

The Ancient English Morris Dance

by Michael Heaney

DESCRIPTION:

The idea that morris dancing captures the essence of ancient Englishness, inherently carefree and merry, has been present for over four hundred years. The Ancient English Morris Dance traces the history of those attitudes, from the dance's introduction to England in the fifteenth century, through the contention of the Reformation and Civil War, during which morris dancing and maypoles became potent symbols of the older ways of living. Thereafter it developed and diversified, neglected and disdained, until antiquaries began to take an interest in its history, leading to its re-invention as emblematic of Victorian concepts of Merrie England in the nineteenth century. The quest for authentic understanding of what that meant led to its revival at the beginning of the twentieth century, but that was predicated on the perception of it as part of England's declining rural past, to the neglect of the one area (the industrial north-west) where it continued to flourish. The revival led in turn to its further evolution into the multitude of forms and styles in which it may be encountered today.

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During his professional career at the Bodleian Library, Michael Heaney also pursued his research interests in folk culture. He has published widely on the subject, including editing and contributing to *The Histories of the Morris in Britain* (EFDSS, 2018) and *Percy Manning: the Man who Collected Oxfordshire* (Archaeopress, 2017). He was editor (1997-2005) of *Folk Music Journal* and remains a member of its Board.