

A busy start to 2023 for the Kennet Morris

1st January

Morris dancing is traditionally a summer activity but the festive season is always an exception.

We first venture outdoors at The Calleva Arms in Silchester where we have danced on New Year's Day since 2008. It is known by the many locals who enjoy the celebration as the "Hangover Cure" and after half a dozen different morris dances the cobwebs have certainly been blown off and the audience have warmed their hands with applause. The performance always concludes with a teaching dance, and this year was no different, for young and old alike, before we retired to the warmth of the pub for music, song and jollification.



6th January

Reading University regularly invite us to entertain their new intake year of foreign students on their "study abroad" programmes and this year it fell on the 12th Night of Christmas, a day celebrated by many morris sides across the land. Some 60 students from all over the world were exposed to the world of English Morris dance with performances by the men and musicians. These were interspersed with a knowledgeable, if light hearted, talk by our Fool on the history of morris (which goes back to the 15th century) and about the different dance traditions we love to keep going. Teaching 60 young students how to actually dance the morris was challenging, but enjoyed by all who really appreciated how much fun you can get out of Morris dancing. Afterwards we retired to the University bar to partake of a well earned pint of traditional English ale.

January 7th

English ale was replaced by the finest Berkshire cider as we Wassailed the Tutt's Clump Cider Orchard as we have done since owner Tim Wales planted the apple trees in 2014. Orchard Wassailing is a traditional ceremony that involves singing and drinking to the health of trees around the Twelfth Night in the hopes that they might thrive better. The purpose is to awaken the cider apple trees after mid-winter and to scare away evil spirits to ensure a good harvest in the Autumn.

Kennet led the songs and procession from the cidery to the orchard and various noise makers – tambourines, rattles, bells and triangles - were given to gathered throng who raised the required din withy much prolonged gusto. Not an evil spirit was seen to be left. The wassail Queen would normally be lifted into the boughs of the tree where she places toast soaked in wassail from the a special bowl as a gift to the tree spirits, and to encourage back the robins scared off by the noise makers. As it was a tad wet underfoot this year – some of our dancers chose to wear wellingtons rather than our normal black shoes - a tree was bent down to allow the Queen (we had a king and two queens!) to toast the tree from the safety of the farm track.



The Wassail must be working as Tim Wale was presented with yet another CAMRA award for his excellent ciders, which stole the prize at the recent Ascot Beer Festival. We're looking forward to a drier orchard in 2014.



January 9th

We're now back indoors to continue our practice season which will continue until the spring when we'll be enjoying entertaining audiences across Berkshire and South Oxfordshire during the summer.

If you think you'd like to be a part of all this, come along to a Monday evening practice at St Mary's Church Hall, Shinfield from 8:00pm. There's still plenty of time left to learn, whether a dancer or musician. We can guarantee, fun, fellowship ... and fitness!