

Dartington Morris: Minutes of AGM 2024

8:00 pm, Friday 27 September, Dartmouth Inn, Totnes

1. Members Present

Sally Parsons, Martin Jones, Mary Sweet, Sarah Sture, Nigel Sture, Colin Lodge, Alan Pritchard, Frank Sweet, Brian Stone, Rachel Stammers, Mark Featherstone, Pete Holdaway, Dan Shearer, Robin Wells, Ken Hudson, Joe Vincent, David Sawney, Hattie McCann, Robin Springett, Stephen Holley, Michael Dadson, Lynda Steer, Jon Owen, Kev Steer, Roger Easterbrook, Rob Nutkins.

Robin Springett chaired the meeting; Martin Jones recorded the minutes.

2. Apologies for absence

John Culf, Joe Spalding, Lin Ford, Miyu Tokoi, Sarah Clegg, Chris Farr, Roy Hartwell, David Lance.

3. Minutes from AGM 2023

3.1. Acceptance of minutes

Minutes were accepted; all in favour.

3.2. Matters arising:

3.2.1. Status of Champernowne.

Ken raised the issue of our former horse, Champernowne and proposed that he request it be stored at Kingsbridge museum. All in favour.

Action: Ken Hudson.

3.2.2. Storage of club archives.

Rachel said she'd speak to the Devon County archives to see if the club archive material can be stored there. In the meantime they remain in Robin's garage.

Action: Rachel Stammers.

3.2.3. New 'hooden' stag (status).

Colin Lodge had completed the new Hooden Hart and the meeting recorded a vote of thanks for his excellent work.

Robin Springett suggested the cape be made longer and crown to be improved, which Colin acknowledged.

Martin asked what the beast should be called; Colin said it is a white hart of roebuck origin. There was some discussion about a name for the Hart and the suggestion of

Arthur (Holland) was made and widely appreciated. A decision is to be made in the near future.

4. Officers' and Other Reports

All reports were submitted before the meeting and are attached to the minutes. Each officer was asked to mention highlights from their report.

4.1. Squire: Sally Parsons

4.2. Bagman: Martin Jones

4.3. Treasurer: Robin Wells

4.4. Foreman: Stephen Holley

4.5. Musicians: Sally Parsons

4.6. Collections: Frank Sweet

With fewer collection opportunities this year (compared to last) Frank asked whether we should be doing more paid outs. Some discussion followed.

Martin said that we have a balance to be struck, as more paid outs typically means fewer Friday nights, and the club has previously expressed a preference for more Fridays and fewer weekend outings (when the paid outs usually are). We have turned down no paid outs in the past year.

4.7. Ragman: Roger Easterbrook (report by Ken Hudson)

Ken praised Colin for the excellent furnishing of kit, which the meeting attendees agreed with. Colin said he has plenty of fabric for baldrics but is getting short of the smaller pieces of yellow and red for attachments. Colin is also short of bells so a new order is required.

All were reminded that bells and baldrics belong to the club. Bells in particular are expensive, with each pair of bell pads costing in excess of £50.

4.8. Archivist: Robin Wells

Robin confirmed he still has possession of the archive material.

Robin Springett said there was a worry that reliance on electronic copies of photos could be a risk. Martin said that on balance it is better to have photos stored this way without the concern of who looks after the physical copies; and that electronic storage (eg in our Flickr account) is a risk in that it depends on a commercial provider and that we should always be prepared to move the stored images to another host should there be a problem with that provider.

4.9. Webmaster: Martin Jones

Martin had nothing to add to his report.

4.10. Longsword: Ken Hudson

Ken explained how he had stepped in to take Joe Vincent's lead role while Joe has been unfit to dance, but is keen for someone else to take that lead. Ken stated that the longsword team needs to be expanded to include other willing members, by at least a couple more if possible. Joe Vincent confirmed he is hopeful that he will be able to return to dancing before long.

4.11. Advertising & Publicity: Ken Hudson

Hattie mentioned that she hoped she could gain some further TV publicity for the side, perhaps by means of the Longsword team.

The chairman proposed a vote of thanks to all the Officers for their reports and their support in the past year. All in favour.

5. Election of Officers

5.1. Squire

This year we had two candidates for Squire: Stephen Holley and Dan Shearer.

A secret ballot was held, with all eligible members present casting a vote via a voting slip at the start of the meeting. The votes were counted and the candidate with the most votes was Stephen Holley, duly elected as Squire.

5.2. Bagman

Martin said he was prepared to stand again; there being no alternative candidate, he continues as Bagman.

5.3. Treasurer

Robin Wells said he was prepared to stand again; there being no alternative candidate, he continues as Treasurer.

5.4. Foreman

As previous Foreman - Stephen Holley - was elected as Squire, a new Foreman was proposed.

Ken Hudson proposed Dan Shearer and Robin Wells seconded him.

Brian Stone proposed Michael Dadson but Michael was not willing to stand.

All meeting attendees were in favour of Dan as Foreman, so he is duly elected.

5.5. Appointed roles

The following roles are appointed by the Squire:

Ragman; Archivist; Animal; Fool; Webmaster.

6. Agenda items

Items were led by the named person.

6.1. Membership fee (Robin Wells)

Our Constitution states we will review the membership fee each year. The membership fee for the coming year is due for payment immediately after the AGM.

6.1.1. Proposal: the annual membership fee should remain as £10 per member.

- Proposed by: Robin Wells
- Seconded by: Martin Jones

All in favour: motion carried.

6.2. Formal definition of kit for dancers and musicians (Sally Parsons)

The definition of what comprises our kit is at present too broad, and open to misinterpretation. Therefore, following an Elected Officers' meeting, we have described the kit in more detail, which we would like to be available to view on the club website. See Appendix III for a summary of added details.

6.2.1. Proposal: the kit definition to be added to the Dartington Morris website and that this is referred to in the Constitution.

- Proposed by: Sally Parsons
- Seconded by: Robin Wells

Extensive discussion followed and this motion was not carried. Particular points raised were:

- Rachel felt she was being targeted by the changes and considered them to be unfair, with women being disadvantaged. She stated a fuller explanation was needed and that she felt it was discriminating -and insensitive.
- Mark objected to rolling sleeves up above the elbow and prefers his below the elbow.
- Hattie said she had no idea that she wasn't meant to wear a hat while dancing and would have appreciated being told instead of via an AGM item.
- ~~Pete stated it was understood that we don't wear hats while dancing. Pete sought confirmation that the policy is that, whilst hats aren't worn when dancing, they may be worn at other times. This was confirmed.~~
- Nigel said he had noted Thaxted and Belles in different kit (men and women) but thought they were part of a single side; could this be helpful?
- Martin explained that the kit definition was an attempt by the officers to detail what is and isn't acceptable and ~~more of~~ an explanation of how the kit should be as we see it now. Further consideration needs to be made as there was no intention to cause upset to anyone.
- Frank said he often hears comments about how Dartington kit makes the side stand out and look good.

It was clear from the meeting that more work needs to be done on this to determine what is and isn't acceptable in the side's dancer kit.

Action: Officers to agree way forward.

6.3. **Comments about kit (Brian Stone)**

- Shirt sleeves to be folded / rolled back neatly exposing the elbow. That's how I remember it from my time with Dartington except Chris Farr of course.
- Britches should look like britches even when the bell pads are removed not like something akin to culottes. Even the long sword dancers should look like they are wearing britches.
- When on an actual out anyone intending to dance impromptu jigs should make sure they are wearing full kit. I personally won't be providing any music for anyone not in full kit. I know the people outside the Dolphin in Dartmouth enjoyed what they saw but I believe that they would have enjoyed it even more with the sound of bells. Dancing in bells are what we're all about.

These comments were raised in the previous agenda item and was discussed no further.

6.4. **Sharing of the stick bags (Alan Pritchard)**

In recent years it has fallen to a very small number of people to take the long and short stick bags to the next outing. This is unfair and needs to change and I would like everyone to help with the sticks however they can. I've calculated that each capable person needs to take a stick bag one outing in four (if anyone wants my calculations, I'm happy to provide).

I recognise there are some not capable of looking after the sticks and so suggest they declare themselves so they don't keep being asked. Perhaps let the Bagman know so he can publish a list of those who can?

6.4.1. I propose that everyone capable looks after sticks around 1 time in 4.

- Proposed by: Alan Pritchard
- Seconded by: Martin Jones

After some discussion, it was acknowledged that sticks are a continual issue. Alan's formal proposal was not accepted as it stood but the meeting concurred that he made a good point and that more people must accept to take the sticks occasionally.

Dan suggested someone be given the role of being responsible for sticks in assigning who should take them (but not having to take them themselves).

6.5. **An annual end-of-season side social (Pete Holdaway)**

See Appendix I for detailed information on this item.

6.5.1. Proposal: To hold an annual end-of-season social event for the side.

- Proposed by: Pete Holdaway
- Seconded by: Sally Parsons

This was generally liked, as long as we aren't talking about a ceilidh format every year. The meeting was in favour, so Pete asked for volunteers to help him to discuss and

organise the next event. Those that volunteered were Hattie, Stephen, Sally, Alan and Mary.

Action: Pete to organise.

6.6. Audience participation (Pete Holdaway)

See Appendix II for detailed information on this item.

6.6.1. Proposal: To try some simple social dances at suitable venues

- Proposed by: Pete Holdaway
- Seconded by: Nigel Sture

Pete explained his reasoning and that he was proposing something simple that could be taught to couples in a few minutes. Some discussion followed and Shepherd's Hey was used as an example that we already do. Pete said that was good but not suitable for every opportunity. General agreement that this was something we should consider but no specific actions were identified.

On a related note, the lifting of a 'Rose' after being selected from the audience to dance in the middle of the Rose Tree (Bampton) was discussed. There was a clear steer that this should not happen – even to a bride – without prior consent. This is very important and perhaps part of a needed wider discussion about our interaction with our audience.

Action: Officers to discuss.

6.7. Avoid events that may be political or contentious in nature or potentially divisive (Pete Holdaway)

On occasion we are invited to events that may be considered political or contentious in nature, or potentially divisive to the side. To this end I would like to propose an amendment to the Constitution that takes care of this:

"In attending a range of events for the enjoyment of the members and the public, the side shall not support or endorse any such event which might be considered political or contentious in nature or potentially divisive. Any such invitation to be considered by the elected officers in this context as it may arise."

6.7.1. Proposal: To add a clause to the Constitution using the wording shown above.

- Proposed by: Pete Holdaway
- Seconded by: Rachel Stammers

Some discussion followed, questioning the need for this – but in the end there was conclusion that it could be helpful. Martin said it was particularly helpful to the Bagman in responding to requests for performances.

All in favour, motion passed.

6.8. Work harder to retain beginners (Alan Pritchard)

I believe that we need to make an extra effort to ensure that we retain new starters. To this end I suggest we take the following actions.

Spread the load

- Appoint someone to look after strategy for beginners – I propose Dan.
- But he shouldn't have to devote half of every practice teaching: with guidance, any of us could help beginners with the basics – not necessarily teaching, but guiding. Who would like to help?

Allocate extra time?

- Try to get the practice hall from 7.30? 7.45?
- Use the first time for beginners. Recorded music if no musician available.

Find extra space?

- Try to rent another room, or use the side corridor.

Use two halves of practice time differently

- First half
 - If no extra time available, use the first half of practice to learn technique: stepping, then hands. Again, recorded music if no musician available.
- Second half
 - Beginners join in with experienced dancers. Learn to be at the right place at the right time, and to interact with other dancers.

Set achievable goals

- One or two dances by Christmas markets and Boxing day?
- A few dances by May Day?

Alan's suggestions were met with general agreement and some specific points were added:

- Stephen said it was important to practise basic stepping, but not spend too long on it.
- Brian said it was valuable for beginners (and others) to practise in their own time, not just at formal practice.
- Jon said he'd found it helpful (other sides) to make simple videos available that allow beginners to see single- and double-stepping so they can practise separately.
- Hattie said 2 hours of practice is a lot for an absolute beginner to maintain concentration.
- Stephen added it is helpful to have feedback from all dancers as it's hard to get everything right as Foreman.

6.9. Changes to the Constitution (Martin Jones)

I have two proposals relating to the Constitution and these are grouped together here (although unrelated). There may be other Constitution amendments as a result of other agenda items, so they could be potentially collected together.

6.9.1. The club Constitution is labelled as 'Dartington Morris Men' and this should be changed to 'Dartington Morris'.

- Proposed by: Martin Jones
- Seconded by: Rachel Stammers

All in favour: motion carried.

6.9.2. The Constitution defines 'Ordinary Members' and 'Associate Members'. I would like to propose a third category of 'Honorary Life Member' to apply to anyone that the elected Officers unanimously (or a majority at an AGM or an EGM) deem to have made a significant contribution to the club. Such a Member would have the same rights as an Ordinary Member, except:

1. they are not able to vote or hold an elected position;
2. they are not required to pay the annual membership fee.

- Proposed by: Martin Jones
- Seconded by: Sally Parsons

This was discussed further, and generally agreed in principle. The candidates should be proposed at an AGM (or EGM) and accepted only if there is unanimous agreement (ie not simply the Officers' decision).

Constitution wording needs to be adjusted from that shown above and proposed back to the side before agreement.

Some candidates were mentioned but none were agreed at the meeting. This needs to be decided once the constitution changes are agreed.

Action: Martin to propose wording for Constitution, to be agreed at an EGM.

During discussion it was clear that further clarification on eligibility to vote at the AGM will also need to be discussed and agreed.

Action: Officers to agree how to resolve.

6.10. Autumn/Winter events (Bagman)

Robin S said that help will be needed from all members for the Autumn Ale on 26 October. The help will be needed from 6pm on that day, in setting up the hall. Ken confirmed that six sides have been invited but are not yet confirmed.

The invitation to the Ale by Belles of London City on Saturday 2 November has three members planning to go (Rachel, Dan, Brian). Rachel said she would coordinate this for those attending.

Further event discussion adjourned to Planning Meeting.

Action: Martin to arrange date for planning meeting.

6.11. Spring/Summer events (Bagman)

Adjourned to Planning Meeting.

6.12. Brutus Event (Stephen Holley)

Stephen wanted to thank Sally and Alan for their help in preparing the Brutus banner and Michael for his support at the presentation by Brutus author Anthony Adolph in Totnes the day before and for singing when we were in the church.

Plans for 2025 adjourned to Planning Meeting.

6.13. Away trips/visits to consider

Stephen spoke of his suggestion to arrange the King John Morris meeting in Devon in April 2026. If we are to do this it will need planning and venues booked before April 2025.

Further discussion adjourned to Planning Meeting.

6.14. Charity/charities to support 2024/2025

6.14.1. Donation to St Mary's Church, Totnes.

Martin proposed that a donation be made to St Mary's church renovation fund in recognition of their support for our Day of Dance and the Brutus Day.

A donation of £100 was proposed by Martin, seconded by Robin Wells and agreed by all.

6.14.2. Continue with Rowcroft Hospice as main charity.

Rowcroft Hospice was agreed as our main charity for the coming year.

The meeting closed at 10:12pm.

Chairman thanked all members – especially the newer ones – for their contribution to the meeting.

Appendix I

Years ago, we used to have end of season Ladies' Nights to thank our partners for their forbearance and support throughout the year - but at some point, they lapsed.

Somewhat inspired by Steve's landmark event at the end of the season a couple of years ago, mine recently used my birthday as a convenient excuse. It strikes me that things like this are useful bonding and unifying exercises for the side and some people have suggested that we have them on a regular basis. We can't rely on other people having similar events at the end of the season, even if they should want to do anything like this. So here's my suggestion for a low-cost, minimal effort, end-of-season ceilidh/mixed party-piece social event for DM members and partners. Other sides do similar.

All we need is a hall and we could ask people to bring food to share and their own drink. Ipplepen was £10 per hour, I imagine that Rattery and other halls are similar, and we'd only need it for 5 or 6 hours - minimal cost. With Frank's skills as collector, we now have more income than ever and, once we've covered our basic running costs, that's a small price to pay for an investment in side unity and cohesion.

As to music, I'm not suggesting that our professional musicians should be expected to take a busman's holiday but we have two other regular musicians in the side, if they were prepared to play. We already have people who could call some dances (Ken, obviously, but I also have 3 or 4 dances I could bring and I expect there are others so it could be very varied). I would anticipate social dancing for the benefit of partners (rather than indulging ourselves with Morris which is what the Ale is for) plus some floor-spots and singing.

Ladies' Nights tended to be sit-down meals with people spread about on different tables and the suggestion above is intended to be more inclusive and active for our quite dynamic side.

I would also suggest that, if approved, the event should be held in a different hall to the Ale so that the two events don't become blurred. It could move around the patch annually to suit our widespread membership. I would also suggest keeping the end of August date, not to clash with the bank holiday, two weeks away from the usual date of the Day of Dance and two months from the Ale.

It's moot whether some selected guests might be invited but there's a risk that this grows and then dilutes the side bonding aspect. However, anyone who's shown an interest in joining would be prime candidates.

All of the above can be discussed and I'd be happy to organise such an event along with anyone else who might want to be involved.

Pete Holdaway

Appendix II

Audience participation is a tool to recruitment. Occasionally, there is a venue with a suitable dancing area and receptive audience where we invite them to join in a Shepherd's Hey. Liverton is one such example and, despite the large potted tree, the Cott is another.

Morris is not intended for the public to join in but, to get people interested, my suggestion is to try, at suitable venues, some simple social/couple dances such as are quickly explained in a minute or two. This season I've seen this done by other sides at South Petherton festival and at Sidmouth. At Lyme, Dan and I joined in such a dance with another side. When our musicians were playing after our dancing at the Cott, some students got up and folk-danced (rather well) and I was rather embarrassed that a Morris side, in kit, did/could not do likewise.

In every other European country, most people can do some of their traditional dances. But not in England and I wonder if this is something to do with Morris being solely a display dance. The Triangle at Teignmouth was a case in point where hundreds of people watch and can't join in. Such times seem a lost opportunity.

So my proposal is that the side try some simple social dances at suitable venues to encourage public participation, engender interest in folk dance and possibly lead to some recruits. The more fun we seem, the more people might want to join. At the very least, we wouldn't appear as inept as we did at the Cott.

Pete Holdaway

Appendix III

SUMMARY OF CLARIFICATION OF KIT DESCRIPTION

The recent drive to raise the standard of our kit has resulted in a huge improvement. You should all be really proud of how great you look now. Just so everyone is clear on how the kit should be worn, a description is available on the Dartington Morris website. Several additions in the form of guidance have been added recently, and the following provides a summary.

Shirts

Shirts should be plain, bright white, with long sleeves that can be rolled up to the elbow. The body should be long enough to be tucked into breeches and with ample room for movement when dancing. Shirts should not be crumpled.

Breeches

Breeches are trousers which are cut to just below the knee. Please note that long trousers tucked into socks is not acceptable kit. Black belts are part of the kit and should be worn.

Baldrics

Please do not decorate baldrics with attachments. The medal of office worn by any past Squire of the Morris Ring may be worn on the baldrics.

Accessories

Please note that hair bands, scrunchies and jewellery should be low key and in keeping with kit colour.

The following items should not be worn during the dance performance:

Hats, Scarves, Gloves, Neckerchiefs.

Many thanks for your assistance in maintaining the standard of our kit.

Squire Sally, Treasurer Robin, Foreman Stephen and Bagman Martin