

80 YEARS OF MORRIS

in the LIVERPOOL area

**as told through the
personal recollections of**



JIM JONES - MORRIS DANCER

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Mention the Mersey Morris Men to anyone involved in English traditional ritual dance and they are likely to retort, “Ah yes, that’s Jim Jones’s lot, isn’t it!”

In fact, Jim’s involvement in the morris goes back further than the Mersey Morris Men themselves, to the days back in the 1940’s when a group of young men involved in the folk dancing scene in Liverpool, re-formed the Liverpool Morris side that had existed prior to, and no doubt ceased due to, World War Two.

Now in his eighties, Jim is as much dedicated to the morris as ever; on the occasions when he can get a lift to morris practice or to a pub session or booking, he is usually to be found nowadays with his drum, leading the rest of the musicians in a steady rhythm, but still occasionally dons the bell pads in one of his favourite handkerchief dances or even shows off his nimble footwork in a solo jig!

One always assumes that the likes of Jim ‘has always been at it’ although most of us have no idea of the details. It was only when one of the younger members of Mersey innocently asked if Cecil Sharp had ever collected anything from Jim, that I decided it was about time that Jim was given a thorough grilling about his morris career. And so, armed with tape recorder and microphone, together with a list of questions from inquisitive members of Mersey Morris Men, I made my way to Jim’s house in Aigburth, Liverpool, where we spent a happy afternoon chatting into the microphone and drinking copious quantities of tea provided by his lovely wife, Ruth.

I am ashamed to say that this interview took place on 10th August 2000 and it has taken me the best part of eight years to finally put it into print, spurred on by the fact that Mersey Morris Men are to host the 315th Meeting of the Morris Ring in July 2008. Not only does this particular year happen to be massively important to the city of Liverpool as it celebrates being the European Capital of Culture, it also marks eighty years (at least) that Merseyside has been the home of an all-male Cotswold morris side through the existence of the Liverpool Morris Men and their successors. It therefore seems fitting that, as the Ring Meeting celebrates the 80th anniversary of Liverpool Morris Men, the most influential and longest serving morris dancer from this part of the world, shares his memories, thoughts and views concerning the history of the Morris in and around Liverpool. Jim is the first to admit that the memory can let you down, especially in later years, so this account does not set out to be totally accurate to the last detail. Some further information from John Stapledon and Bernard Cliffe has been ‘worked’ into the script and I am grateful to them.

I personally owe a great deal of gratitude to Jim. He, together with Miss Ethyl Anderson, shaped my own skills and love of the morris from the tender age of fourteen when I first became involved. Since 1983, taking over the mantle from Jim, I have endeavoured to pass those skills on to many others, in my role as Foreman of Mersey Morris Men.

Richard Stapledon.
June 2008

RICHARD (RS) Right Jim, can we start this off by you telling me when you first saw morris dancers and how old you were at the time?

JIM (JJ) I was about 24 and the first time I saw an actual morris side performing was at a festival in Preston. We were taking part as country dancers arranged by EFDS (English Folk Dance Society). They used to hold it once a year in Preston and they brought a made up morris side from EFDS headquarters. They included a chap who had first started to teach us. They danced 'Lads a Bunchum' and one of them made a mistake, going up with his stick instead of down and I remember a chap sitting with us, saying he was a ***** fool. We had already started to learn steps and that sort of thing, taught to us by this chap, but that was the first time I actually saw a side perform.

RS From what you describe, it sounds like this was a hand picked collection of individuals from various morris sides, brought together to perform under the banner of EFDS.

JJ Yes, and this particular chap – his name was Hoole and I think his Christian name was Fred but I'm not sure – was already living in Liverpool and had started to teach us some steps. He was one of the Bedford Morris Men. He had come to Kirby to train to be a teacher, as there was a Teacher Training College there in those days. He got in touch with Ethyl Anderson at the EFDS office to ask if there was any morris in the district and she saw this as an opportunity. She asked him if he would like to do some teaching and help to re-form a morris side and he agreed. At that time, we were meeting as a group doing country dancing at Blackburne House. I used to go straight from work as we used to meet quite early at about half past six. So what we decided then, Ethyl fixed it up, we went to the meeting and half way through, the men, there were half a dozen or so of us, we went from Blackburne House down to the Liverpool Institute, which was only across the road. This chap Hoole came with us and he'd then demonstrate the first morris steps and start to teach them to us. We weren't dancing as a side as such, just learning the basic steps, then going on to learn one or two actual dances. But that was the start of it.

RS So this would be about when?

JJ 1947 I think.

RS I take it from what you have just said then Jim, that Liverpool Morris Men did not exist at this time, but do you know roughly when the original Liverpool side started and were dancing?

JJ I know from an old chap that was with Stafford M.M. that he had danced with Liverpool M.M. in the late 1920s so there had been a side going since at least about 1928. I know that they were still going in the thirties and that they were at the Ring Meeting at Grasmere in 1936 where they got their Staff of Office. In fact, Liverpool were present at the Inaugural meeting at Cecil Sharp House in 1934.

RS So presumably the original Liverpool Morris Men must have finished due to the war?

JJ That's right. I'm sure they must have finished because of war.

- RS And then I presume nothing else happened until your involvement as you described earlier.
- JJ That's right.
- RS So was there anyone around who knew about the original Liverpool Morris Men? I mean there is a Staff-of-Office, so who had all the things like that?
- JJ I've no idea, I don't think so. The EFDSS might have had some records.
- RS It might even have been Ethyl Anderson?
- JJ Yes, because our original Staff was found some time later. It was found in the EFDSS office when they closed the office down. That's how we came to acquire it.
- RS Can you remember your first experiences of actually starting to dance in public - this group of men from the country dance class that you had been involved with - how did it come about that you started to dance for real?
- JJ We started once we got a couple of dances together, just going along to the odd Country Dance groups but the one I remember particularly was St. Helens. St. Helens had decided to form a morris side. On one occasion, they had a dance over in St. Helens and we were asked by Ethyl Anderson to go along and do a couple of morris dances to show them what it was about. We had no gear as such. I remember we all wore grey flannels, white shirts, I don't remember if we had bells but I think we did. So we went along and the music was recorded – two 78 records - the turn table was a bit too fast; I remember we danced 'Rodney' at terrific speed and with its cross backs, we greatly impressed the audience and the St Helens men, who had all just started, were all there in their breeches, bells, baldricks and their caps with St. Helens on, but they couldn't dance!
- RS So they had produced their kit without being able to dance?
- JJ That's right, and we did two dances to show them in fact, what a morris dance was.
- RS So the person who was responsible initially for teaching you the rudiments of it, was this chap called Hoole?
- JJ Yes I think it was Fred.
- RS You mentioned Ethyl Anderson. I know from my own experience that she was an excellent morris dancer herself.
- JJ Oh yes, she was very proficient but a little bit stiff. She was like a lot of the women who did country dancing and then tried the morris; they were not relaxed enough.
- RS I'm interested about you saying that you did not really have any kit at this stage when you taught the St. Helens Men, so how did the kit eventually come about and do you know if it was the same kit design that was previously used by the original team?

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JJ No it wasn't. We were invited, and again this was through Ethyl, to dance at the International Eisteddfod in Llangollen. This was in 1951, I think. We went as a side but we were only actually proficient in two dances, Lads a Bunchum and Bledington Leapfrog.

RS So you had one hankie dance and one stick dance?

JJ Yes, we had done others but these were the only ones that we could show. A couple of times we danced at the Liverpool Show with only two dances. When we went to the Eisteddfod, Ethyl borrowed kit from the EFDS in London - from Cecil Sharp House. She got breeches, stockings and hats. We already had our baldricks. We had those made somewhere.

RS Just describe the baldricks can you?

JJ It was just the Liver Bird and a rosette, which was the centrepiece on blue baldricks; the Liver Bird was surrounded by the rosette, which had some red and some yellow.



Richard Stapledon and Jim Jones showing both Mersey and Liverpool baldricks at the Golden Jubilee of The Morris Ring in 1984.

RS Anything on the back?

JJ No, nothing.

RS So this kit would have been decided upon by this group of people? It didn't have any connection with the original pre war team?

JJ No.

RS Do you have any knowledge of what the original team would have worn?

JJ Yes, but just from the two photos you have, both from the Liverpool Daily Post. They show them in whites and baldricks but the colour and detail of the baldricks are unknown.



Photo taken from The Liverpool Daily Post, 26.10.1929

The caption read: 'Members of the Liverpool and District Folk Dance Society in a Morris dance, 'Blue-eyed Stranger', an item in last night's festival at St. George's Hall, Liverpool.'

The accompanying article states that the event was organised by the EFDS and 1200 people were expected to take part over two days. This, the first day, was for 'children and young people up to 20 or so'. There were 150 entries into various classes and the adjudicator was Miss Bower.

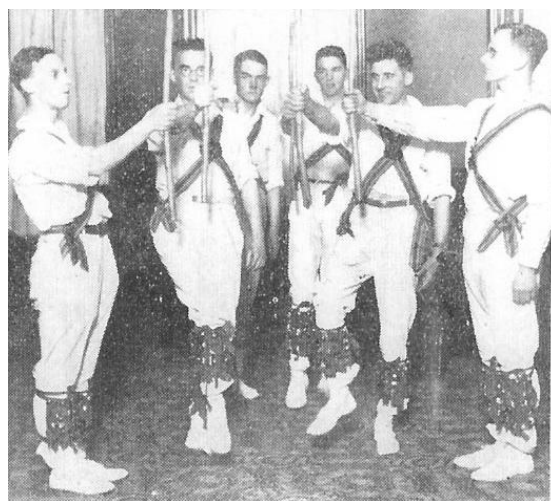


Photo taken from The Liverpool Daily Post, 27.10.1930

The caption read: 'Members of the Liverpool Branch of the Old English Folk Dancing Society in the dance which they gave at the Birkenhead Town Hall on Saturday.'

The accompanying article states that the event was a folk-dance tea arranged by the EFDS in conjunction with Birkenhead Charities' Ladies Committee. The programme included country dancing, and men's and women's morris dancing. It was hoped that the venture would stimulate interest in folk dancing in Birkenhead and make the town a centre of this movement in Cheshire and North Wales.

- RS Presumably this would have been the case with nearly all morris teams in those days, the war would have put an end to a lot of sides.
- JJ Of course the men who danced go away to war and a lot of them will not have come back, and I think that was probably the case with the Liverpool side.
- RS You told us about this chap Hoole who perhaps was the first person to teach you the initial steps etc. but can you tell us about other people who were responsible for teaching you in the early days?
- JJ Well, when we became more established, we started to meet as morris men separately from the country dancers. Ethyl Anderson arranged it and we were booked in as part of a night school course and so we were able to meet at Highfield School in Broadgreen. We arranged to meet there one evening, I think it was a Thursday, and we would go along there as morris men and practice just morris. It was arranged that we got it free because it was a night school.
- RS And who would be teaching at this night school? Still Fred Hoole?
- JJ No, the main teacher was Millie English.
- RS Tell us about her.
- JJ She was a member of the Liverpool group of country dancers - an excellent morris dancer. Where she had learnt her morris, I don't know, but really she was very, very good and she used to take us and teach us.
- RS What sort of age would she have been at the time?
- JJ I would have thought Millie was 40, 50 or something. She was very sprightly. I was very saddened to read about four or five years ago that she had died. She had retired to Grasmere. She must have been about 90 when she died.
It was interesting at the night school that we were not allowed to use our own musician who was usually Joy Larsen. Because it was a night school, the corporation insisted that they use their own musician.
- RS Good heavens!
- Jim She was a pianist, I think called Nellie Williams, who of course had never played any of this before; she was very good and in fact she got so keen on the morris tunes and the country dance that in actual fact she became one of the founder members of the Poachers Band.
- RS So how long would this have been for, that she was playing for you at this night school?
- JJ She did two whole terms I think.
- RS Tell me about your 'proper' musician.

JJ It was Joy Larsen and sometimes her husband, Henry, who were the first musicians; they were both fiddle players. Although they were not allowed to play for us at the class, Joy played for us when we danced at the Llangollen International Eisteddfod. Pathé News made a recording of it and they remarked on the quality of her playing.



*Two photos showing the revived Liverpool Morris Men with their musician, Joy Larsen.
The venue was Halewood and the date is thought to be 1953.*



L to R - Harry Brook, Andy McMillan, Bob Dutton, Bernard Cliffe, Jim Jones, Roger Bonsall

RS Very good.

JJ Henry went out with us occasionally. For example when we danced at the Liverpool Show, Henry came because they thought that a man playing was better than a woman.

RS So you were being taught by Millie English. What happened after that?

JJ Well, Ethyl Anderson of course played a large part as well. We also had a chap - don't know

where he'd come from, but he became our first Squire. Whether he had been with the original Liverpool side, I don't know. He was called Bill Rice.

RS So he was the first squire of the post war team?

JJ Yes, but he never actually danced with the side.

RS That sounds strange, how come?

JJ He used to come to all the practices but when we danced out, he was not a young man and he never actually danced with us. We were actually led by a chap called Jim Howard. I first met him when I went to my first country dance in Liverpool. Jim was on the door collecting the money. He was involved in the country dancing but he had danced morris before. He was very good.

RS So it may well be that he was in the pre war Liverpool Side?

JJ I don't know, but if he was, he would only have been a boy because he was in his late twenties or early thirties when I first met him.

RS Can you remember names of any of the other dancers involved in those days?

JJ I remember Jim Howard as I said, and then there was John Campbell, Bob Dutton, Andy McMillan, Jack Davenport and Bernard Cliffe. (Others mentioned by Bernard Cliffe include Roger Bonsall, Jack Harrison, Harry Brooke, Ernie Winter and Fred Kirkbride who had danced with Cambridge MM before the war.) They would all have been people in the same situation as me; they were in the country dancing first and then got involved with the morris after that.

RS You told me earlier on that the first two dances that your team became proficient at were Bledington Leapfrog and Lads a Bunchum but what was the very first dance that this chap Hoole taught you? Can you remember?



Liverpool Morris Men, probably 1953. Jim Jones, far right.

- JJ Yes, it was Headington Blue Eyed Stranger, the one with the continuous stepping. It's quite easy. That was the first one I remember.
- RS I don't think I would regard it as a particularly easy dance!
- JJ But it's straightforward.
- RS I wouldn't dream of teaching that as a first dance to novices!
- JJ The advantage is it kept your stepping going, which was the thing that we needed to perfect.
- RS So when the side got going a bit, were there any other dances in the repertoire that you can remember?
- JJ We did Bean Setting and Rodney.
- RS So it sounds like quite a lot from the Headington tradition.
- JJ Yes, Headington and some Bledington with one or two Fieldtown dances.
- RS OK, I gather that in country dancing, there was an exam system in order to gain certificates of proficiency, but did they have anything similar for the Morris?
- JJ Included in the exams that you mention, there was an intermediate and an advanced level for which you had to perform a country dance, some 'running set' and some morris. You normally had to dance a jig. I got the intermediate level. I fully intended taking the advanced level later on but then I got properly involved in the morris and I decided that I didn't really need exams as it was too much like school and I was in it for fun, not to take exams.
- RS Can you remember which jig you had to do for the intermediate exam?
- JJ Yes, it was a Headington jig, Jockey to the Fair.
- RS And who would have been judging you?
- JJ Well Ethyl Anderson was one, and I think a couple of others from the EFDS headquarters at Cecil Sharp House.
- RS Very good. Is there anything else that you want to tell us about the Liverpool Morris Men because of course we have to move on from there. Summing it up, you say they were reformed around 1950 I think you said.
- JJ Yes, or even earlier, about 1947.
- RS Well in the meantime of course, on the other side of the Mersey, we had the Wirral Morris Men who had also started in the early 50s.
- JJ Yes, I would think around then.

R Can you tell us about any of your first recollections of them? Were they completely separate from the Liverpool side?

JJ They were a separate side but we got to know them. Bert Eccles was one of them. Their bagman then was a chap called Dick Rogers. I remember their squire was called Bill Doe and he was a contemporary of Nibs Matthews (Squire of the Morris Ring, 1960 – 1962). The two of them went to school together where they both learnt their morris from Beryl Frere of the EFDS. Bill was employed at the navigational radar station that was based down by the marshes at Burton (Wirral). He left the area in 1958.

RS These chaps in the Wirral side, will they have been country dancers as well?

JJ I think so, and possibly Bill Doe had got them together as a morris side, but Dick Rogers was very friendly with Stafford MM and his brother-in-law was a member of Stafford and I think that possibly had something to do with the formation of Wirral which I think was in about 1953. But the earliest I can remember is being asked if I would like to join them, as they wanted to do a tour and didn't have enough men so a couple of us went across; I think possibly Bernard Cliffe might have been the other one.



Representing Neston Folk Dance Group but wearing Wirral Morris Men's kit, Bill Doe dances the Bacca Pipes, accompanied by Graham Jones on fiddle and joined by Dick Rogers. Taken in 1954.

RS So intermingling between the two sides started to happen?

JJ Yes, and as the Liverpool side declined, so we got more involved with Wirral.

RS Was there any rivalry between the sides?

JJ No, none at all.

RS Can you remember what kit the Wirral team wore?

JJ They wore white trousers with a black waistcoat that had the Wirral Horn on the back.

Apparently, they had to ask permission from the Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire to use the horn on their waistcoats.

RS You were telling me that the numbers eventually started to decline in the Liverpool side and that there had been a lot of swapping over between the two sides. How did the eventual amalgamation take place?

JJ I'm not sure but I think Dick Rogers had a lot to do with it. Our Liverpool bagman at the time was Ernie Winter. We no longer had the use of the school for practising and I'm afraid he just let it go.

RS So really you weren't even having regular practice nights?

JJ No. We went for a while without any practices and in fact, Ernie Winter arrived on my doorstep one day demanding the kit. Apparently he'd got half a dozen lads from his school and he wanted the Liverpool colours to get them dancing for something and he wanted to borrow bells and the kit, but I said I'm not giving you the kit; this belongs to the Liverpool men.

RS Were you in charge of all the kit?

JJ Yes, I had all the kit but I said we're the Liverpool men, you're the Bagman, you should get the men together. Anyway, that was it. I had the kit and I kept it.

RS So you sent him off with a flea in his ear?

JJ Yes, but they did dance at Rock Ferry somewhere, at a country dance meeting of some sort.

RS So from the sounds of it, the Liverpool men were more or less inactive.

JJ They practised certainly up until the mid 50s when we were going quite strong and getting about, but then they stopped meeting; they were not practising regularly and there was nothing being arranged and nobody kept in touch, so what more or less happened was that some of the keener ones started doing odd things with the Wirral men who were also struggling for numbers, and that's how the amalgamation finally came around. I can't remember who suggested we officially get together but we had enough there to form a side so we decided the best thing to do was to merge and meet together and dance, and that's how Mersey Morris Men started.

RS How did you come to decisions about what the kit was going to be?

JJ Well we had Liverpool colours, which were just six sets of baldricks so to start with, we used those. If there weren't enough to go round, and if I was leading the side, I would wear my fancy waistcoat which I had made for when I went to dance at the Albert Hall. I danced in that as number one and let the others have the baldricks.

RS So really, they were dancing in Liverpool kit to start with. Breeches as well?



Probably taken in the mid 1950s, this is the only photo that has been unearthed, officially showing Wirral Morris Men, here shown with some Liverpool men (J. Jones, B. Cliffe, A. McMillan). The musician is probably Mrs. Fearon who played for Wirral in their early days. Three of the Wirral men are probably Fred Johnson, Dick Rogers and Bill Doe.

- JJ No. We wore whites like Wirral had used.
- RS I suppose in that way, no one lost face did they?
- JJ It never occurred to us really; after all, the Liverpool breeches were borrowed anyway. Mind you, we kept them; they never went back. Prior to this, the Liverpool side were strong and thriving. Besides the morris, they also did North Skelton long sword. I remember that we once danced in Liverpool town hall for the visit of some civic dignitaries from Germany. When I put up the sword lock, it went right through a priceless chandelier.
- RS Can you remember any other names from the Wirral side prior to you amalgamating? You've already mentioned Bert Eccles, Bill Doe and Dick Rogers.
- JJ There was Graham Jones and Fred Johnson and at a later stage, Charlie Williams would have started, but like us, they would not have had many.
- RS So what year would this have been when the two sides officially amalgamated?
- JJ According to the club's Squire's Tankard, it was 1959. At first, I remember how difficult it was with musicians. Wirral had had a lady in the early days called Mrs Fearon who used to play the fiddle. She was quite elderly.
- RS Would this have been before my father, John Stapledon, played for them?
- JJ Yes. I gather he actually joined as a dancer. He was recruited when Wirral men used to offer

their services to give performances at local folk dances. Your dad saw them at one of these and decided to join. He soon became proficient on the concertina and together with Bill McLean on fiddle, they were the main musicians by the early 1960s.



*Mersey Morris Men dancing on the promenade in Parkgate on 17.5.1964
Mostyn House School, venue for the 315th meeting of the Morris Ring, is in the background.
Dancers L to R are: Peter Quincey (?), John Battle, Jim Jones, Graham Jones, Charlie Williams and
Bert Eccles. Musicians are Bill McLean (fiddle) and John Stapledon (hidden; concertina)*

But before that, a lady called Claire Harvey became Wirral's main musician. She was an accordion player and I think her husband Martin, was another recruited dancer. There was also someone else who played an accordion. His name was Duncan but we called him Drunken Duncan because he was always tight. I can't remember if he played for Liverpool or Wirral, mind you.

- RS In these early days of Mersey Morris Men, the early 60's, who were the first officers of the side?
- JJ The first Bagman of Mersey was Bert Eccles. I think the original Wirral bagman was Dick Rogers.
- RS I gather the first squire was Ken Winter. Can you tell me about him?
- JJ He moved to the area from somewhere, I've no idea where, but he was a proficient dancer.
- RS So did he have a big influence on the side?
- JJ Oh yes, he knew the morris; he knew the traditions, the set up and that sort of thing. He got us organised by going out and dancing as a side. He left the area in about 1963 but is still very active as a member of Forest of Dean MM. (RS – *During a Forest of Dean weekend of dance in June 2008, Ken Winter performed a dance with Mersey for the first time in 45 years, wearing his original baldricks and trademark yellow waistcoat. This was just one*

week after a chance meeting with Bernard Cliffe who was in the audience at a Mersey booking in Sefton and who also came in and danced a dance with us – probably his first morris dance in over 40 years!)



Mersey Morris Men in 1961

L to R - Colin Furness, unknown, Bert Eccles, Dick Rogers, Ken Winter, unknown, Jim Jones, John Stapledon

- RS It sounds like Ken Winter had come from the big wide world of Morris and you lot in the Northwest were just doing your own thing without any communication with others.
- JJ Yes, I think he opened it up; under his reign we went to our first ring meeting in 1959 at Ludlow, but I don't think we were 'officially' Mersey at that stage. I think we were listed loosely as 'Merseyside'.
- RS You were telling me that originally Mersey danced in Liverpool's baldricks and Wirral's white trousers. How, eventually, did the current kit come about?
- JJ One of the men was acquainted with a lady who was a teacher of handicapped people and we were going to a ring meeting at Newcastle so she got her 'patients' to make the baldricks with the blue and yellow and the badge with the Liver bird and Wirral horn. So we used them for the first time at the Newcastle ring.
- RS So presumably you must have decided between you on the colours and design.
- JJ We didn't. We weren't asked as I remember; the kit just appeared.
- RS Oh right! So in those days they didn't have AGMs where they spoke for about 5 hours before any decision was made?
- JJ We didn't have anything. We had no constitution or anything like that. When we elected a squire, well he was squire until he either left or decided to pack up and then we would get someone else.

RS Would there have been a foreman?

JJ No, the squire did all the teaching.

RS So in fact, until I became foreman in 1983, you had been squire and foreman from 1963 until 1977 and carried on 'unofficially' as foreman until 1983?

JJ Yes, that's right.

RS Can you remember anything about bookings in the early days of MMM? Were there any particularly special events that you did?

JJ Well as I said, Ludlow was our first ring meeting. We danced mainly on the Wirral, but only did fetes and such things.

RS Did you meet regularly for practising purposes?

JJ We tried to meet once a week but our difficulty was we didn't have a regular place. I gather the Wirral men had used a back room at the Neston Civic Hall for a while. Anyway, Mersey then got the use of a pub in Birkenhead and we practised there for a while until we got thrown out. Then someone arranged for us to use a hall at the YWCA in Birkenhead, and of course, this was our home for many years. The road was The Woodlands and it gave its name to the dance that you made up and the accompanying tune that your dad composed for it.

RS Have you got any recollection about the changing from white trousers into black breeches?



Mersey Morris Men dancing at an EFDSS spring festival in 1966.

JJ Well yes, we were to go to a ring meeting at Stratford, hosted by Shakespeare Morris Men and we talked about getting breeches. The thing with the whites was that they were never all the same white and they had difficulty keeping the bells up. Somebody said we looked like a load of out-of-work painters. Liverpool of course had danced in breeches and the Liverpool men that had come through to join Mersey were used to them. We thought they looked

smarter and were easier to dance in. Also, we thought that the footwork was shown off better; so we got breeches in time for the ring meeting down at Stratford.

RS Is that still your preference?

JJ I think so, I still think they look smarter. I know that there's a case for the whites but I have to say for dancing, I prefer to dance in breeches; for one thing, as I say, you never had the feeling that the bells were coming off.

RS Well our present Bagman (Tony Foard at time of interview) will be very interested to hear your comments because I know he is all for us wearing whites.

JJ I know that he's agitating for us to go back to the painter's trousers!

RS You were telling me before about the first ring meeting that Mersey went to at Ludlow. Now Wirral hadn't been members of the ring I don't think, had they?

JJ No.

RS So Liverpool, the pre-war team, had been, and then eventually Mersey presumably applied for membership?

JJ We applied when I was squire, I think it was 1966, and we received our staff at the Leicester Ring Meeting, which incidentally is where we got the nickname of 'The Mersey Milkmaids'. We had a chap dancing with us who was a Dutchman called Werner. We were at a village near Leicester with a crowd of other teams we had been on tour with, and we had just got a round of drinks in when Werner stopped the milk float that was coming through the village and proceeded to drink a full pint of milk in the middle of the street in front of all the assembled morris sides!

RS Do any other Ring meetings stand out in your memory?

JJ Well we've been to loads over the years but I remember us going to London and it absolutely poured down all day.

RS I remember that, yes.

JJ And you came to me and showed me your shoes which were split right down the sides so your feet were soaking wet! It poured so much, we spent most of the day in the pub. Eventually, when it briefly stopped raining, we went and danced in Trafalgar Square. It was like dancing on a duck pond because the water was lying across the whole area.

RS Do you remember any funny incidents at ring meetings?

JJ Well, at Sheffield we were staying in student accommodation in individual rooms and they had two lifts which stopped at alternate floors. Some of the men, you were probably involved, completely emptied John Battle's room, all the furniture, bed and all. They took it

all down a floor, then put it all in the lift, and of course John couldn't find it for ages because it was the alternate lift!



London Ring Meeting; Jim Jones dancing in the 'duck pond' known as Trafalgar Square. Richard Stapledon is standing behind him. The other two dancers are David Walker and Charlie Williams. Musician is John Stapledon.

- RS One of the features of Ring meetings is the performing of solo show dances. Have you got any recollections of show dances that Mersey have chosen to do over the years?
- JJ In earlier days, we didn't often do that. The only sides to perform solo were the host sides and possibly one or two sides who had a particularly good reputation. I do remember at a later meeting at Ludlow where we were asked to dance; we did Bledington Trunkles and it was a marvellous show. We were highly complimented by the Squire of the Ring. The other one I remember was at a Bristol meeting. We were dancing at Bath in front of the abbey and Father Kenneth Loveless, who was Squire of the Ring at the time, came to watch. We danced our own dance, The Woodlands, and Kenneth was so smitten with it that I remember him saying, "Please do that dance as your show dance," which we did.
- RS While we're talking about Ring meetings, we should of course mention the famous one in Chester in 1976 as it was hosted by us. (the only time Mersey have acted as hosts until the Liverpool meeting in 2008)
- JJ That's when I was squire and you were Bagman for the Meeting. I think that was one of the best meetings that I have ever attended.
- RS Ah, but we're biased aren't we?
- JJ True! We were accommodated in Chester College, which was excellent, and of course in those days, we regarded Chester as our main dance venue as very few other sides

visited there and Chester Morris Men were only just starting around that time.

RS Do you have any particularly fond memories of that weekend?

JJ Yes, I remember the wonderful sermon given by Father Ken in the church service at St. Peter's. We danced Signposts (Shepherds' Hey, Fieldtown) in the church and I nearly fell over the carpet because the space was very restricted, but many in the congregation said the hairs stood up on the backs of their necks when we did that dance.

RS After the Service, we were supposed to walk down to The Groves on the river front for our massed display, as the police had refused us permission to process due to another event taking place. Unfortunately, the Ring Squire ignored my instruction and organised the men to process. Do you remember that?

JJ Yes. We were in trouble with the police on the following Monday and we were left having to eat humble pie. That was a great shame and the only black mark on the weekend.

RS Are there any other Sides or individuals that you have built up particular friendships with over the years?

JJ Well, at our first Ring Meeting at Ludlow, we made the acquaintance of Stafford; Dick Rogers was very friendly with Stafford and was an honorary member. His brother-in-law, Peter Stephens, was a Stafford man and through Dick's connection, we got very friendly with Stafford. I remember we all lodged together in the Friary Hall in Ludlow and someone got us all up in the middle of the night and we all danced William and Nancy in our bare feet! From that connection, we then got to know Uttoxeter and I have personally made many friends from there; I still attend their annual feasts most years.

RS Have you noticed any particular changes in the way that morris is presented and performed nowadays, compared to when you were starting off?

JJ Well of course some sides have always had very good standards but I think in the days when I first started, it was very much more 'come day go day'. It seems to me that the sides have got more perfectionist or technical in recent years, but I've also noticed too that on tours in the old days, we went to dance. Very often these days, when you go out on tour, the dancing seems to take second place to having a pub-crawl!

RS I've been asked to ask you your opinion on women dancing morris, and what influences have women had on your morris career. I think you have covered some of that before, when you were telling us about Millie English.

JJ Millie English and Ethyl Anderson started us off and it was Millie English who taught me. I remember in the early days of Mersey that we went to put on a show at a folk dance, and Millie, who made a speech at the end, remarked favourably on our dancing and style, which of course was a compliment to me as I had done all the teaching. In my reply, I told her she should recognise the style because it was she who had taught me!
I have to say though, that I don't like to see girls dancing Cotswold, either in all-girl sides or in mixed sides, although as I say, I have known some excellent lady dancers; but I do like to

see them dancing North West morris like our Mockbeggar Ladies do. I just don't like to see them imitating men in our style of morris.

RS Would the likes of Millie English and Ethyl Anderson have danced in public?

JJ No, no. They would have the same opinion as me, even though they could dance it better than most of us!

RS What about female musicians?

JJ I personally don't have any problem with that at all. As I've said, both Liverpool and Wirral had female musicians back in the 50s. Joy Larsen was a marvellous musician.

RS Do you have any favourite dances?

JJ It's hard to say really. I like Mersey dancing Lass of Richmond Hill. Its a lovely dance; and of course I have always liked to dance Webley (Bampton).



Jim Jones dances 'Webley' in the Palm House, Sefton in 2005.

RS What about stick dances as opposed to handkerchief dances?

JJ I like the handkerchief dances best because you can give expression with the hankies. I find that sometimes sticks can become a bit stilted in a way. Douglas Kennedy, who was the adjudicator when we (Liverpool) danced at the Llangollen Eisteddfod in about 1951, described our stick dance as 'too much stamp and shout'. He pulled us to pieces. Needless to say, we didn't win!

RS Have you ever had any particularly embarrassing experiences while doing morris?

JJ Liverpool once danced in St George's Hall, in the main hall where they have all the balls and dances. The sprung floor was highly polished and as we proceeded to dance in front of a full hall, we did 'foot up', turned and went to dance 'foot down' when I lost my footing and ended sliding along the floor on my backside for what seemed like a mile!



Jim Jones dances a jig in about 1967.

RS One of the final questions I'd like to ask you: could you try to sum up what the morris has given to you in your life?

JJ Obviously it's given me friendship, also a life-long interest and great enjoyment in the dancing, but also it's given me a great sense of tradition, a sense of belonging to something which has existed for umpteen years, and being part of that has been a great privilege.



Mersey Morris Men in 1977, Jim Jones far right.

RS Have you given anything back in turn?

JJ I have perhaps helped to bring some people into the morris, to teach them what it was all about and to get them dancing, and I think if you do that, it's something to be proud of.

RS Now you're not able to dance so much, you've been joining the musicians by playing the tabor, so you obviously enjoy the music too. Do you have any favourite tunes?

JJ I think perhaps my favourites are Fieldtown Processional and William and Nancy, which is one of the first dances I learnt.



Jim Jones, Nev Moulden and Richard Stapledon, playing for Mersey in Gibraltar, 2005.

RS OK, so if we were doing Desert Island Discs, we'd let you have those tunes and we'll throw in a pair of hankies and your tabor.

JJ Oh thank you very much; no bells?

RS Oh yes, we'll let you take your bells.

JJ They'll help to frighten the animals away!

RS Thank you for telling us your memories of the morris, Jim. It's been fascinating.

JJ Thank you.



Mersey Morris Men bring us up to date and draw things to a close with Bonny Green Garters in June 2008.

