



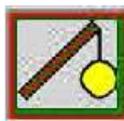
# KENNET KAPERS



## THE SUMMER 2014 NEWSLETTER KEEPING UP WITH THE KENNETSHIRE KINGDOM

VOLUME 1 number 1

News and views of all things Kennet – a seasonal newsletter for all citizens of Kennetshire, present, past and future – written by a Fool.



## Kontents

About Kennet Kapers.....	2
About Us .....	3
What have we been up to? .....	3
St George’s Day.....	3
May Day .....	3
Reading Beer Festival .....	4
May Bank Holiday Tour.....	4
Beer Mats .....	5
Mr Heming’s Day of Dance .....	5
Spring Bank Holiday .....	5
Hartley Ale June 6 – 8 <sup>th</sup> .....	5
Reading Waterfest 13 <sup>th</sup> June .....	6
Reading Town Centre Tour 5 <sup>th</sup> July.....	7
The Future .....	7

## About Kennet Kapers

Not all citizens of Kennetshire are fortunate enough, or have the stamina to attend all our events to be able to keep up with current news of major events. This seasonal newsletter, which we hope to publish three or four times a year, will attempt to keep you in the picture and inform and entertain. It is no substitute for our [website](#) or [Facebook](#) page but we hope will become a useful addition for our friends - and members.

It’s very much a first effort and all suggestions for improvements are welcomed.



## About Us

The Kennet Morris Men are based in the Reading area, although you can see us performing throughout Berkshire and South Oxfordshire, hereinafter referred to as Kennetshire. This season we will be performing dances in the distinctive styles that developed in the Cotswold villages of Bucknell, Ducklington, Fieldtown, Hinton in the Hedges, Illmington, Oddington and Sherborne, and farther afield in the City of Lichfield and Upton upon Severn.

Our dancing season starts at sunrise on May 1st and continues through to the end of September. During the season we go out one evening each week to dance at many of our favourite local hostelries, often with or as guests of neighbouring teams. At weekends we can be seen dancing at fetes and shows, and we often go on tour with other Morris sides. From October to April we meet on Monday evenings at St Mary's Church Hall, Church Lane, Shinfield RG2 9BY, to continue practising our dances, to learn new ones and to train new dancers.

We dance the Morris because we enjoy it, because we want to maintain a unique part of our cultural heritage, and because our audiences are entertained by watching us and participating in the Luck of the Morris.

We are always pleased to welcome new members as either dancers or musicians, to ensure that Morris continues to be danced in the Reading area for many more years to come. Why not come along to a practice, or better still, one of our October taster sessions and get involved? You'll like us.

## What have we been up to?

We've tried to give a taste of what we've been up to so far this season at the main events, not every pub we've visited – this newsletter is long enough already.

## St George's Day

We don't usually do a St George's Day performance because it always rains, but Sharon of The Calleva Arms, our favourite landlady, used all her many charms to convince us to give it a go. She is irresistible. We had a great evening, but dancing eventually halted as it rained cats, dogs, and the occasional flying pig. We did warn you Sharon. Pete Hughes very fine record of the night is on the [Silchester Life web site](#). Clive Blunt led an evening session of traditional English songs in his own, largely ignored, inimitable style.



## May Day



May morning began in the traditional way with our dance on the Castle Mound in the Forbury Gardens, the true venue of the Abbey Ruins still being dangerously out of bounds. The gates were ceremoniously unlocked at 5:20am for Jack "Cecil J" Smee's sharps inspection by torch light. The public were then admitted, and she was followed by an excellent turnout of men. As well as the audience, the sun, as is usual, also failed to appear. Dancing was of the normal standard for the time of day.

The evening was our first visit to The Wheelwrights Arms hidden away near Dinton Pastures, and a fine evening it was too, enjoyed by a fair sized audience witnessing a strong Kennet turnout with 2 sides up for



several dances. The après session worked very well too, if a tad cosy. We'll probably be back as the pub was very keen for us to return and we were much impressed by this little known CAMRA gem.

## Reading Beer Festival

The first Saturday in May is first date to go in the Kennet programme ever since the millennium, with the more recent addition of the Friday Bar keeping night in full morris kit. This year there was no Locale Bar so we manned the ever popular stage end. By the end of the evening our ears were ringing more loudly than our bell pads, but well worth it to raise the profile of Kennet and hopefully tempt a few recruits. The Saturday brought wonderful weather and the ever exuberant crowds of spectators. This year we put up two sides – nominally the red and the green sides, to compete in Strictly Come Morris Dancing for audience members to sample The Morris. Almost KISS probably stole the show for the Red Team. We'll be back !!!



## May Bank Holiday Tour

We've be dancing this tour since 1978 and Alnutts Hospital, also known as Goring Heath Alms Houses, has been first stop for every one of them. Its location on Deadman's Lane isn't usually mentioned, given the age of most residents! The glorious building is Grade 1 listed, built by and endowed Henry Allnut, a Lord Mayor of London from nearby Ibstone, about 1724. This year saw the quad's beautiful but completely impractical pebble cobbles replaced by a super new modern smooth surface. We approve, as did the residents who turned out in good numbers this year. Perhaps they need to rename the road.



Goring Lock, the next stop, was dry unlike earlier this year when Bill Martin was passing our dance spot. There was a marked absence of worms who usually pop up their heads to see what's going on so not everything was back to normal.

Our final call was, as has become traditional, the South Stoke May Queen crowning and maypole dancing. This year was unique in having two queens – well you can't favour one twin over another. I can confirm that they were both as charming as each other.



## Beer Mats

We've set ourselves a challenge to introduce a new generation of dancers to Kennet and morris dancing and have been working on various recruitment initiatives. Recognising the close affinity we have to pubs and ale one of the first ideas to become reality was a Kennet beer mat. Thanks to the efforts of Neil Stevens the first 500 were delivered in May and will be appearing in a pub near you (if you're in Kennetshire).



## Mr Heming's Day of Dance

The 10<sup>th</sup> May was the nearest Saturday to Tom Hemming's birthday on the sixth, a former Morris dancer responsible for the revival of the traditional Abingdon Morris in the mid 19th century. Mr Hemming's Traditional Abingdon Morris Dancers had invited ourselves, Mayflower Morris, Stroud Morris and Ashnah, represented by a pair of belly dancing ladies performing the American Tribal Style. While not quite a pub crawl of Abingdon's Ock Street, we were able to enjoy a few very fine ales during the course of the excellent day. A sudden rain storm meant the final dances took place in the cover of what was previously Berkshire's County Hall, which we couldn't resist occupying and reclaiming for Kennetshire from the upstarts of Oxford. We might be invited back.



## Spring Bank Holiday

We were first invited to dance at the Yattendon Spring Fair in 1970 and, other than the "Foot & Mouth" cancelled fete we've been a regular fixture ever since. The streets closed, dancing in front of the pub in the unspoilt village square with audience on all four sides is probably as traditional a setting for morris as you could imagine. As traditional as English Bank Holiday weather too – our umbrella dances are also a regular fixture and this year was no exception, with the additional inclusion of our pre-fair venue of The Pot Kiln.



## Hartley Ale June 6 – 8<sup>th</sup>

Our first weekend away of the season is usually our visit to Wrotham in Kent, home to the Hartley Morris Men, who have all become good friends over the years. Perhaps it's our tradition of providing all-comers with gin, tonic, ice and a slice after breakfast? This year's touring companions were Greensleeves Morris Men from Wimbledon, attending for their first time. They certainly joined in the fun weekend whole heartedly, even listening to the tale of ale from the Brewer at the Larkin's Brewery, our first stop of Saturday's charabanc trip. Our vintage coach was then parked up as we took to the Spa Valley railway, dancing at Groombridge, Eridge and Tunbridge stations before descending on Tunbridge Wells – outside the old well house. We entertained an enthusiastic audience before boarding the coach for the final venue, The Swan on The Green at West Peckham. This is an idyllic village green setting which the pub has



overlooked since 1526! Its micro-brewery is a more recent and wonderful addition. The other tour bus joined us there for a cracking display of morris dancing – even at the end of a long day. As is traditional we then departed for an excellent feast back at Wrotham before repairing to local hostelryes to take up where our Friday night singing and music sessions left off (though some, perhaps more sensible souls, went straight to bed in the Cricket Pavilion, where we were “indoor camping”). Whatever our bedtime, we were all up for a hearty full-English (and more gin and tonic) in good time for coaches to the local Steam Fair where we attempted to get some lift in our dances from an unforgiving grass field. The best surface was coincidentally in front of the beer tent. A final display of all sides in Wrotham’s Church square completed another totally enjoyable weekend.



## Reading Waterfest 13<sup>th</sup> June

Another venue we’ve been appearing at for more years than we care to remember. The event lived up to its name with our first performance having to be danced on a covered stage as the audience endured a dramatic cloudburst. The rain stopped and we were able to give a more traditional display in the puddles surrounding the Forbury Lion. The afternoon was fittingly completed alongside Jurassic Park on Oracle’s Riverside. Also on display was our new magnificent “teardrop” banner, another Neil Steven’s Enterprises production (though our recruitment team of Chris Newman, Brian Jones, John Peach and I can take some credit).



## Reading Town Centre Tour 5<sup>th</sup> July

We've rather neglected Reading town centre, but following last year's Reading 500 Years celebrations' success we were keen to keep up the connection with our home town's new heart, and a great day it turned out to be. With recruitment in mind, after much appreciated displays, we invited the sizeable audiences that gathered at each of our performance areas (two in Broad Street and outside Reading Minster), to join "teach-ins", and very well it turned out too. Hopefully some may want to try more. To end the day, we became the first morris team to dance on Reading station's new "transfer deck". With everyone scurrying to catch trains it was perhaps not the best venue to hold an audience, but several of the station staff seemed to find time to stop and watch. Not that much has changed since privatisation!



## The Future

There's plenty still to come in our dance programme, including taster evenings where you can see if you've got what it takes to become a Kennet Morris Man. Have a word with any of the men if you are able to get to one of the following, and we'll make sure we keep you posted about all things Kennet and how you can get involved.

Mon 21st Jul	Reading Walking Tour- The Lyndhurst Arms 8:30pm; The Eldon Arms 9:30pm
Sun 27th Jul	Watercress Line Rail Day from 11:00am
Mon 28th Jul	Sun, Whitchurch Hill 8:00pm
1st-3rd Aug	Sidmouth Folk Festival
Wed 6th Aug	Six Bells, Burghfield 8:00pm
Mon 11th Aug	Plough, Little London 8:00pm
Mon 18th Aug	Reformation, Gallowstree Common 8:00pm
22nd-24th Aug	Saddleworth Rushcart Ring Meeting
Sat 30th Aug	Wallingford BunkFest
Sat 27th Sep	End of Season Tour to Oxford
Mon 29 <sup>th</sup> Sep	The Autumn Issue of Kennet Kapers
Mon 6th Oct	Display for French visitors at Green Man, Hurst
Sat 11th Oct	Reading town "Press Gang" performances from 11:00 am
Mon 13 <sup>th</sup> & 20 <sup>th</sup> Oct	Taster Evenings for would be morris men at St Mary's Church Hall, Shinfield
Sun 19th Oct	Apple Day, Thatcham Nature Discovery Centre
Mon 27 <sup>th</sup> Oct	Practice Evenings at St Mary's Church Hall, Shinfield every Monday until May 1st

If you want to learn even more, visit our Website [www.kennetmorrismen.co.uk](http://www.kennetmorrismen.co.uk) where there is a mass of information about our dances, our full programme, maps of the venues and our video and picture gallery.

You will also find other booklets in this (growing) series. U-Spy Kennet Morris, the complete spotters guide to the Kennet Morris Men; U-Spy Kennet Morris Dances is a guide to our 2014 season's dance repertoire; Your Welcome to Kennet Morris, an introduction for anyone considering joining us, and a companion volume, The Kennet Morris Men – A Foolish History. Have fun.

**Yours foolishly**  
**Peter de Courcy**

