

Reply to Colin Andrew's Response

I find there is much I agree with in what Colin is saying but must remark that in hurrying to dismiss my thoughts with a label - "heart-felt lament for the days of yore" - he sadly fails to give sufficient depth of thought to all my analysis and so is too keen to reach conclusions on some of the complicated and contentious issues. I commend a more careful reading of what I have said in order to see we agree on more than we disagree about. I am advocating finding a way forward, not looking back!

I am certainly not advocating a narrow interpretation of Morris and pointed out that The Ring has encouraged teams to develop their own diversity of styles since its creation. As to the comparison with EFDSS and its failing to embrace changes, I am actually arguing that we should be facing up to those kinds of changes after years of not adequately doing so! I have a suspicion Colin is defending the distortion of traditional presentation on grounds of the value of invention and experimentation. Fair enough as a thought to pursue but it is surely also fair to point out what a low level of tat is presently coming out of that process! We all get labeled as the Morris, the good the bad and the ugly!

Anyone who has seen my team dance will know we have a passion for high standards, and yet still have naturally over many years included elements of change and innovation in our Morris. We do argue strongly that it is an art form, in the same way as all traditional folklore and folk music throughout the world is recognized as such. Also although we find it is greatly enjoyable to do, its importance as part of our heritage is a vital ingredient in our performance. Colin misses the important element in the whole question of change, innovation and evolution. The Morris certainly has, and does change, but it is a process that all true artistry undergoes: each generation of dancers adding their skills and own artistic contribution to the tradition handed down to them, ensuring continuity by handing it on to future generations. I can recall discussions between Arnold Woodley and Son Townsend of Bampton about the changes there. Sonny started his dancing in 1924 and Arnold during the mid 1930's and so sometimes at practices small disagreements arose from time to time of a minor nature. Memories were relied upon to continue the dances unchanged and what changes came about were made unconsciously when forgetfulness sometimes happened. Sometimes after agreements were reached, the consensus was undone when some very old dancer from times past walked through the yard and made another comment! In traditional teams change is unconscious and I am convinced that it was never progressed for its own sake. The quality of the dancing was always of prime consideration and individual performance scrutinized for faults and weaknesses.

Colin will therefore appreciate perhaps why I am certainly very dismissive of is the experimentation that produces teams dancing rubbish of the kind being increasingly seen on our streets. Conversations with their members often reveals their performance material has been 'assembled' with none or very little actual knowledge of the Morris tradition involved and by that I mean the steps done, the dance movements, choruses, and the music used. Costume, the individual appearance of each member, how many musicians can they get into their band and the size of their banner are the only issues for them! Colin does make a good point about it perhaps being a popular entry for young people into Morris, but he needs to address my concerns over distortion and low standards of performance and offer some thoughts up as to how the suggested progress to Cotswold and other traditional dance forms (or even decent standards of performance of that genre) can be brought about in real terms.

I am pleased however, that Colin has troubled to take part in thinking about the way forward and I hope he doesn't find too much of this comment has barbs!

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