



Newsletter - December 2015

Welcome to Issue 11 of the Rose & Castle Morris Newsletter. We are now coming to the end of a mixed year of highs and lows, the biggest high being a very successful Week-end of Dance in our new venue at Towcester Rugby Club. Unfortunately it is surpassed by our biggest low which is the passing of John Thomas, the only founding member who was still with the side. This newsletter deals with this loss as well as news of our new recruit.

At this stage we only have one significant event in the calendar so far and that is our regular dance-out outside The Boat Inn in Stoke Bruerne at noon on New Year's Day to herald in a new and hopefully happier year.

FAREWELL TO A FOUNDER OF OUR SIDE
It is with the greatest regret that Rose and Castle Morris Men announce the death of their longest-serving active member, John Thomas, who passed away following a stroke on October 27th at the far too early age of 69.

“JT” as he was widely known in Morris circles, was a founder member of Rose and Castle when it was set up in 1977, before which he danced with the – now sadly defunct – Akeley Morris Men. From then until his first serious illness in 2000 JT was a stalwart dancer with our Side, rarely missing a dance out, a week-end away, or a Practice. He was also an accomplished melodeon player, who contributed a number of our favourite dance tunes.



“JT dancing with R&C at Saddleworth in 1999”

Although Rose and Castle was his main focus, John was also active with a number of other local sides, notably Redbornstoke Morris and, in his latter years as a musician, Old Mother Redcaps.

JT was an affable and jovial social companion, whose knowledge of Morris and folk music was at least matched by his expert appreciation of a decent pint of real ale and a good traditional pub. On Morris outings around the country he could be relied upon to know the best pub in the neighbourhood and where to get a good pint. He was also an authority on steam railways and actively involved in their preservation.



His good humour and wealth of interesting conversation and anecdote won him many friends, including this writer, who was one of a number of such he recruited into Rose and Castle, over 20 years ago now.

In 2001 John was fortunate to survive very serious illness, which severely limited his mobility and meant his dancing days were, sadly, at an end. However, JT continued to be a hard-core member of Rose and Castle as a musician, turning out in all weathers to play for us and joining the Side on away gigs even when confined to a wheelchair. His wife Frances, whom he married in 1969, was the rock who supported him through these often difficult latter years.

His passing prompted a flood of condolence and tribute from Morris and Folk circles, nationally as well as locally. John's funeral in Milton Keynes on November 9th was packed to the doors with friends and family, including representatives from at least a dozen Morris Sides around the country. As JT would certainly have wished, the funeral was followed by a gathering at Rose and Castle's home hostelry, The Boat Inn at Stoke Bruerne, at which many a pint of good English ale was sunk in his memory.

Farewell, JT. We will always remember, and miss, you. But, thanks to commitment like yours, the Morris goes on...

Steve Brady



IF THE CLOGS FIT...

Dancing in a North-West Clog Morris Side, Rose and Castle dancers need the right clogs. Ideally ones that are tailored to their own feet in person by the clogmaker. Measurements can be taken and sent to him or her to make the basic footwear, but the final personal fitting should ideally be done on the actual feet of the wearer.

So it was that in early November one of our new dancers Steve Rogers, together with our Bagman, another Steve, Brady, took the train to Stockport near Manchester to fit and collect his first clogs. A short bus ride to the station took us to the garden outhouse where one of Britain's last few clogmakers, Phil Howard, has his workshop. Over the next hour Phil carefully fitted the leather upper to the wooden sole of the clog, ensuring it fitted perfectly. Before dismissing us to a fine nearby hostelry to enjoy a pint of Hyde's Manchester Bitter over lunch.



"Phil Howard, one of very few clogmakers that now exist in the UK working at his trade"

Then it was back to Phil's for the final fitting. Steve tried on his new clogs and professed himself well satisfied. Rose and Castle met half the cost, as it does for every new dancer's clogs. The clogs collected, the Two Steves went back into central Stockport to indulge a passion dear to the heart of many a Rose and

Castle man, drinking good beer. A guided tour of Robinson's Brewery was followed by a crawl around the top real ale pubs of the town, and many of them, and their beers, were indeed top notch.



Next day back to Milton Keynes, mission accomplished. It only remained for Steve Rogers to christen his clogs with his first dance out in public, at Stony Stratford's Lights Festival on 28th November. A pair of hand-fitted clogs is waiting for you too, if you join the Rose and Castle!

Steve Brady



MEET OUR NEW RECRUIT

Each issue, we like to feature a different member of the side. This time it is the turn of our new recruit, Steve Rogers who danced out with us for the first time at the Stony Lights Switch On Day celebrations at the end of November this year. Steve was for many years very adamant that he was not going to dance with us although he was very supportive.



"Steve being congratulated at the end of his first dance in public by the Foreman"

However, inevitably he succumbed to the pleasures of dancing the Morris. Once convinced, he started learning to dance earlier this year and he was so dedicated to learning our dances that he was able to dance out with us sooner than many. He has thrown himself into all aspects of the Morris, having pulled the Saddleworth Rushcart earlier this year and he will soon be initiated into a Morris Feast at Ripley. We look forward to Steve being with us for many years and I am sure he will be a big asset to the side.

Ian Welborn, Squire

Interested?

We are always looking for new members (dancers, musicians & helpers) so if you think you might like to have a go, why not come to one of our practice nights every Wednesday evening from 8.30pm at Stoke Bruerne Village Hall. You will be made very welcome

or contact: Ian Welborn 01908 635134

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For more information about Rose & Castle Morris see:

www.rose-castlemorris.org.uk