representation of it in any form within the theatrical setting.

### **5.6 Bintley and the translation of the folk dance form**

As one of the few Morris specialists in ballet (see p.176), Bintley is adept at translating the form into a theatrical setting. As discussed in chapter three (p.121), his Cotswold Morris inspired motifs resemble many of the steps in the tradition, even though they have been transformed by the ballet aesthetic. In Bintley's work this ballet aesthetic contrasts with the full-bodied Morris style, and it seems that he loses some of the authentic characteristic elements in his theatrical translations. This is to be expected since Bintley is a choreographer of ballets that draw from folk dance and are not, therefore, anthropological studies of the forms.

One might even ask if it is at all appropriate to transform genuine Morris dance for the ballet stage. For example if the form is divorced from its social and historical environment, it is bound to lose its ring of authenticity and as I discovered through my own process and performance of *Still Life at the Folk Café*, to a large extent the style itself resists theatrical translation. Despite these reservations, I contend that the benefits outweigh the challenges of becoming creatively involved with Morris dance. For instance, working with its variety of floor patterns and figures, using weight, flow and breath in an entirely new way and discovering the informality and relaxed nature of the dance style are aspects of Morris that can benefit the dancer/choreographer. There is also the social dimension and teamwork which could be replicated within the professional dance context in helping develop greater interaction and connection between performers.

I also discovered during the performance of *Still Life at the Folk Café* that it is not necessary to be too literal in one's translation of the Morris dance form. I made adaptations and adjustments to the style to translate it to a theatrical setting. Watching the young women perform with the group of older men during the workshop had the effect of making Morris dance appear fresher and more contemporary. The contrasts in age and gender altered the dynamic of the dance, in the sense that it appeared to become a more fashionable dance form. The combination of young women and older men seemed to modernise the dance.

Based on my findings from the workshop with the Ravenbourne Morris men, for any future projects I would ensure that dancers participating in Morris-based

work had the opportunity to study its context and spend time with a Morris dance side. This would include that all-important activity of socialising (see pp.185-186). In achieving the unstudied earthy quality of the Morris dance style, I would adopt some of the Morris men's training methods such as teaching complete sections of the dance rather than breaking them down into discrete steps and components. This would encourage the dancers to release some of their control and embody the actions rather than reflect too much on the minute workings of a step. I would work with a musician rather than with recorded music in order to promote the lively, natural spirit of Morris dance. For a similar reason, I would rotate the dancers in their positions, so that they were constantly working with different partners in order to maintain equality of connection between all the performers.

In terms of performance space, I would ensure that the steps and figures are based on the genuine Morris dance shapes, but would not hesitate in adapting them so that they were clearly visible for the audience. For Morris dancers, close communication with the audience is imperative and any Morris-inflected style would benefit from being presented as a site-specific work in which the audience can surround the performance space and interact with the dance and the live musicians. In this respect, a fusion of street and Morris dance would complement each other. The Morris style thrives on the equality of the men in the side who all play an active part in contributing ideas for creating new dances or embodying the old traditional ones. I would ensure that in rehearsal each dancer was encouraged to create new movements based on the dance form, thus contributing

to the choreography and style. In this way, each member of the team actively invests in the dance form.

It is also vital that practice sessions are relaxed, social occasions and not run as formal dance classes or rehearsals. Morris practice sessions are probably best suited to informal spaces such as community halls and outdoor spaces. Aligning the rehearsal and creative process with the genuine Morris dance tradition, would permit professional dancers to free themselves of the constraints associated with formal training. However, just because a dancer is working within this more social, relaxed framework, does not mean the movements would lose their aesthetic quality. It is important for the Morris style to be passed on from one practitioner to another across various dance genres to ensure the form is maintained as a living and breathing tradition.

Choreographers and dancers should be made aware of the advantages of greater access to socio-folk traditions and also the issues that this may raise. The participatory process of the workshop I conducted with the Ravensbourne Morris Men and my dancers would be beneficial to others in adapting to folk dance styles. In addition these adaptations can stimulate new choreographic ideas. The fusion of old and new traditions could also work to the advantage of the folk dance tradition in reaching new and younger practitioners and audiences; however it is imperative to understand and recognise the responsibilities of working with socio-folk art forms in preserving the narrative of the folk idiom.

Having discussed the key elements involved in the translation of English Morris dance into a theatrical setting, chapter six goes on to discuss the conclusions drawn from the study.

## **Chapter six**

### **Conclusions and further recommendations for research**

Following discussion of the benefits of immersing oneself in Morris dance culture for those involved in the process of translating English Morris dance into a theatrical setting, this chapter concerns ways in which the study might be taken forward and how the conclusions drawn from the research could be used in further study of Bintley's choreographic process. Prospects for the development of further research into Morris-inflected style are outlined and additional opportunities for the study of other folk dance forms and their impact on practice are suggested. The future of English Morris dance and the English ballet tradition are also discussed.

#### **6.1 The future of Morris dance**

The year 2009 saw a renewed interest in Morris dance. On 7 February 2009, during the day of celebration for Mary Neal, the choreographer and former Bow Street Rapper, Jonathan Burrows, claimed that since training with the Bampton Traditional Morris Men, he has used Morris inspired movements in every work he has since created. Despite its ancient origins, Morris is not purely an archaic dance style, it has continual relevance within some unexpected areas of contemporary sub-culture. Burrows explained how during a performance by the Bow Street Rappers in Newcastle during the 1970s, the side attracted attention from a group of "skinheads" who recognised that the earthy Morris dance style shared qualities with some of the dance moves they performed in their heavy Dr

Marten boots. Thus, Morris dance is not an outdated folk dance style but can be aligned to work with various contemporary music and dance trends. For instance, in 2009, the Green Mountain Morris dancers, a young men's Morris dance side from Vermont in America created several new Morris dances inspired by their appreciation of heavy metal music. The choreography is athletic, aggressive and manages to fuse violent shaking of the head, or head-banging gestures, with traditional Morris dance steps and stick striking sequences.

As discussed the Ravensbourne Morris men belong to the Morris Ring (see p.111). This Morris dance association is open only to male Morris dance sides. However the Morris Ring represents just one strand of current Morris dance practice. Two other national and international bodies have been formed that are inclusive of womens' and mixed Morris dance teams, namely the Morris Federation and Open Morris. These associations encourage the practice of Morris dancing by men and women of all ages and also advocate creative and choreographic experimentation within the dance form. This creativity is evident at the Rochester Sweeps Festival which takes place every year in Kent across the first bank holiday weekend in May. The event is a colourful fusion of traditional dance and energetic street theatre.

There has been a proliferation of information on the internet about Morris dance and in particular all-women and mixed Morris sides have showcased their performances on video sharing web sites such as YouTube. Such teams include the Bare Bones women's Morris side from Loughborough (2009) and St Katherine's Morris men and women from Irchester (2008). Morris has also been

taken up by the film industry with the release in 2009 of a comedy entitled *Morris: a Life with Bells on*. This film, starring Sir Derek Jacobi and Clive Mantle, follows the fortunes of a fictional Morris dance side called the Milsham Morris. The film's Director, Lucy Akhurst, hoped that the film would reach as wide an audience as possible and is amongst those who consider Morris to be a phenomenon which can continuously reinvent itself (2009, p.20).

These later developments notwithstanding, the future of traditional Morris dance is dependant on its practitioners' willingness to share the stylistic nuances, techniques and glossary of steps, figures and patterns with new influences. Such influences could range from ballet and contemporary dance choreographers and dance companies to street dance performance teams. Authentic Morris dancers should not relinquish their close links with the past, but must allow the dance form to become more transparent to other dance genres. The involvement of women is also a significant factor in the evolution of Morris dance. As shown elsewhere within this thesis, women can reproduce the masculine movements and attitude that is an essential requirement of the tradition if given the opportunity to spend time with an authentic Morris dance team (see p.200). Thus it would seem only advantageous to all-male Morris dance sides to allow and facilitate women's participation in embracing this traditional dance style, perhaps by encouraging them to take part in some of their rehearsal sessions. The future of Morris dance lies in its ability to be able to diversify so that the spirit, technique and teamwork can become embodied by new performers within new performance spaces.

Without this more open approach, the future of Morris is in jeopardy as Charlie Corcoran, the present bagman of the Morris Ring association has pointed out. In January 2009 he stated that young people are too “embarrassed” to perform Morris dance and that the art form could be “extinct” within 20 years (in Adams, 2009). Authentic Morris dance sides should be encouraged to work with a younger demographic and participate in projects with schools, colleges and universities. Such institutions would then be more likely to be able to develop their own authentic or fusion Morris dance teams. The folk dance form can thus remain true to its social roots by sharing its secrets with new types of community.

## **6.2 The development of a Morris-inflected dance style**

Throughout this study I have presented the Morris dance form as a rich and varied style and source of inspiration for steps, figures, patterns, gestures and arm movements. I have argued that it cultivates teamwork, a sense of communal spirit, energy and awareness, direct communication with the audience, new ways to express and control the human body and that it also offers freedom from the constraints of more formal dance styles. It is a language that should be translated to work across different dance genres. However, based on the findings from the research, there are some key recommendations which follow for those interested in creating a theatrical performance based on the Morris dance style.

- When introducing new participants to complex floor patterns and interweaving figures, draw diagrams, create a dance map or mark on the

floor the position of the figure or shape to help the dancers visualise the patterns (see p.150). Devote time to teaching the transitions between figures and change the dancers' position frequently in the figure so that the floor pattern is fluid and every dancer can appreciate where the other is in the dance (see p.192).

- Work with live musical accompaniment during the rehearsal period as well as in the performance (see p.184). The live musician will be able to slow down or speed up the tempo of the dance depending on the dancers' requirements. The dancer should not grow accustomed to dancing or performing the same dance to the same piece of music, because they are less likely to maintain a spontaneous response to the music. Close interaction between the musician and the dancers must be encouraged, so that the dance becomes an extension of the music and vice versa.
- The form uses space relatively informally in order to maintain close communication with the audience. For Morris, the dancers' space is never defined by artificial lighting. One should try and ensure that the relationship between the audience and performer is less distinct. This means that Morris-based choreography is best suited to site-specific or street dance idioms and might be developed as such. However, staged versions of Morris need to be set so that the figures and framework do not obstruct the audience's view of the action (see p.163).

- The source of Morris dance informality should be fostered by securing a rehearsal space that is not subject to the codes of the specialist dance studio (see p.205). Dancers should not think of themselves as solo artists, but be prepared to work harmoniously as a team. The aim should be to develop a community of performers who are telling the story of the tradition in their own manner. For this reason, social gatherings or meetings inside and outside of the practice space are advisable in order to develop a closer relationship and understanding between the performers.
- Dancers should be encouraged to rehearse in everyday wear and not special practice clothes. They also require heavy footwear in the form of hard-soled shoes or boots (see p.147). The need for this heavy footwear for Morris dance is in contrast to other folk dance forms such as Irish and Scottish dance for which dancers wear soft-soled shoes, or ghillies, similar to soft ballet shoes. The ghillies are made of supple leather and can have a split-sole to allow the dancer greater flexibility to point the foot. The shoes are fastened by laces which, like ballet shoes, can be wrapped around and tied tightly at the ankle. The heavy footwear used in Morris dancing helps the dancer to accentuate the weight and direct quality of the actions and also encourages the flexion of the foot. Adapting to such restrictive footwear, however, is particularly difficult for dancers who have been trained in ballet. Yet these dancers may find that fewer adjustments have to be made in terms of the translation process for Irish and Scottish folk dance as a result of the footwear that is worn.

- Breathing techniques can help dancers adapt to the loose, relaxed posture and alignment required for Morris dance (see p.147). Vocalising the language and energy of the dance, via exclamations and shouts during the performance can also enable the dancer to energise and release themselves from the customary formalities of dance. It must be appreciated that expecting a dancer to change an ingrained approach to movement which they have studied and absorbed over many years of training is a challenge. The process of change may be slow but there are benefits to be gained from working outside the constraints of a familiar dance style.
- Throughout the training process for a Morris based dance, it is helpful to rehearse and perform as much as possible in the local community. Morris is a local tradition that is embedded within the community from which it springs. In sharing, displaying and experimenting with the Morris-based style at a local level the choreographer can ensure that the social nature of the tradition remains at the core of the dance's identity. It will also go some way to disprove the views of those who consider folk dancers to be unskilled and amateurish in their performances (see p.201). Professional choreographers taking their transformative interpretations of Morris back to the community of origin will have the effect of awakening folk dancers to the style's potential as an art form.
- There are many all-female and mixed Morris dance sides across the UK. However, as discussed, among the more authentic Cotswold Morris dance

teams, Morris has historically been a male preserve and yet this is something of an anachronism in the modern world, where particularly in the context of contemporary dance, women do show equal strength to men. There are still discrepancies in the field of sport however, whereby football teams are either male or female and, at a competitive level, tennis players tend to play members of the same sex. Morris should lend itself more to a contemporary arts context, with the encouragement of mixed and also single sex performance work. Male and female dancers would use the same technique, style and foundations, but have the space to experiment with their own sexuality within the dance form.

- Young teams of dancers are a genuine reflection of Morris dance ideology. As discussed (see p.162), Morris dancers in the nineteenth century would have been the youngest, most virile members of the local community, able to perform stunts and athletic feats to demonstrate their masculine strength and prowess (Sutton, 2000). Choreographers working with a younger performance team would be able to reconnect with this athleticism and vigour. This is not to say, however that a Morris-based style should be performed only by the young. As I discovered during my research with the Ravensbourne Morris Men, despite being in the age range of around 50 years and over, the men still embodied the spirit, dynamics and energy required for the dance form. Thus, the Morris is sufficiently flexible to be accessible to a variety of age groups.

Having discussed the key recommendations for creating a theatrical performance based on the Morris dance style, I want to mention specifically how the practice-based element of this study might be taken forward through translating Morris dance into site-specific spaces and outdoor locations. For example, *Still Life at the Penguin Café* is designed to be like a floor show or cabaret which takes place within a café environment. Therefore a suitable location to set a further translation of the Morris dance form within this context might be a café itself.

For the purpose of this study, I set out with the intention to create a more authentically ‘Morris’ version of Bintley’s dance, yet discovered that in attempting to adhere to a more literal translation my inventiveness was to some degree restricted. Further translations of traditional Morris dance might experiment more with the artistic and imaginative possibilities of the form.

### **Deciphering the language of Morris dance**

To be able to translate the story of the Morris dance for the stage, the dancer or choreographer has to immerse themselves in the sources of the tradition. This means researching and engaging in the sense of tradition that is passed from one Morris dancer to another along with their physical embodiment of the movement. It is only then that the dancer can begin to understand what I would term the source language or the physical and verbal manifestation of the dance in its current form. The source language holds the key to be able to decode and decipher the Morris dance motifs, habits and stylistic principles. Once a dancer or choreographer listens to and can see and embody the origin of the source

language, they will be able to appreciate the value of its narrative. From here the process of translating the Morris dance style so that it can travel across different dance genres can begin. The process can be fluid and as discussed (p.203) does not have to be an exact reproduction of the dance style, which in many respects resists translation, but can take the source language, maintain its meaning and subtext, and interpret it for new audiences to understand, appreciate and connect with.

The workshop I conducted with the Ravensbourne Morris Men and two of my dancers is an example of the process involved in translating between the genres. My dancers represented the field of professional dance and my interaction as the translator, helped to bridge the gap between the two worlds of professional and folk dance. Thus, in order to equip choreographers, dance companies and dance students with the tools to translate and develop a Morris-inflected dance style, it is to be recommended that folk dance specialists hold regular workshops and dance classes within the professional dance community to teach the principles of the Morris dance style. As discussed, Royal Ballet pupils at the Lower School are fortunate enough to take classes in Morris and the students at the Upper School perform folk dances at showcase events (p.72). However other dance students may never come across the folk dance form in their training. Giving students the opportunity to attend a Morris dance workshop or class will be beneficial in allowing them to extend their choreological and movement vocabulary.

Such a process can work both ways and there is a growing idea that Morris dance is an art, and as much as ballet or contemporary dance can borrow from its

artistic principles, the Morris form might also learn from some of the methods practised in professional dance contexts. These might include the idea of working on the dramatic characterisation of the demi-caractère style of the Morris dance fool for instance.

### **6.3 The study of other folk dance styles**

Working with Morris dance has enriched my choreographic experience. There is the potential to investigate other English dance forms such as country dance, clog dance, rapper, sword dance, maypole and border Morris dance. The process of translation used in this study should be applied to these dance forms. In relation to further practice-based research, *Still Life at the Folk Café* might be developed as a series of divertissements, each one telling the story of one of the English dance traditions (listed above) on which it has been based. As discussed, Bintley's *Still Life at the Penguin Café* is concerned with the preservation of culture (see p.97). Similarly future work on *Still Life at the Folk Café* might also be concerned with the cultural protection and diversification of English dance traditions. Considering that Bintley's *Still Life at the Penguin Café* has returned to the Birmingham Royal Ballet's (BRB) repertory in 2009, it can be proposed that the ballet and indeed folk dance forms continue to be relevant.

Morris dance has proved inspirational for English ballet choreographers such as De Valois and Bintley. A question that has arisen out of this fact is what impact other traditional dance forms such as Scottish or Irish dancing have had on English ballet and contemporary dance choreography. This question might also

extend to the inclusion of dance forms such as hip-hop or street dance, Asian or Bollywood dance or Latin American and ballroom dance within a contemporary ballet and contemporary dance context. A social and folk dance symposium should explore some of these questions and also help introduce dance students and companies to social and folk dance practitioners to encourage them to engage more with some of the less familiar art forms. After promoting and encouraging an increased interest in traditional dance styles and the translation of such forms into new theatrical contexts, I would recommend the creation of a dance festival showcasing the new work of social and folk dance theatre practitioners.

#### **6.4 Bintley's national and international identity**

Bintley is highly proficient at transforming English folk dance for the ballet stage and consequently has received critical and public acclaim for his dances in the English narrative ballet tradition. The study has demonstrated that his approach to Morris dance is bolstered by his experience in both authentic and theatricalised folk dance and that he has drawn from folk dance throughout his career. This aspect of his style has helped shape his identity and reputation as a truly English choreographer. The fieldwork that I carried out with the Ravensbourne Morris Men enabled an examination of the extent to which Bintley's interpretation of English Morris dance in *Still Life at the Penguin Café* was 'genuine'.

Ethnography proved a valuable model for investigating both the Cotswold Morris dance form and Bintley's choreography. This type of research methodology is of increasing importance to the dance world because, as detailed throughout the

thesis, it allows the researcher to become familiar with the social and cultural practices of the society in question, gain an understanding of how the culture is embodied in the society's movement vocabulary and share some of the physical and psychological feelings involved in the performance of the movements.

I found that Bintley has a greater understanding of Morris dance than he acknowledges (see p.177). There were, understandably, variations in his selection of steps compared with their traditional counterparts, particularly in the stylistic principles and qualities of weight, flow, flexion of the knee and foot, degrees of flexibility and the informality of the Morris style with its relaxed upper body carriage. In the context of this thesis, I was not able to go into a detailed comparison between the traditional lexicon of Cotswold Morris dance steps and Bintley's interpretation of the folk dance form in some of his other ballets such as *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1996) and *Hobson's Choice* (1989). However a similar comparative process to the one used in this study might similarly be applied to these works.

As a choreographer, Bintley is rare in the fact that he is working from within the traditional framework of the English ballet tradition and I have expressed concern that there will be few, if any to continue the tradition in the future. In this respect, it is to be hoped that others will follow in Bintley's footsteps including choreographers both inside and outside of the English ballet tradition. In June 2009 BRB's Department for Learning confirmed that the company does not currently run a programme that specifically explores Bintley's use of folk dance in his ballets. I suggest as part of the social and folk dance symposium,

Bintley should be invited as a guest speaker to impart some of his skill in transforming English folk dance for the stage. Across the national education system, there is also scope for the further study and exploration of folk dance theatre art.

The BRB has to straddle a number of different identities and has a regional, national and international role which makes Bintley's position at the heart of the company even more significant. Bintley's social consciousness and belief in Wright's principle that the BRB should be an artistic and social centre able to reach out to the community which supports it, has ensured his work is localised. In drawing on the Morris form, Bintley offers a representation of local life on stage. He portrays English communities, their inhabitants and their idiosyncrasies, and in so doing his ballets are deeply rooted in his desire to present a theatricalised representation of England. Bintley is also a protector of the English ballet tradition (see p.64) and via his blend of classicism and dramatic characterisation, is safeguarding its national stylistic principles within the ballets he is creating for the company.

The BRB also has a growing international audience and exports many of the classics from its repertory by performing them on their foreign tours. For example, Bintley's *Beauty and the Beast* (2003) and MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet* (1965) were taken to China in January 2009, and Sir Peter Wright's *The Sleeping Beauty* (1968) to the USA in May 2007. In 2008, Bintley became Artistic Advisor to the New National Theatre Ballet Company, Tokyo for whom he created a full-length ballet, *Aladdin* (2008). He will assume Directorship of

the Company in 2010 in addition to his post at the BRB. As part of his international role, Bintley might play a key part in highlighting the creative potential of English folk dance to a global audience.

There is very little published literature on the life and work of Bintley (see p.14). Considering his position in the pantheon of English Royal Ballet choreographers, there is plenty of scope for further research and documentation of his choreography along with the need to make his body of work more visible. In chapter two I have offered a biographical overview of his life and career. There is scope to take this forward with the publication of a biography of Bintley's life and work. A further publication might focus on the English ballet tradition and *danse d'école* with subsequent chapters on English ballet's key practitioners, namely De Valois, Ashton, MacMillan, Wright and Bintley.

### **6.5 The future of the English Ballet tradition**

Bintley is a living exponent of the English Ballet tradition. His work embodies its story, yet one must question how safe the style is in terms of other practitioners adept at choreographing within the tradition. Certain elements of the style could face extinction if there is not enough debate about the form. As discussed, Bintley is highly unusual among a younger generation of choreographers in his interest in and capacity for creating the three-act narrative ballets (see p.64). This research has pointed out that there are very few choreographers working within the full-length ballet tradition. Questions that should continue to be asked include what kind of training, experience and skills are needed to create a full-length

narrative and whether audiences are losing touch with story and narrative in favour of montage based techniques or that feature the integration of dance and motion capture technology. It is interesting to question whether so few choreographers have been inspired by literary narratives as the basis for a full-length work because the choreographic process is extremely complex.

Bintley has been recognised for his mastery of the *demi-caractère* role and his sensitivity in portraying human personality traits (see pp.65-66). The *demi-caractère* is a specialist style and further research is needed into the stylistic requirements of the style to determine what training methods, skills and performance experience are required. Bintley is preserving the style in his work by choosing to explore the psychology of his complex and often flawed characters, yet one should question how prevalent the style is in more current choreography and whether enough is being done to safeguard its continuation and stylistic nuances.

De Valois's decision to establish and foster an English ballet tradition that embraced national dance styles has proved fruitful. One of the major strengths of the tradition is its ability to recognise and draw from the rich resource of socio-folk dance forms. Within an ever changing English social landscape, however, it is time to also embrace new ethnic dance styles such as African dance, Capoeira, Bhangra or Bharatanatyam in order to ensure the English ballet tradition continues to have contemporary relevance and can offer an expression of England's myriad of heterogeneous communities. In this way, the development of the English ballet tradition would still follow De Valois's original ideology, to

find sources of creativity and inspiration in local artists and practitioners. It would also offer new sources of stimulus for key characteristics of the tradition, namely expressivity, dramatic characterisation and musicality. It is only by respecting and taking a fresh look at tradition that we can really see into the future of English dance.

## Appendix

Fig A: Full list of figures and steps from Lionel Bacon's *A handbook of Morris dances* (1974).

| <u>ABBREVIATIONS</u>            |                          |        |                                  |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|--------|----------------------------------|
| (Others are defined where used) |                          |        |                                  |
| (i) <u>Figures</u>              |                          |        |                                  |
| AMR                             | Advance, meet and retire | HHds   | Half hands                       |
| BB                              | Back to back             | HH     | Half hey                         |
| Cnrs                            | Corners                  | HR     | Half rounds                      |
| CF                              | Common figure(s)         | OY     | Once to yourself                 |
| CO                              | Cross over               | PD     | Processional down                |
| CT                              | Cross & turn             | PU     | " up                             |
| DF                              | Distinctive figure       | S      | Spots                            |
| DP                              | Dance in position        | SO     | Show out                         |
| DR                              | Dance round              | SS     | Side by side or set straight     |
| FD                              | Foot down                | SSS    | Sidestep sequence                |
| FF                              | Face to face             | WG     | Whole gip, gipsy                 |
| FU                              | Foot up                  | WH     | Whole hey                        |
| HA                              | Hands across             | WhR    | Whole rounds                     |
| HCF                             | Hand-clapping figure     | WkR    | Walk round                       |
| HG                              | Half gip                 |        |                                  |
| (ii) <u>Steps</u>               |                          |        |                                  |
| 2-step                          | 4/2 or 6/2               | l      | Step or hop on lt foot           |
| *2                              | morris step              | l      | Leg                              |
| 4-step                          | 4/3 or 6/3               | Ⓛ      | Stamp with lt toe                |
| *4                              | morris step              | L      | Caper on lt foot                 |
| A                               | Apart (straddle)         | ltb    | Lt toe behind                    |
| bs                              | Backstep                 | ltf    | Lt toe forward                   |
| bss                             | Backward sidestep        | oss    | Open sidestep                    |
| bwd                             | Backward                 | PC     | Plain caper(s)                   |
| oss                             | Closed sidestep          | QC     | Quick caper(s)                   |
| DC                              | Double caper(s)          | r      | Step or hop on rt foot           |
| fa                              | Feet apart               | Ⓡ      | Stamp with rt toe                |
| faj                             | Feet apart & jump        | R      | Caper on rt foot                 |
| FC                              | Fore caper(s)            | rtb    | Right toe behind                 |
| fss                             | Forward sidestep         | rtf    | Right toe forward                |
| ft                              | Foot, feet               | S4     | Sherborne-type 4-step            |
| ftj                             | Feet together & jump     | SC     | Step and caper                   |
| fwd                             | Forward                  | sh     | Shuffle-back step(s)             |
| G                               | Galley                   | sj     | Step and jump                    |
| h                               | hop                      | spJ    | Split jump                       |
| H                               | Heel                     | spl    | Kick caper(s) ('Splitters')      |
| H                               | Weight on heel           | ss     | Sidestep                         |
| hb, hbs                         | Hop-back step(s)         | ss(lt) | " , lt foot leading              |
| hcb                             | Hockle-back step(s)      | ss(rt) | " , rt " "                       |
| HC                              | Half caper(s)            | t      | feet together                    |
| HL                              | Hook-leg(s)              | T      | Toe                              |
| ht                              | Heel-&-toe               | T      | Weight on toe                    |
| J, Ju                           | Jump                     | tb     | Toe behind                       |
| j                               | Low jump                 | tf     | Toe forward                      |
| KC                              | Kneeling capers          | UC     | Upright (Full or whole) caper(s) |
| kn                              | Kneel                    | wb     | Wide back step                   |
| * when used between bar-lines   |                          | x      | Cross-hop(s)                     |
|                                 |                          | xAC    | Cross, apart & caper             |
|                                 |                          | xbs    | Cross, back steps                |
|                                 |                          | Y      | Spring                           |

Note: From Bacon, L. (1974). *A handbook of Morris dances* (pp.14-15).  
Cambridge: The Morris Ring

Fig B: Full list of arm movements, hand-clapping and stick-striking motifs from Lionel Bacon's *A handbook of Morris dances* (1974)

|                                                         |                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| (iii) <u>Arm-movements</u>                              |                          |
| d                                                       | Down                     |
| du                                                      | Down and up              |
| o                                                       | Circle or twist          |
| tf                                                      | Throw forward            |
| Tl                                                      | Touch with lt hand       |
| Tr                                                      | " " rt "                 |
| u                                                       | Up                       |
| Wb                                                      | Wave both hands          |
| Wl                                                      | Wave lt hand             |
| Wr                                                      | " rt "                   |
| (iv) <u>Hand-clapping</u>                               |                          |
| B                                                       | Clap hands behind back   |
| F                                                       | Clap hands in front      |
| L                                                       | Partners clap lt hands   |
| LK                                                      | Strike lt knee           |
| P                                                       | Partners clap both hands |
| R                                                       | Partners clap rt hands   |
| RK                                                      | Strike rt knee           |
| ULK                                                     | Clap under lt knee       |
| URK                                                     | " " rt "                 |
| (v) <u>Stick-striking</u>                               |                          |
| B                                                       | Partners strike butts    |
| D,DB                                                    | Dib with butts           |
| E                                                       | Even numbers             |
| G                                                       | Strike ground with tips  |
| M                                                       | Middle(s) of stick(s)    |
| O                                                       | Odd numbers              |
| S                                                       | Shoot                    |
| T                                                       | Tip(s)                   |
| (e.g. $\frac{OT}{EB}$ = odds' tips strike evens' butts) |                          |
| xvi.                                                    |                          |

Note: From Bacon, L. (1974). *A handbook of Morris dances* (p.16). Cambridge: The Morris Ring

## **Glossary of terms**

**Ale:** An event hosted by a Morris dance team to which other Morris dance teams are invited to perform for each other. In the nineteenth century the ale would be held in the village with the dancers moving through various locations such as homes, the local pub or the church.

**Bagman:** The person in a Morris dance team who monitors and controls the group's finances or funds. Bag also refers to any team's monies.

**Baldrick:** A sash traditionally worn by Cotswold Morris dance teams during a performance.

**Bell pad:** A collection of bells that is sewn to a backing and worn around the ankle, knee or tied to the shoes.

**Border Morris:** This Morris dance form originates from the English side of the Wales-England border in the counties of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire. However it is not restricted to these areas. Border Morris dances generally involve stick striking sequences and are more boisterous than other Morris dance forms. The costumes generally are adorned with strips of material or rags and ribbons.

**Clog dance:** This folk dance form is thought to have developed in the Lancashire cotton mills where wooden-soled clogs were worn and workers would tap to the

rhythm of the machinery. It became a popular performance art form in the music hall in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

**Cotswold Morris:** A Morris dance form that originally derived from the geographical region of the Cotswolds, but it is not restricted to the area. The style is danced across Britain.

**Fool:** The Morris dance fool can take different guises and is seen as a mischief-maker. They disrupt the dance and offer a means of direct communication between the audience and the dancers. The fool is usually a talented dancer.

**Foreman:** The person who normally teaches and trains the dancers in a Morris dance team and is accountable for the standard of the Morris dance style.

**Hobby:** A dancer dressed in an animal costume, which usually takes the form of a hobby horse. The hobby horse can also be the embodiment of the Morris dance fool and interacts and plays with the audience.

**Maypole dance:** A form of dance in which the dancers move around a pole which is draped with ribbons and garlands. Holding on to the ribbons, the dancers can make intricate circular shapes and figures.

**Ragman:** The person in a Morris dance team who co-ordinates the team's costume and props such as the staves and handkerchiefs.

**Rapper dance:** This Morris dance form takes its name from the sword that is used in the dance, a highly flexible length of spring steel, about 28 inches long, with a fixed handle at one end and a swivel handle at the other. Five dancers form a circle and are linked by the swords. They perform a very fast series of dance figures, weaving in and out, over and under each other.

**Set:** This refers to the group of dancers performing in a Morris dance. In Cotswold Morris dance this is generally six or eight dancers.

**Side:** The colloquial name for a Morris dance team in the UK.

**Squire:** The leader of a Morris dance team who generally leads or calls the dances.

**Stave:** The traditional wooden stick that a Morris dancer wields.

## **DVD footage**

### **Chapter 1: 0.00:01 Excerpts from the ethnographic study conducted with the Ravensbourne Morris Men between 2003-2006.**

Chapter 2: 0.00:06 Performance of the dance *The Rose Tree* (Bampton tradition)

Chapter 3: 0.02:53 Teaching a Cotswold Morris stick striking dance

Chapter 4: 0.07:32 Performance of a solo Morris dance

Chapter 5: 0.09:05 Teaching a Cotswold Morris stick striking sequence

Chapter 6: 0.09:39 Teaching a rapper sword dance

Chapter 7: 0.10:36 The teaching and performance of the dance *Mr and Mrs Mickey Mouse* (Choreographed by the Ravensbourne Morris men)

### **Chapter 8: 0.13:33 Excerpts from a performance by the Ravensbourne Morris Men on 26 December 2003 in Keston, Kent.**

Chapter 9: 0.13:41 Performance of the dance *Old Woman Tossed Up* (Field Town tradition)

Chapter 10: 0.17:05 Performance of the dance *The Postman's Knock* (Adderbury tradition)

Chapter 11: 0.20:28 Performance of the *Upton-Upon-Severn stick dance* (Upton-upon-Severn tradition)

### **Chapter 12: 0.23:58 Excerpts from the Cotswold Morris dance workshops and rehearsal sessions**

Chapter 13: 0.25:21 Rehearsal of *Still Life at the Folk Café*

**Chapter 14: 0.28:20 The performance of *Still Life at the Folk Café*. 18 May 2006. Laban Studio Theatre.**

Chapter 15: 0.28:26 Preparatory dance

Chapter 16: 0.33:09 *Still Life at the Folk Café*

Chapter 17: 0.36:27 Composite dance

**Chapter 18: 0.38:37 Excerpts from the training workshop conducted with my dancers and the Ravensbourne Morris Men. September 2006.**

Chapter 19: 0.39:01 Teaching the galley

Chapter 20: 0.39:34 Teaching the caper

Chapter 21: 0.40:08 Teaching the dance *Old Woman Tossed Up* (Field Town tradition)

Chapter 22: 0.41:25 Teaching the hey

Chapter 23: 0.42:26 Teaching the dance *Bean Setting* (Headington tradition)

Chapter 24: 0.44:16 Teaching the dance *The Shepherd's Hey* (Adderbury tradition)

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