

**Revival: The Transformative Potential of English Folksong and  
Dance, 1890-1940**

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**Abstract**

This thesis asserts the status of the English Folk Revival of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century as a progressive movement, refuting the prevailing scholarly tendency to characterise the revival as conservative, reactionary, or ineffectually sentimental. It argues that the revival was driven by individuals committed to positive social change, who made use of both the cultural material of the folk revival and its attendant concepts of tradition, heritage, and national identity in their endeavours to effect change through the fostering of community and communality.

In order to do this it analyses the participation in the revival of several key figures, Charles Marson, Conrad Noel, Grace Kimmins, Mary Neal, and Rolf Gardiner, contextualising their work in the revival alongside their political and social beliefs and their involvement in other movements. The thesis considers folk revivalism as it intersected with the Christian socialism of Marson and Noel; the youth social work of Kimmins and Neal; and the organicism and efforts towards rural regeneration of Gardiner. In doing so, the thesis also makes a case for the value of the contributions to the movement of a number of lesser-known revivalists. Two of these revivalists, Marson and Noel, have not previously been the subjects of scholarly considerations of their revival work, and Marson's archive has not previously been consulted as a source for academic work. The thesis makes extensive use of this and other archival resources, as well as the published works of each figure both on folksong and dance and in their respective other fields of interest. This biographical approach is combined with that of the cultural historian in building a detailed picture of why and how folksong and dance were used by these individuals in their efforts to create a better society.

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## Abbreviations

CMM	Cambridge Morris Men
CSU	Christian Social Union
CSL	Church Socialist League
CUL	Cambridge University Library
EFDS	English Folk Dance Society
EFDSS	English Folk Dance and Song Society
FSS	Folk Song Society
GSM	Guild of St. Matthew
ILP	Independent Labour Party
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SHC	Somerset Heritage Centre
VWML	Vaughan Williams Memorial Library
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union

## Introduction

### Transformative Potential

The English Folk Revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has suffered from the condescension of both history and scholarship. The movement has been dismissed as mere sentiment at best, or an exercise in cultural plunder at worst. As Vic Gammon notes, a period existed where much scholarship on the movement was 'little more than denigration', and a tendency developed to approach the revival with 'a near-religious attitude [...] or its obverse, a sort of pathological hatred.'<sup>1</sup> Both these attitudes have interfered with a deeper understanding of the movement and its proponents. This thesis responds to Gammon's 2004 prediction that the most useful work to be undertaken in the future will seek to 'understand something of people in their particular historical contexts.'<sup>2</sup> I seek to reintegrate a number of folk revivalists within such contexts, and more importantly, to place their interest in and use of revived folksong and dance back into its context alongside their work in other movements. In doing so I explore the ways in which these interests interacted to form a more complete picture of the meanings and values ascribed to folk material by some proponents of an active revival. I examine the involvement in folksong collecting of Charles Marson alongside his belief and active role in Christian socialism, assessing his political, religious, and semi-fictional writings to gain a better understanding of his interest in folksong and the inherently communal values he saw in it. I also investigate the position of Morris dance within the social, aesthetic, religious, and political make-up of the Thaxted Movement through the writing of another Christian socialist priest, Conrad Noel. The second section of the thesis investigates the use of folksong, dance, and the socialist conception of 'Merrie England' in youth social work by Mary Neal and Grace Kimmins, again situating the use of revived folk forms within a wider personal framework of political and social beliefs. Finally, I examine the centrality of folk dance ritualism in Rolf Gardiner's efforts for social regeneration, placing it within his organicist outlook as an interlocking element of his spiritual and political strategies for social transformation.

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<sup>1</sup> Vic Gammon, 'One Hundred Years of the Folk-Song Society' in Ian Russell and David Atkinson (eds), *Folk Song: Tradition, Revival, and Re-Creation* (Aberdeen: The Elphinstone Institute Occasional Publications 3, 2004), pp. 14-27 (p. 24).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Folk revivalism in general and at this period has been treated as sentimental, conservative, or reactionary because it is backward-looking, making no secret of and indeed celebrating the drawing of its inspiration and its material from the past, as well as investing itself in the concept of tradition and its perpetuation. Tradition is of course a 'site of resistance to change', but as Michael Pickering notes, 'this does not mean that it is necessarily supportive of the economic and ideological status quo.'<sup>3</sup> This thesis affirms the statement by Tamara Livingston in her work towards a general theory of music revivals that through their allegiance to the past, revivalists 'position themselves in *opposition* to aspects of the contemporary cultural mainstream': that is, that revivals are concerned with change as well as with stability or continuity.<sup>4</sup> This work aims, then, to transcend 'oversimplified associations of folklore with conservatism' by demonstrating that for a group of revivalists in the early twentieth century, folksong and dance provided a means to express dissatisfaction with the status quo as well as the inspiration for change.<sup>5</sup> I also take as an underlying premise the notion that the practice of preservation is not itself 'a reactionary or conservative ideology' as Paul Readman notes; and that in fact, as Raphael Samuel has written, it is 'a cause which owes at least as much to the Left as to the Right', giving as his examples the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings founded by William Morris and Philip Webb, the creation of Green belts by the Labour-led LCC in the 1930s, and the Attlee government's establishment of National Parks.<sup>6</sup> I therefore present the argument that although the figures I focus on undoubtedly looked to the past and were strongly convinced of the value of tradition, they were interested in how these ideas could be used to give shape to or to call into a being a positive present and future.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Pickering, 'Recent Folk Music Scholarship in England: A Critique', *Folk Music Journal*, 6, no.1 (1990), pp. 37-64 (p. 40).

<sup>4</sup> Tamara E. Livingston, 'Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory', *Ethnomusicology*, 43, no.1 (1999), pp. 66-85 (p. 66).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Narváez and Martin Laba, 'Introduction' in Peter Narváez and Martin Laba (eds), *Media Sense: The Folklore-Popular Culture Continuum*, (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1986), pp. 1-8 (p. 1).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Readman, 'Preserving the English Landscape, c.1870-1914', *Cultural & Social History*, 5, no.2 (2008), pp. 197-218 (p. 210); Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 2nd edtn. (London: Verso, 1996), p. 288.

Marson, Noel, Neal, Kimmins, and Gardiner all believed in what I have called the 'transformative potential' of folksong and dance. The loci of this potential and the particular transformations its users hoped for varied between them, influenced by the intersection of folksong and dance with their other interests (Christian socialism, youth social work, rural regeneration) as well as their political allegiances (Noel, Marson, Neal, and Kimmins were of the Left, Noel to the strongest degree; Gardiner was strongly right-wing). For all of them, the basis of folksong and dance's potential to change for the better the society in which they lived was in what they perceived to be its status as communal culture, as working-class culture, as rural culture, or as national culture; its expression of tradition, continuity, or a link with the past; its application as shared recreation or communal bonding; and, quite simply, its potential to foster happiness and enjoyment. In each case the transformative potential resided in a combination of a number of these sites. The transformations each revivalist aimed for were also varied. All of them aimed to transform a society they perceived to be fragmented into a coherent community bound by a common good, but contributing to that overall end were other projects of transformation, dependent on the particular individual: the transformation of dispossessed slum children into empowered citizens, and of sweated workers into teachers and cultural leaders; the transformation of an unjust world into a socialist commonwealth of God; the transformation of a mechanistic, individualist society into an organic whole in touch with its roots, and of a dilapidated rural society and culture into a functioning rural ecosystem. These people aimed for nothing less than the utter transformation of their societies, and they believed that folksong and dance would help them in undertaking these projects. For them, folksong and dance were not mere sentiment, but a potent cultural antidote to society's ills.

### **The Folk Revival**

The Folk Revival as a connected movement of participants who were aware of each other and in contact regarding their shared interests began to coalesce in the 1880s, around Lucy Broadwood, Frank Kidson, and Sabine Baring-Gould.<sup>7</sup> They began collecting and publishing songs, often collaborating together and with others, and by 1898 there was enough interest and commitment among fellow collectors that a society

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<sup>7</sup> Gammon, 'One hundred years', p. 14.

was instituted, the Folk-Song Society. Kidson, Broadwood, and Baring-Gould, along with the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, were among the 110 founder members.<sup>8</sup> Cecil Sharp began his own collecting in 1903 alongside Marson, having heard his first song in Marson's vicarage garden in Hambridge, sung by gardener John England. The revival was at this stage entirely focused on songs. Sharp had seen Morris dances performed by a group in Headington, Oxfordshire on Boxing Day 1899, but was at this stage interested only in the music, noting down the tunes from the playing of the side's concertina player William Kimber the next day.<sup>9</sup> The advent of the Morris revival came when Neal began to make use of Morris dances as material for her social club for London seamstresses, the *Espérance Club*, in 1905.<sup>10</sup> Following a disagreement over both the style and purpose of Morris, Sharp began his own organisation for the practice of Morris dance, the English Folk Dance Society, in 1911.<sup>11</sup> This society and the FSS were amalgamated in 1932 as the English Folk Dance and Song Society.<sup>12</sup>

The revival prior to Sharp's involvement was of a more antiquarian nature, concerned with collection rather than dissemination and popularisation. This thesis, then, could have taken as its start date the year 1903; but I have chosen to open my period of study in 1890. This is because although the thesis focuses only on the more active period of revival aimed at popularising the material among the public at large, it also takes into account the other related interests and involvements of the key figures Marson, Noel, Neal, Kimmins, and Gardiner. In the cases of Marson and Neal particularly, it is necessary to examine the groundwork laid in their lives and work which made their interest in the folk revival notable. This includes in Marson's case his earlier published work on both religion and politics, as well as letters and diaries, and in Neal's case, must take into account the beginning of the *Espérance Club* in 1895 and

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<sup>8</sup> Dorothy de Val, 'Broadwood, Lucy Etheldred', 2007, in *ODNB Online* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/57238>> [accessed 6 February 2016]. A timeline of important events in the founding of the present English Folk Dance and Song Society is available on their own website: 'Our story: a brief history', <<http://efdss.org/efdss-about-us/history>> [accessed 6 February 2016].

<sup>9</sup> Michael Heaney, 'Sharp, Cecil James', 2008, in *ODNB Online* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36040>> [accessed 6 February 2016].

<sup>10</sup> Roy Judge, 'Mary Neal and the *Espérance Morris*', *Folk Music Journal*, 5, no.5 (1985), pp. 545–91, (p. 549–50).

<sup>11</sup> 'Our story: a brief history'.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

her developing social work. At the other end of the time period, I have designated 1940 as endpoint. This is because the thesis is concerned with the interwar activities of Gardiner, as well as the ongoing development of the Thaxted Movement under Noel in this period. By the Second World War, the landscape of the revival had again shifted, reaching a stage after the establishment of the Morris Ring in 1934 where its meanings and values had been widely agreed upon and established. It had also reached a significant scale of popularity and participation by this juncture, with 21,000 individuals involved by 1935.<sup>13</sup> Folksong revival gained new impetus in the 1950s and '60s, and Morris dancing grappled with new developments in the 1970s, but those revivals were separate events, and thus I have taken the war as a suitable end point for my investigation.

The folk revival came about in a more general sense through the convergence of a number of cultural and social factors. Arthur Knevetts pinpoints firstly a renewed need for English identity at the turn of the century due to weakening leadership in industry and trade from rapidly expanding competitors such as Germany, Japan and the USA; the domination of European music by Germany; the Irish literary renaissance and its juxtaposition with the Home Rule movement.<sup>14</sup> All of these and other factors contributing to a feeling of the nation's diminishing status on the world stage combined with an air of cultural and political malaise at the fin de siècle worked to establish a concern for English identity, and, after the model of the Irish nationalists, precipitated a turn from 'political to cultural enterprises' as a method for re-establishing identity.<sup>15</sup> Most of the core tenets of the song revival - where the material came from, how it was created, altered, passed on, or discarded, by whom it was practiced, and its relationship to mainstream or national culture - were for the most part agreed upon by the majority of revivalists. The key idea was the concept of oral tradition, a model of the development and transmission of folksongs through a process of evolution. This was set

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<sup>13</sup> Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. xi.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Knevetts, 'Cultural and Political Origins of the Folk-Song Society and the Irish Dimension', *Folk Music Journal*, 10, no.5 (2015), pp. 592-608, (p. 593-5).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 595.

forth in 1907 by Sharp in his manifesto, *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions*.<sup>16</sup> Sharp set out some basic assumptions:

folk-music is generically distinct from ordinary music; that the former is not the composition of the original and, as such, limited in outlook and appeal, but a communal and racial product, the expression, in musical idiom, of aims and ideals that are primarily national in character.<sup>17</sup>

Most importantly given the value placed upon community and communality, folksong was thought of as the expression of a whole community:

*Art-music*, then, is the work of the individual, and expresses his own personal ideals and aspirations only; [...] *Folk-music*, on the other hand, is the product of a race, and reflects feelings and tastes that are communal rather than personal; it is always in solution; its creation is never completed; while, at every moment of its history, it exists not in one form but in many.<sup>18</sup>

Folksong was seen as a medium for the expression of communal values, and it was both 'of' and 'for' the community. This assumption of communal origin is what attracted those who wished for social change through the strengthening of community to the revival of folk forms. The definitions of folksong and the processes by which it is created, altered and sustained have been challenged and altered in the intervening years, but Sharp's explanation of the phenomenon is the definition at the heart of this thesis, for it is this definition which was broadly accepted at the time and which inspired the socially-transformative projects of the figures I focus on.

### **The critical landscape**

For a period of approximately thirty years a critical orthodoxy regarding the motives, methods, and achievements of the folk revival held sway over scholarship on the

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<sup>16</sup> Cecil Sharp, *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions* (London: Simpkin, Novello, Ltd. Taunton: Barnicott & Pearce, 1907).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

movement. The work of Dave Harker, from 'Cecil Sharp in Somerset: Some Conclusions' in 1972, *One for the Money: Politics and Popular Song* in 1980, and 'May Cecil Sharp be praised?' in 1982, to, most significantly, *Fakesong: The manufacture of British 'folksong' 1700 to the present day* in 1985, is the root source of this orthodoxy.<sup>19</sup> Harker's work led to a wide scale acceptance of the notion that folksong collectors performed an act of 'cultural expropriation.'<sup>20</sup> This appropriation was aimed at making profit for themselves both financially and in status, and more importantly, at gaining 'the ability to intervene ideologically in their own bourgeois culture and, thereby, in the culture of the working-class.'<sup>21</sup> According to Harker, folksong became an element of the bourgeois 'ideological armoury against the material forces which drive the working classes of each state closer together,' and was used to impose onto the working classes suitable bourgeois values, fed to their children through educational interventions in the form of re-worked and misrepresented folksongs.<sup>22</sup> This process amounted to 'the inculcation of bourgeois values at a level approaching outright indoctrination.'<sup>23</sup> Similar views of working-class 'embourgeoisement' as social control were roundly rejected by F.M.L. Thompson in 1981 as 'unwarrantably condescending to the humble and anonymous masses' in supposing them mere 'puppets on the end of bourgeois strings' without cultural or social autonomy of their own.<sup>24</sup> For Thompson, 'many improvers and reformers' such as the revivalists at the centre of this thesis, 'were socializers rather than controllers, peddling recipes for better survival in a changing environment rather than weaving webs of subordination.'<sup>25</sup> It is in this way that I approach the revivalists examined in this thesis: they wished for the reform of the society in which they lived, and, through their work both within the folk revival and with other progressive

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<sup>19</sup> Dave Harker, 'Cecil Sharp in Somerset: Some Conclusions', *Folk Music Journal*, 2, no.3 (1972), pp. 220-240; Dave Harker, *One for the Money: Politics and Popular Song* (London: Hutchinson, 1980); Dave Harker, 'May Cecil Sharp be praised?', *History Workshop*, 14, no.1 (1982), pp. 45-62; Dave Harker, *Fakesong: The manufacture of British 'folksong' 1700 to the present day* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985).

<sup>20</sup> Harker, 'May Cecil Sharp be praised?', p. 49.

<sup>21</sup> Harker, *Fakesong*, p. 165.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. xii, p. 171; Harker, 'Cecil Sharp in Somerset', p. 239.

<sup>23</sup> Harker, 'Cecil Sharp in Somerset', p. 240.

<sup>24</sup> F. M. L. Thompson, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 34, no.2 (1981), pp. 189-208, (p. 196, p. 207).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 207.



movements, aimed at improving both the lot of the working classes and English society as a whole. Of course, elements of their work were aimed at the working-classes: Neal's and Kimmins' social work, for example, did include elements of socialization (but not social control, as differentiated by Thompson). I argue also, though, that much of the persuasive work undertaken by these figures was in fact aimed at the middle classes. Noel and Marson both emphatically wished to convert their own classes to socialism; Neal's *Maison Espérance* aimed to provide good working conditions and wages for seamstresses by convincing ladies of fashion to consider the provenance of their clothes. The revivalists were interested in renewing society as a whole, and addressed both the working and the middle classes. Throughout this thesis I reject Harker's assertion that the revivalists undertook their work with the primary aim to 'mystify workers' culture in the interests of bourgeois ideology and therefore of capitalism, east and west.'<sup>26</sup> Marson's papers, which directly challenge some of Harker's assumptions about the editing of folksong texts undertaken by Marson and Sharp, have only recently been deposited at the Somerset Heritage Centre, and I have made much use of these valuable MSS in my own analysis: this thesis is the first academic work to fully take into account the Marson Papers.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Harker, *Fakesong*, p. xii.

<sup>27</sup> After Marson's death, his widow Clotilda appealed in the newspapers for any letters sent by him to be returned to her, to be used for the preparation of a biography by F.M. Etherington. This biography was never published, but the manuscript remains available at the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library: F. M. Etherington, *Life of Charles Latimer Marson* (Typescript by Dave Bland of Etherington's original manuscript), AL MARSON 13946, Dave Bland Collection. Etherington's manuscript formed the source for the only scholarly appraisal of Marson's life and work, a chapter in a study of four Christian socialists: Maurice B. Reckitt, 'Charles Marson and the Real Disorders of the Church', in Maurice B. Reckitt (ed.) *For Christ and the People: Studies of four Socialist Priests and Prophets of the Church of England between 1870 and 1930* (London: S.P.C.K, 1968), pp. 89-134. The letters, diaries, and other papers used by Etherington to prepare the biography were inherited from him by Roger Wallis, vicar of Hambridge, and were then passed on to Alan Mills, vicar of Minehead, from whom David Sutcliffe, producer of the first published biography of Marson, obtained them. Sutcliffe's biography was not intended by him to be an academic work, but to tell the previously untold story of Marson's eventful life. Sutcliffe deposited the papers at the SHC. David Sutcliffe, *The Keys of Heaven: The Life of Revd. Charles Marson, Socialist Priest and Folk Song Collector* (Nottingham: Cockasnook Books, 2010), p. 309.

Georgina Boyes' 1993 book *The Imagined Village* examines the ideology of the revival of folk dance as well as folksong, a topic untouched by Harker. Boyes interpreted the disagreement between Sharp and Neal as founded in the resistance of Sharp towards the use of what he believed to be high 'Art' for social purposes, and I concur with this reading as well as her suggestion that Neal's status as a woman with left-wing associations in comparison to Sharp as a man with Establishment connections counted against her in her bid to establish her version of the revival.<sup>28</sup> While Sharp was not the master manipulator Boyes suggests, I do find it undeniable that he treated certain colleagues extremely badly: my own analysis of the situation is expanded with further research into Neal's archive, and by comparison with Sharp's dealings with Marson and Kimmins, also underpinned by research in Marson's and Kimmins' MSS. *The Imagined Village*, though, helped to cement the interpretation of the revival as a process of 'cultural transfer': the revivalists, having invented 'the Folk', 'unconscious' and 'near-defunct' yet in possession of cultural treasure of national importance, then set about replacing these unreliable custodians as keepers of this priceless store with 'a responsible, caring and knowledgeable body of performers and adaptors' - that is, themselves - in the name of a 'vital and continuing cultural duty.'<sup>29</sup> It is here that I depart from Boyes. I argue instead that Marson emphatically did not see the parishioners from whom he collected songs as a broken cultural repository, but as individuals whose lives were as valuable as their songs; and that Neal devoutly wished for ownership of the Morris dance to remain with the working classes, asserting the rights of the seamstresses of St Pancras in the same way that Kimmins asserted the rights of slum children to citizenship and a stake in culture and society. Boyes argues that the collection and publication of folk material 'objectified' it, rendering socially-contextualised culture into mere information: 'singing became a number of folksongs, dancing a fashionable form of exercise or a professional requirement for the school curriculum - each was isolated in a new, constructed setting.'<sup>30</sup> But I present the encouragement of Morris and other folk dancing by Conrad and Miriam Noel, Mary Neal, and Grace Kimmins as deliberately situated in social activity: the prime value these revivalists saw in this material was its potential for corporate joy.

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<sup>28</sup> Boyes, *Imagined Village*, pp. 81-4, p. 95.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. xiv.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

The assertion by Harker and Boyes that the revival was ultimately driven by the desire of the bourgeoisie to maintain their hegemony, both cultural and social, and that this was achieved through a distortion of the collected material and a misrepresentation or an elision of the people it was collected from became the accepted theory upon which most scholarship and public commentary on the revival was based. The editor of *Folk Music Journal* who first published Harker's work in 1972, Mike Yates, recalled in 2003 that a member of the editorial board had raised concerns at the time over the accuracy of Harker's statistics concerning the demography of Sharp's sources (Harker's argument hinged partly on the idea that Sharp misrepresented the population size of villages and towns and the occupations of the singers in order to present a more rural origin for the material).<sup>31</sup> Yates wrote that the objector, Pat Shaw, intended to produce a rebuttal, but died without having done so.<sup>32</sup> A re-evaluation of Harker's analysis and the statistics upon which much of it rested was not forthcoming until the entry into the field at the turn of the millennium of C.J. Bearman. Bearman's article 'Who were the Folk? The Demography of Cecil Sharp's Somerset Folk Singers' used census information to rebut Harker's analysis by producing a group biography of a large number of Sharp's singers, demonstrating that the vast majority of them were labourers involved mainly in agricultural or related trades, contrary to Harker's assertions.<sup>33</sup> Bearman also used information on the population sizes of the settlements where Sharp collected to refute Harker's assertion that Sharp emphasised the rurality of his sources by giving preference to the songs collected in small villages and hamlets over the large proportion of songs collected in what Harker describes as large villages and towns. In making his point, Harker calls Langport a 'large town', Huish Episcopi a 'large village', and High Ham 'tiny', but Bearman's research in the 1901 census shows that Langport had a population of 813, Huish c. 700, and Ham 898.<sup>34</sup> Harker accused Sharp of declining to publish or giving less exposure to songs collected in larger settlements in order to present a more rural origin, but Bearman would have it that Harker misrepresented the occupations of the singers and arbitrarily described the relative sizes of various villages

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<sup>31</sup> Mike Yates, 'Enthusiasms No. 36: Jumping to Conclusions', 2003, *Musical Traditions* <<http://www.mustrad.org.uk/enth36.htm>> [accessed 9 February 2016].

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> C.J. Bearman, 'Who Were the Folk? The Demography of Cecil Sharp's Somerset Folk Singers', *The Historical Journal*, 43, no.3 (2000), pp. 751-775 (pp. 757-60).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 761.

in order to fit his own interpretation and to co-opt the singers as an 'urban proletariat'.<sup>35</sup> Bearman concluded that it was not possible to define Sharp's singers in terms of their class, but only in terms of their membership of a rural culture: Sharp had been right to view them as a 'peasantry', no matter the imperfect use of such a word to describe what he saw as a community of people whose lives and occupations were shaped around rural culture; Harker had been wrong to attempt to redefine them in terms of class and to equate their class interests with those of urban or industrial workers.<sup>36</sup> Another article by Bearman in 2002 took issue with even more of Harker's maths, finding that he had miscalculated several percentages when laying out the proportions of songs Sharp published from different singers in Harker's attempt to prove Sharp's skewing of the material to fit his ideal: Bearman showed that Harker's dubious calculations in fact aided Harker's own analysis in a similar way to that he ascribes to Sharp.<sup>37</sup> Bearman's complete rebuttal was presented in his PhD thesis, completed in 2001, and available at the VWML.<sup>38</sup> While I welcome Bearman's necessary correction of Harker's statistical errors and rebuttal of his interpretation of the revival's underlying motives, I take issue with a number of Bearman's own assertions. Bearman would have it that the revival was based on a recognition of folksong and dance as cultural products rather than class products, and it does seem as though this was the case for Sharp; yet I argue that for Noel and Neal in particular, a major locus for folk material's transformative potential was its status as a class product. Bearman also does not allow that there was any ideological intention behind the revival, merely the intention to preserve an 'art form' and 'national treasury', a view he believes that contemporary scholars ought also to return to rather than attempting to tease out political implications.<sup>39</sup> The examination of the social, political, and religious implications certain revivalists saw in the material, and the ways in which they aimed to use it not, as Harker or Boyes would have it, to maintain the status quo, but to effect a positive transformation of their society, is at the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 762.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 765.

<sup>37</sup> C.J. Bearman, 'Cecil Sharp in Somerset: Some Reflections on the Work of David Harker', *Folklore*, 113, no.1 (2002), pp. 11-34 (pp. 16-19).

<sup>38</sup> Christopher James Bearman, 'The English Folk Music Movement, 1898-1914' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Hull, 2001). MPS 15, VWML.

<sup>39</sup> Bearman, 'Who were the Folk?', p. 775.

centre of this thesis, and as such, the thesis also offers an alternate reading of the revival to that of Bearman.

More recently, in 2009, Bearman also sought to refute Boyes' allegations both in *Imagined Village* and in her edited collection *Step Change* that Gardiner was the 'charismatic innovator' and 'chief theoretician' responsible for the policy of both the EFDSS and the Morris Ring, thus linking those organisations with his far-Right politics and his misogyny.<sup>40</sup> Boyes' allegations were repeated in her chapter for Matthew Jefferies and Mike Tyldesley's edited collection on Gardiner in 2011, in which she modified her argument, stating that even though Gardiner had been proven not to have been officially involved in the formation of the Morris Ring, he did not need to have been so, as 'following more than a decade of proselytizing, the concept of the *Männerbund* was embedded in fellow-dancers' consciousness and accepted as a rationale for their performance.'<sup>41</sup> This thesis refutes that argument through reference to Gardiner's MSS, held at the Cambridge University Library, by demonstrating that the majority of his colleagues in the interwar folk movement were unimpressed both by Gardiner's esoteric applications of folk dance and his abrasive relationship with the movement's leaders. Nevertheless, I do not concur entirely with Bearman's analysis either: in 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice', Bearman casts Gardiner as apprentice to Neal, and Neal therefore as the source of his mystical 'blut und boden' interpretations of the Morris.<sup>42</sup> This thesis also aims therefore to refute what I believe to be an overly simplistic equation of Neal and Gardiner's similar attributes which ignores their own stated aims, which were greatly at odds, and does not take into account Gardiner's own views on leadership. I offer a different treatment of Gardiner to those put forward by either Boyes or Bearman, focusing on Gardiner's work as an extension into the interwar era of a belief in the transformative potential of folksong and dance, and, as with the

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<sup>40</sup> Boyes, *Imagined Village*, p. 160; Georgina Boyes, "The lady that is with you": Maud Karpeles and the English Folk Revival' in Georgina Boyes (ed.), *Step Change: New Views on Traditional Dances* (London: Frances Boutle, 2001), pp.171-95 (p. 185); C.J. Bearman, 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice: Mary Neal and Rolf Gardiner', *The Morris Dancer*, 4, no.1 (2009), pp. 17–29.

<sup>41</sup> Georgina Boyes, "Potencies of the Earth": Rolf Gardiner and the English Folk Dance Revival' in Matthew Jefferies and Mike Tyldesley (eds), *Rolf Gardiner: Folk, Nature and Culture in Interwar Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 65-94 (pp. 79-80).

<sup>42</sup> Bearman, 'Sorcerer's Apprentice', p. 18.

other figures I investigate, one situated within a wider context of motivations and circumstances.

Work treading a more nuanced line between the dichotomous positions of Harker and Boyes and Bearman has recently begun to emerge. Arthur Knevett and Vic Gammon offer in the January 2016 issue of *Folk Music Journal* an analysis of the folk collectors' and other contemporaneous usages of the word 'peasant' which seeks to address the complexity of the term's use, rather than adhering to the doctrinaire positions adopted by Harker and Bearman.<sup>43</sup> Theresa Buckland has recently produced work examining ideas of socialization rather than indoctrination in dance social work aimed at young people.<sup>44</sup> She has also analysed, rather than dismissed as inauthentic, early attempts by revivalists such as Kimmins and Neal (pre-1905) to make use of created 'folk' dances before the establishment of a revival, as a 'means towards understanding the wider socio-cultural climate' and context within which folk revivalism took hold.<sup>45</sup> Arthur Burns has sought to reassess the Christian socialism of Conrad Noel within the wider context of the Thaxted Movement in an effort to reframe the movement as a larger community project sustained by many individuals, rather than the personality of an eccentric leader.<sup>46</sup> It is this emerging strand of more nuanced and more strongly-contextualized analysis of the intersections between political and social aims and cultural endeavours, and between individuals and the networks of community, to which this thesis belongs.

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<sup>43</sup> Arthur Knevett and Vic Gammon, 'English Folk Song Collectors and the Idea of the Peasant,' *Folk Music Journal*, 11, no.1 (2016), pp. 44-66.

<sup>44</sup> Theresa Buckland, 'Dance and Cultural Memory: Interpreting *Fin de Siècle* Performances of "Olde England"', *Dance Research*, 31, no.1 (2013), pp. 29-66 (p. 51).

<sup>45</sup> Theresa Buckland, 'Pioneering England's dances among late Victorian youth: On the early work of Mary Neal and Grace Kimmins' in Anne Margrete Fiskvik and Marit Stranden (eds), *(Re)Searching the Field: Festschrift in Honour of Egil Bakka* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2014), pp. 319-30 (pp. 319-20). See also Theresa Buckland, 'Dance, authenticity and cultural memory: the politics of embodiment', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 33 (2001), pp. 1-16.

<sup>46</sup> Arthur Burns, 'Beyond the "Red Vicar": Community and Christian Socialism in Thaxted, Essex, 1910-84', *History Workshop Journal*, 75 (2013), pp. 101-124.

## Methodology

Harker wrote in 1985 that 'for almost three centuries, arguments have been raging [...] about where these songs come from, who made them, what they really meant and what relevance they are today.'<sup>47</sup> These are not the questions this thesis addresses: I focus not on origins and 'real' meanings, but on folksong as a cultural and a social idea at a particular period in time. I endeavour to analyse the meanings, values, and applications of that idea in context with other intersecting ideas and movements, linked especially through the work and lives of certain revivalists active in other movements. My approach has instead been inspired by Livingston's general theory of musical revivalism:

revivals are a coming together, a convergence of various circumstances and personal motivations centring on the fascination and emulation of a music culturally and historically distanced from the present. Music revivals are a product of both specific historical circumstances as well as general intellectual and social trends.<sup>48</sup>

The combined approach of the cultural historian and the biographer have therefore been necessary. The first to achieve my aim of assessing both the cultural and social climate within which the revival occurred and the links to earlier cultural periods applied to the material by its revivers, and the second in contextualising revivalists' use of the material within their 'circumstances and personal motivations'. My case studies prove that it is impossible to separate the history of the revival and its development from the personal interests and motivations of its key players, and from the relationships between them. It is undeniable that the course of the revival was shaped in key moments by major disagreements either ideologically or personally between important individuals, and this too is demonstrated in my appendices. Previous scholarship has often ignored such context, and in the cases of Marson and Noel in particular, not only their valuable contributions to the revival but also the links between their political and religious work and their involvement in folksong and dance have not been investigated. This is the first academic work to examine Marson and Noel as folk revivalists in the first instance, all

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<sup>47</sup> Harker, *Fakesong*, p. ix.

<sup>48</sup> Livingston, p. 81.

other work having been centred on their status as important Christian socialists.<sup>49</sup> It is also the first piece of work to bring to bear the personal papers of Charles Marson in creating an understanding of his work in the folk revival and the intersection of that work with both political and religious interests and personal relationships with other revivalists. Kimmins' archive has also not previously been made use of in specific relation to her interest in folk dance: more attention has been given to her social work. While Neal's and Gardiner's archives have informed the analyses of their roles in the folk revival previously, I present new interpretations through comparison with other figures. The evidence of an affair between Gardiner's mother and a senior member of the EFDSS dealt with in Appendix II is however new material not previously taken into account in scholarly work on Gardiner or on the folk revival.

This thesis, then, is not a group biography, but uses a biographical approach and much biographical material to illuminate both the contexts of and the conflicting ideologies within the movement in its own time. A significant number of the thesis' primary sources are archival, and include letters, diaries, drafts for newspaper and magazine articles and correspondence, pamphlets, and personal collections of press cuttings. These sources also include one unpublished biography, of Marson, and two unpublished autobiographies, those of Neal and Gardiner.<sup>50</sup> These long manuscripts, along with Noel's published autobiography, give a valuable insight into their subjects' own thoughts on their role in the folk revival, their relationships with each other and with others such as Cecil Sharp, the meanings they saw in folksong and dance, and how they felt it to be related to their other work and their worldviews at large.<sup>51</sup> The bulk of the non-archival primary material consulted consists of the published works of all of

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<sup>49</sup> Alongside Reckitt's chapter on Marson, the same collection contained a chapter on Noel: Robert Woodifield, 'Conrad Noel, Catholic Crusader', in Reckitt ed., pp. 135-80. Other works include Reg Groves, *Conrad Noel and the Thaxted Movement: An Adventure in Christian Socialism* (London: Merlin Press, 1967) and Kenneth Leech's edited collection *Conrad Noel and the Catholic Crusade: A Critical Evaluation* (London: The Jubilee Group, 1993), as well as Burns' recent work 'Beyond the Red Vicar'.

<sup>50</sup> Neal's autobiography is also at the VWML: Mary Neal, *As A Tale That Is Told: The Autobiography of a Victorian Woman*. MN Box 1. Gardiner's autobiography is held at CUL, in two volumes: 'North Sea and Baltic: An autobiographical record of the younger generation in 1926-32, Volume I.' Gardiner MS A2/10/3(a), and 'North Sea and Baltic: An autobiographical record of the younger generation in 1926-32, Volume II.' Gardiner MS A2/10/3(b).

<sup>51</sup> Conrad Noel, *An Autobiography*, Sidney Dark (ed.) (London: J.M. Dent, 1945).



these figures, both that relating to their work in the folk revival and to their work in other movements, as well as a small amount of fictional and semi-fictional material published by Marson and Kimmins.<sup>52</sup> In the case of Marson this means his collaborative work with Sharp on the first three volumes of the *Folk-Songs from Somerset* series, the above-mentioned fictional and semi-fictional writing, as well as a number of books and articles on Christian socialism.<sup>53</sup> The key texts by Noel include the manifesto of his Catholic Crusade, in which he sets out the beliefs and aims which shaped his work, and *The Battle of the Flags*, an account of the controversy caused by his display of the Red Flag and Sinn Féin flag in Thaxted church and an explanation of his beliefs on national identity and nationalism in relation to socialism and religion.<sup>54</sup> Neal's primary sources deal only with Morris dancing, but delve deeply into its use as social work and set out her belief in its transformative potential. These sources include two handbooks of Morris dance instructions, as well as a number of articles and pamphlets about the dancing of her *Espérance* club and the social changes effected by this.<sup>55</sup> Kimmins also produced a number of dance handbooks, and these are analysed in

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<sup>52</sup> Marson published two books of short stories: Charles Marson, *Faery Stories* (Adelaide: E. A. Petherwick, 1891), and Charles Marson, *Turnpike Tales* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1897). He also produced a semi-fictional work about the lives of his parishioners in Hambridge, *Village Silhouettes*, 2nd edn., (London: The Society of SS. Peter & Paul, 1916). Kimmins likewise produced a semi-fictional account of the work of her organization The Guild of Play, told through the story of one of its members: Grace Kimmins, *Polly of Parker's Rents* (London: James Bowden, 1899).

<sup>53</sup> Cecil Sharp and Charles L. Marson, *Folk Songs from Somerset. Gathered and Edited with Pianoforte Accompaniment, First Series*, 2nd edn., (London: Simpkin, Schott, Taunton: Barnicott and Pearce, 1904; repr. 1905); Cecil Sharp and Charles L. Marson, *Folk Songs from Somerset. Gathered and Edited with Pianoforte Accompaniment, Second Series*, 2nd edn., (London: Simpkin, Schott, Taunton: Barnicott and Pearce, 1905; repr. 1911); Cecil Sharp and Charles L. Marson, *Folk Songs from Somerset. Gathered and Edited with Pianoforte Accompaniment, Third Series*, (London: Simpkin, Schott, Taunton: Barnicott and Pearce, 1906). Marson's most notable works on Christian socialism are *God's Co-operative Society: Suggestions on the Strategy of the Church* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1914), and a pair of articles, 'Huppim and Muppim', *The Commonwealth*, July 1901; repr. in *God's Co-operative*, pp. 40-53; 'And Ard', *The Commonwealth*, November 1904; repr. in *God's Co-operative*, pp. 53-65.

<sup>54</sup> Conrad Noel, *The Catholic Crusade, 1918-1936: A reprint of its original Manifesto with an introduction and notes by Reg Groves* (London: Archive One, 1970); Conrad Noel, *The Battle of the Flags: A Study in Christian Politics* (London: The Labour Publishing Company Ltd., 1922).

<sup>55</sup> Mary Neal, *The Espérance Morris Book, Part I: A Manual of Morris Dances Folk-Songs and Singing Games*, 3rd edn., (London: Curwen, 1910); Mary Neal, *The Espérance Morris Book Part II* (London:

combination with her accounts of the work of her social work organisations, found both within archival material and her published account of the hospital she founded in Chailey, Sussex.<sup>56</sup> Gardiner, like Noel, did not produce any collections or handbooks, but discussed folk material and its use as part of his political and social aims and its place in his worldview. He did, however, publish a number of accounts of Morris tours, often in his own publications and the news sheet of his organisation the Springhead Ring.<sup>57</sup> Other primary sources include two books and a vast number of articles and speeches, many of which were gathered into an anthology after his death.<sup>58</sup> These primary sources, in conjunction with the wide range of available archival material, allow me to fully contextualise the involvement of these figures in the folk revival within both their own lives and their work with other movements.

In addition to the articles exploring the ideas of authenticity and the 'embodiment' of culture and memory by Buckland mentioned above, I have engaged frequently with Rishona Zimring's recent work on social dance in interwar culture, particularly with regards to Zimring's analyses of the physicality of dance and the social

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Curwen, 1912). A pamphlet sets out her ideas on the positive social transformation enabled by living in musical harmony: Mary Neal, *Set to Music* (Reigate: Reigate Press, 1908), repr. in *The Espérance Morris Book, Part I: A Manual of Morris Dances Folk-Songs and Singing Games*, 3rd edtn. (London: Curwen, 1910), pp. 1-2.

<sup>56</sup> Grace Kimmins, *The Guild of Play Book of Festival and Dance* (London: Curwen, 1907); Grace Kimmins, *Four National Dances: the sailor's hornpipe, the Irish jig, the Scotch Reel, Cadair Idris* (London: Curwen, 1910); Grace Kimmins, *The Guild of Play Book of National Dances* (London: Curwen, 1910); Grace Kimmins, *The Masque of the Children of the Empire* (London: Curwen, 1913); Grace Kimmins, *Peasant Dances of Many Lands* (London: Evans Bros., 1918); Grace Kimmins, *Heritage Craft Schools and Hospitals, Chailey, 1903-1948; being an account of the pioneer work for crippled children* (London: Baynard Press, 1948).

<sup>57</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'A Brief Account of the Travelling Morrice' (written 1928), in *North Sea and Baltic*, High Summer 1938, New Series No. 4, pp. 75-81. GRQ35, VWML; Rolf Gardiner, 'The Travelling Morrice and the Cambridge Morris Men', *The Springhead Ring News Sheet*, No. 55 (1961), pp. 9-12. GRQ35, VWML.

<sup>58</sup> Rolf Gardiner, *World Without End: British Politics and the Younger Generation* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1932); Rolf Gardiner, *England Herself: ventures in rural restoration* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943). The anthology is Andrew Best (ed.), *Water Springing from the Ground: An Anthology of the writings of Rolf Gardiner* (Oxford: Alden and Mowbray, 1972).

values inherent in moving together as a group.<sup>59</sup> I have applied Zimring's interpretation to the work of Neal, Kimmins, and Gardiner in particular, along with the concept of 'muscular bonding' developed by William H. McNeill. Both works have been vital in establishing dance as an important locus of communality.<sup>60</sup> Peter d'Alroy Jones' history of the second wave of Christian socialism, of which Marson and Noel were significant proponents, has also been a valuable resource, as have Roy Judge's detailed accounts of key aspects of the folk revival.<sup>61</sup>

## Chapter Summaries

Chapter One begins the thesis with an examination of the involvement of Charles Marson in the folk revival at the very start of the period of active revival beginning in 1903. Between 1903 and 1906 Marson and Cecil Sharp, with whom he had maintained a friendship since meeting in Australia in the previous decade, published in collaboration three volumes of a folksong collection, with many of the songs having been collected from Marson's parishioners. This fruitful partnership was ended by an explosive personal disagreement, discussion of which forms Appendix I. This chapter, however, deals with Marson's self-assigned duty of interpretation, a role his Christian socialism led him to believe should be taken on by all parish priests. This duty was essentially an effort to make the middle and upper classes aware of the cultural and economic lives of the working classes, underpinned by the hope that when those in charge began to view the working classes not merely as abstractions or statistics but as individuals it would be impossible for them to continue ignoring or acting against their interests, and they would instead support trades unions, reforms, and all political measures of benefit to the workers. This chapter charts Marson's engagement with

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<sup>59</sup> Rishona Zimring, *Social Dance and the Modernist Imagination in Interwar Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

<sup>60</sup> William H. McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 2-3.

<sup>61</sup> Peter d'Alroy Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968); Roy Judge, 'D'Arcy Ferris and the Bidford Morris', *Folk Music Journal*, 4, no.5 (1984), pp. 443-480; Judge, 'Mary Neal and the Espérance Morris' (1985); Roy Judge, 'Merrie England and the Morris, 1881-1910', *Folklore*, 104, nos.1-2 (1993), pp. 124-143; Roy Judge, 'Cecil Sharp and Morris 1906-1909', *Folk Music Journal*, 8, no.2 (2002), pp. 195-228.

folksong as a method of cultural interpretation, and his ultimate realisation that individual lives, rather than cultural products, were worthy of celebration. It deals also with his irreverence and wit, and seeks to disrupt previous characterisations of Marson as a bowdlerizing editor with examples of correspondence discussing his dislike of prudery, as well as addressing Marson's own views on the preservation versus social use of cultural heritage, an opposition of major importance in the development of the folk revival in its first decade.

Chapter Two also examines a moment of intersection between the folk revival and Christian socialism, at a later stage and with a focus upon the active revival of dance as a social activity, rather than upon the dissemination of songs as cultural products. The chapter focuses on the encouragement of Morris dancing as a communal activity derived from the English past and an expression of gaiety in the small town of Thaxted, Essex, by Conrad Noel and his wife Miriam, beginning in 1911. The chapter firmly contextualises this encouragement of English dance within Noel's strong religious and political views, most notably those on nationalism and national identity, the earthly nature of the Kingdom of Heaven, and his anti-Puritanism. Raphael Samuel noted that folk dance could be seen as 'a way of freeing the limbs from Victorian tight-lacing', and for anti-Puritan Noel it offered the perfect combination of these values of happy freedom, Englishness, and group activity.<sup>62</sup> Noel's patriotism intersected with his religious beliefs and his politics: a strong socialist International and the Kingdom of Heaven or Divine Commonwealth to be brought about on earth could only be brought to fruition by strong and independent nationalities working in cooperative harmony. This was the meaning of his flying of the Sinn Fein flag and Red Flag - the vital interplay between self-determining nationhood and international solidarity. The Kingdom of Heaven also needed preparation: it could only come about through a similar coordination between harmony and individuality. The symbolic harmony of music, the cooperation of dance, and the Englishness of traditional dance all found a place in Noel's vision for social transformation, and this chapter investigates these factors in relation to his work in the folk revival.

Chapter Three likewise explores dance as a communal activity perceived to be the locus of positive social values derived from the English past. Mary Neal and Grace Kimmins made use of folk dance as part of their strategies for building community and

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<sup>62</sup> Samuel, p. 307.

belonging through their social work with sweated seamstresses, slum children and disabled young people. This chapter explores their use of a nostalgic 'Merrie England' aesthetic in a forward-looking manner, as 'inspiration for future progress' in line with other socialists of the time.<sup>63</sup> Neal and her colleagues saw Morris as a dance embodying socialist values as they associated it with the 'Merrie England' of the past which, as discussed by Blatchford and defined by Hyndman, was a time 'merrie' for the English as a whole, 'not merely for the landlords and capitalists at the top, who live in ease of the fruits of their labour.'<sup>64</sup> They were concerned also with the past and past culture as a 'heritage' belonging to the common people, and sought to empower the young people of their organisations with ownership of a national culture. This chapter examines the social work of Neal and Kimmins as a transformative use of folk material and adds to the examination of the material's potentially transformative uses that of recreation, building upon the previously discussed loci of heritage, communality, and identity.

Chapter Four retains a focus on Neal and Kimmins, and positions the transformative potential of folk revivalism identified by Neal as developed increasingly in opposition to other strands of the revival, particularly that developed by Sharp as a national form of 'high art'. The chapter draws links with Marson and his opposition to seriousness in cultural enterprise, drawing together Marson and Neal in their belief that fun and irreverence could be of great social use as well as acknowledging the fact that both faced major disagreements with Sharp, and explores the notion of the incompatibility of serious art and philanthropy. The chapter also examines the different extents to which Neal and Sharp's disagreement was founded upon ideology, being the style, meanings, and appropriate uses for traditional dance, and how much was based on a battle for control of a movement beginning to attract public recognition and the ability to shape that recognition. In doing so this chapter also compares the different treatment afforded to Neal and Kimmins by Sharp despite the similarity of their aims and values. Finally, it charts the defeat of the transformative model of the folk revival in the pre-war era.

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<sup>63</sup> Paul Readman, *Land and Nation in England: Patriotism, National Identity, and the Politics of Land, 1880-1914* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2008), p. 187.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Blatchford, *Merrie England* (London: The Clarion Press, 1908); H.M. Hyndman, *England for All: The Text Book of Democracy* (London: E.W. Allen, 1881), p. 9.

Chapter Five frames the participation in the folk revival of Rolf Gardiner as a manifestation of the transformative mode of revival in the interwar period. It offers a strong contrast to the previous chapters in that it examines this potential with the context of Gardiner's political views, which were strongly divergent from that of the other figures previously focused on. It does, however, draw out certain comparisons involving the value of community, communal activity and shared heritage, but examines Gardiner's elitism with regard to these ideas: his communities were not open to all, and cultural inheritance was selective, not egalitarian as it was for the others. The chapter again positions the transformative potential of folk revivalism as seen by Gardiner in opposition to the now fully-institutionalised model offered by Sharp and his colleagues, allowing for further comparison and contrast with Neal. It also explores Gardiner's belief in Morris as a ritual dance of fertility and analyses the links of that belief to his ideas of rural regeneration, the English soil, localism, and masculinity. The chapter then examines the effect of the application of these ideas to an active revival of folk material, and the problems generated thereby. It seeks to refute allegations that the movement was permeated with his influence, citing his difficult personal relations with the movement's leaders (see Appendix II), and his lack of credibility among the wider membership.

Chapter Six charts the final period in the development of the interwar revival by examining Gardiner's failure to develop the influence he craved, and through analysis of the birth of a new organisation, The Morris Ring. It offers an examination of the borrowings of this final stage of development from earlier interpretations, notably that of Neal and Noel via renewed impetus in Thaxted, and discusses a resurgence of belief in the transformative potential of folksong and dance developed by notable individuals who broke into the established revival where Gardiner could not. The chapter ends with a discussion on the literal nature of Gardiner's own beliefs in transformative power as inherent in magical dance ritual, contrasting this with the symbolic power vested in the forms by the other revivalists discussed in the thesis but providing also a comparison with the way in which they all equated their beliefs in the transformative potential of the material they aimed to revive with their own deeply-held political and religious beliefs.

Each chapter examines beliefs of certain figures that the material they were attempting to revive would transform for the better the society in which they lived. The chapters assess this idea within its context as an element the social outlooks of those

individuals, affected also by their political and religious beliefs; and explore the complimentary and the contrasting ways in which these views shaped their involvement in the folk revival. Thus they are grouped into pairs, with the first pair of chapters examining involvement in the revival by adherents of Christian socialism, the second pair investigating the use of folksong and dance by youth social workers, and the final pair dealing with the interaction with the revival of a noted organicist and rural revivalist. Together, they show that the folk movement attracted a range of people of different backgrounds and diverse interests, but that these revivalists were united in the belief that folksong and dance contained the potential to change society in a variety of ways and located within a variety of meanings and values applied to the material at different stages.

## Chapter One: Charles Marson, Hambridge, and the Priest as Interpreter

### A very beautiful new life

'There is a very beautiful new life springing up all over our country and because Thaxted is one of the centres of this, I want you to realise that you have your own part to play in it', wrote Mary Neal to 'My Dear Girls and Boys' who danced in Thaxted.<sup>1</sup> In this letter, published in Conrad Noel's 'parish magazine' *The Country Town*, she asked that 'When you dance the Morris Dances [...] I want you to feel that you are part of the truest and best movement towards righteousness and sincerity and upright dealing.'<sup>2</sup> Neal, founder of the Espérance Club for girls employed in the sweatshops of the London dress trade, became in 1905 the first person to attempt the revival of Morris dancing, arranging the instruction of her club by William Kimber from the Headington Quarry Morris side. In turn, two of her young dancers were sent to Thaxted in 1910, at the request of Miriam Noel, wife of the Christian Socialist vicar Conrad, to teach the young people of Thaxted. It was due to Noel that Thaxted had become one of the centres of the 'beautiful new life' that Neal and many others were attempting to build as the solution to all of the problems left behind by the last two centuries of industrialisation, urbanisation, and the worsening degradation of the working classes through these changes. Neal was not the only one to think of the folk revival as a 'movement towards righteousness and sincerity and upright dealing.' The folk movement spread its tendrils into many aspects of the culture of its time, through shared aims, values, and aesthetics, and through the activities of its proponents in other spheres. This was acknowledged at the time by the revival's central figure, Cecil Sharp:

It spreads a wide net and entangles within its meshes specialists in many different branches of knowledge. The historian, musician, ethnologist, educationalist, social reformer, archaeologist and student of folk-lore, are, one and all, attracted to its study.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Neal, 'To the Thaxted Morris Dancers', *The Country Town*, 1, no.9 (1911), pp. 8-9 (p. 8).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Sharp, *Conclusions*, p. x.



One type of 'specialist' that Sharp declined to mention was the Church of England vicar, and more specifically, the Christian socialist, many of whom interested themselves in folksong and dance. The most notable of these were Charles Marson and Conrad Noel.

The most obvious link between the two movements is that they both focussed their attention on the lives and culture of the working classes. If the folk movement wished to bring recognition of the vitality and value of working-class music and culture to the attention of wider society, so also did Marson, who conceived of his role as parson as entailing a duty to act as an 'interpreter' between classes: not to translate middle-class ideals to the working classes, but rather to goad his own class into socialist action through a better understanding of working-class lives.<sup>4</sup> To Marson, his calling meant that he 'ought to be correcting the unworthy caricatures of the poor which fill the press, the table-talk of diners out, the art galleries, the bookshops', believing also that the pattern of missions and settlements from public schools and universities to London's East End ought to be reversed, with missions from 'Seven Dials and Hoxton to Oxford or to Eton' necessary because the poor had never before been so segregated and out of mind.<sup>5</sup>

Marson and Noel's Christianity focussed on Jesus the outcast, the revolutionary working-class carpenter who died for his cause at the hands of the bourgeoisie (Noel even named one of his books *Jesus the Heretic*).<sup>6</sup> Underpinning their socialism was of course this sense of the rebel Jesus as class warrior, but they did not believe that the social problems they railed against could be solved through economics alone. They took from the incarnation of Christ as a man on earth that the Kingdom of Heaven was to be realised on earth as an ideal society of individuals in communion with one another, a Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God: that a fundamental change in the relationships between individuals was necessary to fix the world's ills.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Marson, *God's Co-operative*, pp. 105-7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107-9.

<sup>6</sup> Conrad Noel, *Jesus the Heretic* (London: The Religious Book Club, 1940).

<sup>7</sup> D'Alroy Jones delineates the theological arguments for socialism made by late nineteenth-century Christian Socialists:

1. *From patristics*: that many of the church fathers were socialists and communists.
2. *From the New Testament and the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount*: that Jesus Christ was a socialist.

Strong, harmonious communities were the answer, forming the basis of a revitalised society enriched with a shared culture in which all not only had a stake, but which would itself build and bind together these communities. They believed that industrialisation and its attendant changes in living conditions, working hours and community structures had robbed the working classes of their particular culture, and the nation itself of a heritage rooted in this common culture. More importantly, such disruption had destroyed the harmonious and self-nurturing communities which sustained both life and culture. Their own responses to and work within Christian socialism and the folk revival were to a significant extent aesthetically-driven, but they also sought to move beyond their aesthetic attraction to the material, to the symbolic and the social functions of the folksongs and dances they made use of in their regenerative efforts. It was almost as if the culture of the people had a healing or restorative quality of its own, leading naturally and inevitably to the new society they wished to build: Noel wrote 'that the mystical element in the Russian people was much more the inspiration of the Russian revolution than the appeal to the Marxian dialectic.'<sup>8</sup>

They were looking to the past in their religion as well as their cultural interests, building upon and reviving older forms. Marson linked his work to that of the Oxford Movement, aesthetically of course but politically and socially too. The political and social aspects are what he chose to foreground, lamenting that the High Churchman of his day claimed to be a 'linear descendent of the Puseyites just because he can mimic their tones and wrap himself in their old chasubles,' but did not take up the challenge of 'extending their principles, with their old zeal, their strenuous and bold piety, their crusading spirit.'<sup>9</sup> The crusaders of the Oxford Movement, Marson argued, would not have wanted to stop their reforms 'at the west door or the lych-gate', but, had they had the time would have extended those principles 'to the street and the shop, the market

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3. *From the sacraments and the Book of Common Prayer*: that the modern church in its worship, symbol, and ritual exhibits a socialist faith.

4. *From the doctrine of Divine Immanence*: that God's presence, everywhere, in nature and in man, destroys the artificial distinction between the "sacred" and the "secular" worlds, sanctifies the material life, and supports the socialist call for a Kingdom of God *on earth*.'

D'Alroy Jones, pp. 86-7.

<sup>8</sup> Noel, *Autobiography*, p. 108.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Marson, 'Social Teaching of the Early Fathers,' in Andrew Reid (ed.), *Vox Clamantium: The Gospel of the People* (London: Innes, 1894), pp. 198-224 (pp. 198-9).

and the law-court.'<sup>10</sup> Marson declared that it was this task which fell to the true descendants of the Puseyites, not merely to play a game of dress-up with their vestments, waft their incense and shut the church door upon its meaning at the end of the service. Noel too looked back to the Oxford Movement, but his introduction of Morris dancing, procession and music into Thaxted community life was also part of a hoped-for return to the earlier socialism of William Morris, an escape from the 'drabness' of contemporary socialism and the 'imaginative and intellectual poverty of Labour's leaders' who had begun to urge their followers to 'relinquish the aim of achieving the good society, and [...] accept a handful of grudgingly-given bribes in place of the bright, generous world which Morris and others had called upon them to win.'<sup>11</sup> An example of Noel's curious mixing of medievalism and what the *Illustrated London News* called 'Bolshevism in an Essex Church' is that paper's illustration of a sermon, showing Noel in the pulpit, preaching either socialism, the Gospel or both, with a face like thunder and fists raised. The congregation includes a large group of girls with their heads covered in patterned headscarves, with bunches of flowers laid in the aisle at their side. The flag of St George leans against a pillar behind them. The caption of this illustration asserts that Noel 'combines Bolshevism, for which he claims to find sanction in the Gospel, with incense and elaborate medieval vestments and ritual.'<sup>12</sup> These aspects of Noel's religion were a demonstration that socialism could be as beautiful and vibrant as the Anglo-Catholics had made Christianity. By linking them aesthetically, Noel was also forging a visual link between what he believed to be the identical underlying political and social concepts of Christianity and socialism. The aesthetics of these priests' Christian socialism, and those of the folk revival too, were past-focussed, but their aims were anything but conservative. For Noel and Marson, the folk customs of rural England formed a major aspect of their plan for the building of a society in which it was possible for all to live the 'beautiful life'.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Groves, p. 75.

<sup>12</sup> 'Bolshevism in an Essex church: The "Red" Vicar of Thaxted preaching', *Illustrated London News*, 28 May 1921, p. 701.

### **Father Marson and the Red Vicar**

Radical movements needed radical movers, and these two movements found them in Noel and Marson. Noel reported in his autobiography that he had in front of him 'anonymous scraps of paper with the red hand and other bloody emblems threatening to do me in' sent to him by those angered that his outspoken politics and unorthodox methods should be combined with his position as Church of England vicar.<sup>13</sup> His famed display of the Red Flag and Sinn Fein flag alongside the flag of St George, and refusal to fly the Union Jack, were the blue touch paper to the already well-prepared fireworks laid for him in the surrounding area, despite the seemingly genuine approval of the residents and churchgoers of Thaxted itself.<sup>14</sup> Marson, too, received his knocks from those who did not approve of this combination of views and position: he was rejected for ordination by six bishops and sacked from five different curacies, and only acquired his eventual Crown Living in Hambridge in 1895 through a petition from his friends to Lord Rosebery.<sup>15</sup>

Harker, in his attempt to discredit Sharp's work, brushes briefly over Marson with the phrase 'The vicar was a Fabian socialist.'<sup>16</sup> Marson's socialism was indeed of a Fabian nature, having as its focus co-operation rather than class warfare, but this is not to say that he was either insincere or inactive as Harker suggests. He was a member of the Christian Social Union and the Guild of St. Matthew, taking up residence on the leftmost fringes of those bodies: in 1908 he, along with James Adderley, Percy Dearmer and F.R. Donaldson, caused a major stir in the CSU by producing a pamphlet declaring their socialism to have the exact same aim as secular socialism, and calling for the public ownership of the means of production.<sup>17</sup> He was also editor of the

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<sup>13</sup> Noel, *Autobiography*, p. 112.

<sup>14</sup> Despite numerous raids by outsiders, mainly Cambridge students, to remove the flags, they were never touched by residents. The flags' place in the church was only guaranteed by the democratic approval of the churchwardens and council, and there were petitions by residents in support of Noel's decision to replace them after such raids. When the flags eventually had to be removed, it was because the Bishop chose to enforce a technicality. Noel, *Battle*, pp. 9-10, p. 14, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Sutcliffe, p. 11, p. 196.

<sup>16</sup> Harker, *One for the Money*, p. 147.

<sup>17</sup> D'Alroy Jones, p.219.

*Christian Socialist* between 1884 and 1887.<sup>18</sup> Marson had begun his championing of the working-class cause at a young age: after graduating from Oxford, he moved to the East End at Christmas in 1881 in order to carry out social work, first at Whitechapel Settlement and later at Toynbee Hall.<sup>19</sup> He worked as a curate too, at St. Jude's Whitechapel, but ill health urged him to search for a curacy in the countryside. A reply from Lord Arthur Hervey, Bishop of Bath and Wells, to a letter asking for a curacy in that diocese, demonstrates that, as with Noel, those outside of their particular strand of the Church saw the combination of ardent socialism and the status of a rural vicar as undesirable: 'the views which you express and the special subjects which you have made your study are hardly suitable for a country parish'.<sup>20</sup> There followed a curacy in Petersham, terminated due to his socialistic preaching, and then a three-year appointment as Rector of Orlestone. Marson's time in Orlestone also proved tense, again due to his outspoken preaching which damaged relations with the patrons, along with his sudden transformation from Broad to High Churchmanship: Marson left Orlestone one day dressed in corduroy suit and red tie and with his characteristic brown beard, and returned clean-shaven, dressed in a fine lawn collar and carrying a silver pyx.<sup>21</sup> Rather than attempting to renew this appointment, Marson set off for South Australia to take up a post as curate in Glenelg, a suburb of Adelaide. Shortly before setting sail in May 1889, he became engaged to Clotilda (Chloe) Bayne, the sister of a university friend who had worked with him in the East End. Chloe joined him in Australia in 1890, where they were married (Cecil Sharp, whom Marson had met at social events in Adelaide, gave the bride away). The family returned to Britain in 1892. After more failed curacies, and officiating at Sharp's wedding in 1893, 1894 saw Marson a curate at St. Mary's, Somers Town. In Somers Town, where most of the men were employed in the cab trade, Marson was able to apply his socialism practically, and was at the centre of strike action by the cabbies. They were protesting at the high rent on their cabs and the yard fees charged by the owners, the costs of taking out a cab for a day meaning that they often earned only enough to pay this rent and fees, leaving

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<sup>18</sup> Hugh Anderson, 'Marson, Charles Latimer', 2006, in *ODNB Online*  
 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/57227>> [accessed 5 Jan 2016].

<sup>19</sup> Sutcliffe, p. 23; Anderson, 'Marson, Charles Latimer'.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Lord Arthur Hervey 20 December 1883. A/DFS1/2, Marson MS. SHC.

<sup>21</sup> Sutcliffe, p. 92.

nothing for themselves or ending the day in debt to the cab owners.<sup>22</sup> As well as writing to the Press on behalf of the cabbies, using his contacts to have printed a high-profile interview with a striking cabby; and fundraising for the relief of their families, Marson preached vast outdoor sermons to them: Chloe records in her diary a 'glorious sermon to the 500 cabbies'.<sup>23</sup> The strike was won, leading to the reduction of cab rents and the removal of yard fees, as well as the formal establishment of the London Cabdriver's Union.<sup>24</sup> Marson's efforts were obviously appreciated by the cabbies, as they presented him with an inscribed desk and a silver pyx to thank him for his help.<sup>25</sup> Chloe's diary for this year, 1894, described Marson's growing engagement with the groups of Christian socialists gathered in London. Charles preached at the radically Anglo-Catholic Church of St. Mary's, Primrose Hill, under Percy Dearmer of *English Hymnal* fame, and befriended Dearmer and his curate, Conrad Noel.<sup>26</sup> The diary also documents the continuing close friendship between the Sharp family and the Marsons.<sup>27</sup>

In these early years of their ministries, Noel and Marson developed not only the contacts and friendships which would become so important to their work, but also honed the aesthetics, politics, and churchmanship that would later come together to form the backbone of their Christian socialism, and lead them to combine this with the study and use of folk material. They would later both come to see the Christian element of this combination of politics, aesthetics, nationalism and religion not as the base model to which these other aspects were applied, but as the overarching force running through and embodied in these other elements. Their socialism and their aesthetics were the outward and worldly expressions of the Gospel and Christ's presence on earth: Marson declared that 'It is not necessary for every Churchman to join a Socialist Society, because he has already done this in his baptism.'<sup>28</sup> In his typically more strident tones, Noel preached the 'Real Presence in the Communism of THE COMMUNION,

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with a striking cabman, *Daily Chronicle*, 15 May 15 1894, p. 6. A\DFS/2/4, Marson MS. SHC.

<sup>23</sup> Diary entry Wednesday 6 June 1894. A\DFS/2/3, Marson MS. SHC.

<sup>24</sup> A story of the London Cabbies' Strike of 1894. A\DFS/2/4.

<sup>25</sup> Sutcliffe, p. 184.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Diary entries 13 January, 25 February, 14 May, 15 June, 30 June, 9 September, 8 November, 22 December, 25 December, A\DFS/2/3.

<sup>27</sup> Diary entries 2 January, 2 March, 28 June, 19 Sept, 22 December.

<sup>28</sup> Marson, *God's Co-operative*, pp. 106-7.

THE HOLY MEAL, under the form of nourishing bread and merry wine.<sup>29</sup> It was the 'merry wine' of the folk revival, the celebratory nature of song and dance, which begged these men to make use of it in their religious and political movements. These tooth-cutting years prepared the men for their eventual long-term ministries in Hambridge and Thaxted, and gave them the tools with which to transform these two communities, Thaxted in particular, into living examples of their creeds.

### **Learning Hambridge**

During his time in Australia, Marson wrote regularly to Chloe. His letters could be but playful but were also thoughtful, describing his everyday life, but also containing political and religious musings. On 30 October 1889 he wrote:

I had a swim in the sea [...] to try and clear my wits concerning All Saints. They are very nice to talk about, those chaps in haloes - but [...] I think ordinary coves more agreeable and clayey. If the former are the salt, the latter are the meat of the earth, and after all the only use of Saints is to bless, preserve and keep nous autres.<sup>30</sup>

Marson's religion was, like Noel's, humanised. It was all very well to talk about the saints and a far away heaven, but God was immanent for them in the living men and women on earth (Noel was even refused ordination for this very belief, the bishop accusing him of Pantheism for asserting that God actually dwelt in men and women on Earth.)<sup>31</sup> Marson implied in his letter that religion should be centred on the needs of ordinary people, in that the Saints were not there to be honoured by those below, but instead to do honour to those on earth by their blessings. Ordinary people were central to Marson's theology at this early stage, and his later participation in the folk revival and collaborations with Sharp revealed to him that ordinary people could be at the centre of cultural movements as well as religious and political ones. A life-long socialist, Marson was saddened by how late the realisation came to him that what he truly loved and valued was the people themselves, and not just what they represented in

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<sup>29</sup> Noel, *Catholic Crusade*, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> Letter 30 October 1889. A/DFS1/5, Marson MS. SHC.

<sup>31</sup> Noel, *Autobiography*, p. 35.

his political outlook or interpretation of the Gospel, or the songs and tunes they carried with them:

These Village Silhouettes have a serious purpose. It is to bear some testimony to what the author has discovered - how shameful and blind to have discovered it so late! - the greatness, the sweetness, the unexpectedness and the cleverness of God's common people, in the green of the world.<sup>32</sup>

This book, written in the year of his death, *Village Silhouettes* was a celebration of the people of Hambridge, as he had known them over the two decades of his ministry there. The silhouettes are tender portraits, detailing habits and sharing anecdotes about individuals, often tributes to those no longer living. Each piece is illustrated with an artistic silhouette, cut out by Marson himself.

But Marson's friendship with the villagers of Hambridge was slow to develop. After three years, in 1898, he wrote to Percy Widdrington that 'We are doing poorly, less than 60 communicants this Xmas' and, shared his worry that 'I don't know how to speak any message to these folk.'<sup>33</sup> He had already written about these concerns, albeit in a fictionalised manner, in 1897. The story of 'Mr Lavender and his Legacy' seems to explore Marson's worries about his own ineffectualness and the futility of his efforts.<sup>34</sup> Mr Lavender, like Marson 'a thin, pale enthusiast, fresh from a slum parish', at first enlivened 'Hareby on the Wold' and lived among his flock in the way that Marson wished to: 'how wide the doors then stood, and how welcome was the poorest lad to the study or the dinner-table'.<sup>35</sup> Yet Lavender slowly withdraws, the church falls to ruin and he is no longer able to share his spiritual wealth (represented by his jealously-guarded rose garden). Eventually we find that the cause of Lavender's withdrawal from community was his wife, who had 'no notion of the work or duties of a clergyman, nor of his wife' and 'hated labourers at meals and tobacco smoke'.<sup>36</sup> Mrs Lavender 'was proud and fine and fond of roses. She drew in crayons and worked wool and bead

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<sup>32</sup> Marson, *Silhouettes*, p. iv.

<sup>33</sup> Letter 26 December 1898. A/DFS1/16, Marson MS. SHC.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Marson, 'Mr Lavender and his Legacy' in *Turnpike Tales*, pp. 3-24.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.



mats',<sup>37</sup> bearing some resemblance to Chloe Marson, who was described by family friend Etherington as a 'gentle liberal', apt to 'divide society into two classes, those who were to teach and improve and those who were to be taught and improved'.<sup>38</sup> Marson did not make such distinctions, or if he did, believed that it was the working classes who had much to teach the middle and upper classes. It is difficult to say whether Marson's relationship with Chloe, which became strained after the move to Hambridge and remained so until Marson died in 1914, affected his work in the parish, but it did later become the cause of an argument between Marson and Sharp, leading to the breaking of the men's working partnership and changing the direction and focus of the folk song revival (see Appendix I for an examination of this quarrel).

Etherington confirmed that Marson found the first years in Hambridge especially difficult:

In all his previous experience he had never failed to get his message across. He had always aroused response in the form of antagonism, if not approval, but this dull aloofness which might be hostility or indifference was a sore trial to his volatile spirit.<sup>39</sup>

But for Marson, if not for Lavender, who dies alone and isolated, things improved. He found some way to break through the barriers of class and religious status. It appears that Marson did genuinely come to be not only accepted but loved by his parishioners, evidenced by the warm tones of the letters sent to Etherington about Marson in the 1930s during the compilation of his biography. Rose England, wife of the vicarage gardener, wrote even earlier, immediately after his death in 1914:

no one knows better than we do what a dear Friend as well as master he was to us all the years he was at Hambridge [...], we always thought he was fit for one of the highest places on earth (as I am sure he has in Heaven).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Etherington, p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 142-3.

<sup>40</sup> Typed copy of letter from Rose England, wife of John England, in Canada, 26 March 1914. A\DFS/1/24, Marson MS. SHC.

England also related that the family had kept every letter and photograph he had sent them, preserving the photos behind glass.<sup>41</sup> Louie Hooper, one of the most prolific contributors to Sharp and Marson's *Folk-Songs from Somerset* collections, wrote of her own accord to Etherington to share her memories:

every Maunday Thursday evening he used to have three little boys and wash their feet by the font [...]. He chose my boy one year as I was a widow, [...] and he used to clothe them [...] with lovely suits of cloth and shoes and stockings. [...] Every little child loved him.

he used to load the donkey-cart every Christmas eve [...] with useful presents for everybody in Hambridge and Westport church and chapel [...]

Father Marson will never be forgot. We often hear his name brought up in talking to a neighbour. They will say: "That is what Mr Marson used to say" - something about birds or flowers."<sup>42</sup>

Hooper's letter echoed the sentiments of Rose England's written two decades earlier. Rose also mentioned the love of the Hambridge children for Marson, and emphasised his central position in the community life of the village, in that it would not feel the same now that he was gone:

he also sent us two sketches [...], I shall keep them all for my children for from the smallest child in the Village they knew and loved him.

I could go on for hours and never tell how good he was to us, and my husband said the greatest link to Hambridge has gone with dear Mr. Marson, he had so hoped always to go back and see him, it would not seem a bit like home now.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Louie Hooper to Etherington, 11 March 1934, repr. in Etherington, pp. 150-51.

<sup>43</sup> Typed copy of letter from Rose England, A\DFS/1/24.

Hooper also mentioned the musical legacy left behind by Marson and Sharp's publication of the songs and tunes collected from herself and many other Hambridge residents. Many had since been transformed into hymn tunes by Vaughan Williams for use in *The English Hymnal* of 1906, masterminded by Christian socialist Percy Dearmer. Harker portrays parson-collectors as conniving interlopers keen to steal away the cultural products of their unsuspecting parishioners, but Marson's interest in and celebration of her songs seems to have endeared him to Hooper at least:<sup>44</sup>

Father Marson will never be forgot, when I hear the children sing the tunes to hymns that we gave him years ago. He is always in our minds that make us think of him more. There is a land of pure delight' in the English hymn book, the tune I gave him. I can't tell you how I feel when I the tune sang to a hymn.<sup>45</sup>

This evidence of the degree of warmth felt towards Marson by England and Hooper, retained many years after his death and written of spontaneously, refutes, as has C.J. Bearman, the 'patronising, offensive' suggestion by Harker that differences in class and social status would have precluded any meaningful communication or relationship between song collectors and those from whom they collected.<sup>46</sup>

### **Folksong as basis for interpretation**

In August 1903 Marson invited Sharp to Hambridge, and whatever the true story behind the highly-mythologized collection of Sharp's first song, 'The Seeds of Love' from John England, the pair immediately embarked on a folksong collecting mission. The idea of collecting and publishing folksongs would have appealed to Marson not just aesthetically (he already enjoyed ballads, discussing Morley's *Cavalier Ballads and Songs* in his letters to Chloe during the voyage to Australia<sup>47</sup>), but would also have

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<sup>44</sup> Harker, *Fakesong*, pp. 164-5.

<sup>45</sup> Typescript of letter from Louie Hooper to Etherington, 11 March 1934, A/DFS1/20, Marson MS. SHC.

<sup>46</sup> C. J. Bearman describes this interpretation by Harker as such, claiming that it stems from a Marxist 'hostility' and 'contempt' for rural people and 'rural values' in Bearman, 'The English Folk Music Movement', p. 114; Harker, *Fakesong*, p. 159.

<sup>47</sup> Photocopy of Etherington's typescript of Marson's letter of 14 May 1889, A\DFS/2/1, Marson MS. SHC.

touched deep chords with his political and theological outlook. Tradition, in the view of the folk collectors of this time, embodied collective creativity and represented the concept of useful culture, developed by and according to the needs of those who were to make use of it. This was an idea very important to those wishing to create a socialistic society because it placed at the forefront the needs of a group or community, rather than of any individual. But more importantly, it provided an interpretative opportunity, for Marson believed that part of the duty of the priest, or of the Christian religion itself, was to be an interpreter between classes. Marson's contemporaries, the historians J.L. and Barbara Hammond, raised concerns about the growing social and cultural divisions between classes, particularly in the rural setting: they wrote in *The Village Labourer 1760-1832* that in this period the rich and the poor grew further and further apart, until there remained 'nobody in the English village to interpret these two worlds to each other.'<sup>48</sup> It was this unbridged gulf, still present in the 1890s and 1900s, that Marson sought to cross. Marson also believed that religion was only one of an equal pairing of interpreters, the other being Art. Art, he wrote, was some way behind religion, in that it only ever interpreted the rich to the poor, and not the other way around. Marson complains of lack of representation: 'Who ever paints the engine-driver when he has the director as his patron?'; of mocking depictions: 'Does any single picture in *Punch* make the poor otherwise than contemptible, half cretinous, and wholly ridiculous?' and of inaccuracy and ignorance:

Is there one picture in any of the exhibitions which shows manual work correctly? or the manual worker as the strong, athletic, and graceful person he so often is? Even to notice the correct use to tools is a task too hard for the draughtsman's eye.<sup>49</sup>

Marson also saw this deficiency in musical art:

The musicians are leaving the melodic for the harmonic, until a shortage of the raw material of their art, the ancient melodies of their race, drives them to

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<sup>48</sup> J.L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer 1760-1832* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1911; repr. Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1987), pp. 214-15.

<sup>49</sup> Marson, *God's Co-operative*, pp. 103-4.

snatch stuffs from Laps, Fins, and Andamanese, [...] These works have not come from the people and cannot appeal to the people. They are not meant to do so. They are meant for the non-productive "nut" [...], for after-dinner relishes, to be the spiritual liqueurs of jaded folk with much to eat and nothing to do.<sup>50</sup>

This music was mere soulless table-dressing, not the functional basis for drawing together communities that he and other folklorists believed culture once had been, and, could through their efforts become again. It was, as Vaughan Williams later complained, something received passively, not a shared and community-bonding activity.<sup>51</sup> Marson's final complaint was that 'The great nation, in short, is untouched by Art, un-interpreted by Art, and ignored by Art, with a growing completeness'.<sup>52</sup> As a High Churchman following in the footsteps of the Oxford Movement, Marson imbued art with spiritual significance, and thus this dereliction of the duty of artistic interpretation was on a league with the failings of the church on this score. Marson strongly wished to remedy this failing:

It is of the first importance that our clergy [...] should study humbly and patiently the lives of the poor, which they do a little; and the views of the poor, which they never do. They must themselves explain those views to the class to which they belong (in the ugly worldly sense of this word class).<sup>53</sup>

The idea that it was the well-off who were in need of education, rather than the poor, was shared by Marson with other Christian socialist colleagues, who likewise wished to encourage political reform through a better understanding of the social and cultural problems and concerns facing the working classes: Dearmer, for example, held catechism classes for the children of rich families, in the hope of raising a generation of young people sympathetic to the socialist cause.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, pp. 104-5.

<sup>51</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'National Music' in Ralph Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edtn., Michael Kennedy (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 1-82 (pp. 4-6).

<sup>52</sup> Marson, *God's Co-operative*, p. 105

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 106-7.

<sup>54</sup> Nan Dearmer, *The Life of Percy Dearmer* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), p. 104.

## Editing the collections

The very act of interpretation was fraught with dangers and deficiencies. The fact that songs were intended for publication, and in a respectable format (the *Folk Songs from Somerset* series was dedicated, with her permission, to the Princess of Wales<sup>55</sup>) meant that they had to conform to received standards of decorum and decency, both grammatically and in content. Marson wrote of the bowdlerization of the songs' texts, or 'softening sentiment' as he called it, that it was the 'conventions of our less delicate and more dishonest time' which demanded that treatment, implying that it was not the songs or their original singers in the wrong, but the prudish atmosphere of the drawing room to which the books were destined. 'We plead compulsion and not desire in these alterations,' he insisted.<sup>56</sup> Sharp also expressed these sentiments, complaining of having to 'undertake the distasteful task of modifying noble and beautiful sentiments' to 'conform to the conventions of another age, where such things would not be understood in the [...] healthy sense' they were intended.<sup>57</sup> In his private letters Marson exercised his opinions on bowdlerization, calling the collection of texts he had been reading, including *Cavalier Ballads and Songs*, 'stupidly bowdlerized for feminine minds,' a complaint about the unnecessary and insulting protection of women's sensibilities.<sup>58</sup> Writing to Chloe, Marson decried editors who insulted women by insisting that their 'frail hold upon eternal verities would be relaxed at once [...] if some coarse or lewd lines met your eyes'.<sup>59</sup> He further insisted that it was only those who were protected and shielded from the realities of life who were likely to be offended by direct or forward statement in the songs. Sharp too placed the fault with the over-sheltered, talking of 'delicacy, which, as often as not, degenerates into pruriency'.<sup>60</sup> Writing during his journey to Australia, Marson's views were already well-developed, long before he considered that these editorial decisions would one day be his to make:

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<sup>55</sup> Sharp and Marson, *Folk Songs from Somerset, Second Series*, p. vi.

<sup>56</sup> Sharp and Marson, *Folk Songs from Somerset, First Series*, p. xvi

<sup>57</sup> Sharp, *Conclusions*, pp. 102-3.

<sup>58</sup> Photocopy of Etherington's typescript of Marson's letter of 14 May 1889, A\DFS/2/1.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Sharp, *Conclusions*, p. 103.

But [editors] do not think you would be wounded by "immorality" but only by coarseness - which sometimes only means saxon [...] as if we have not to select weigh and choose the good and expect the evil every day in [...] every other subject [...]. It does seem to me insolent to choose out herbs for the wild rabbits or extracts which will suit [...] feminine minds.<sup>61</sup>

Later, when he had become not only an editor but the father of a daughter, Marson continued to defend this premise, namely that directness and simplicity were in themselves nothing offensive. He continued to believe that such shielding, whether of the female, young, or middle-class, was problematic in that it diminished the ability to 'weigh and choose the good and evil' in life, not just in literature or music. Marson, as the textual editor, has taken most of the blame for the bowdlerization of the songs in the *from Somerset* series, but his letters demonstrate that he attempted to persuade Sharp to allow some 'improper' lyrics to stand. The song discussed in this letter is 'The Oak and the Ash', also known as 'Rosemary Lane' or 'He Called for a Candle'.<sup>62</sup> Thirteen years earlier Sabine Baring-Gould had declined to publish the song, writing that 'the words are objectionable'.<sup>63</sup> Baring-Gould instead concocted a new set of words to showcase the tune.<sup>64</sup> Marson, conversely, did not wish to make very many changes at all. He wrote to Sharp:

But the 'Oak and the Ash' I think to be really quite simple, clean and gentle poetry. I should only suggest one or two simple touches and then give it boldly.[...] In the second verse I should only correct 'like his Daddy used to do' into 'as his Daddy etc' - adverb for preposition.'<sup>65</sup>

Marson was more concerned with the grammatical sensibilities of his readers than with their sense of propriety. The song narrates the story of a servant girl who goes to bed

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<sup>61</sup> Photocopy of Etherington's typescript of Marson's letter of 14 May 1889, A\DFS/2/1.

<sup>62</sup> The song is Roud number 269 < <http://www.vwml.org/record/RoudFS/S185701> > [accessed 6 January 2016].

<sup>63</sup> Sabine Baring-Gould, and Henry Fleetwood Sheppard, *Songs and Ballads of the West* (London: Methuen, 1890), p. xxxii.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Typescript of letter from Marson to Sharp, 13 October 1903. A/DFS1/20, Marson MS. SHC.

with a sailor, who the next morning gives her some money to bring up the baby he expects she will have. There follows discussion as to what the baby will do when it grows up, the choice for a boy being sailing 'like his Daddy used to do.' The final verse is the girl's reflection, and Marson in his letter informed Sharp that he would publish it thus:

When you have a baby, you put it out to nurse,  
And sit it in your chair, with gold in your purse.  
What is gold in your purse, when there's milk in your breast?  
And you see what you are come to, from a sailor in the West?  
Or possibly  
And you've neither got your baby nor your sailor in the West?<sup>66</sup>

Sharp's manuscripts from that first collecting trip allow us to compare Marson's suggestions with the collected text. Louie Hooper and Lucy White sang the final verse thus:

When you have a baby you put it out to nurse  
And sit in your chair with gold in your purse  
With gold in your purse and milk in your breast  
And to see what you're coming to by a sailor in the West.<sup>67</sup>

Marson's alterations do not alter the narrative of the song, rather they attempt to improve its literary qualities by turning statements into questions, making the ending of the song much more rhetorical.

Yet neither Marson's altered version nor Louie and Lucy's unadorned text were to be published, despite Marson's assurance that he 'can't imagine how any one could mind it' and that he would teach the song to 'Mary [his daughter, then 12 years old] as soon as I had it.'<sup>68</sup> The tune, which Sharp found worthy of notice, was included in the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> 'The Oak and the Ash', September 1903. CJS2/9/27, Cecil Sharp MS, Clare College, Cambridge. Available online < <http://www.vwml.org/record/CJS2/9/27> > [accessed 6 January 2016].

<sup>68</sup> Typescript of letter from Marson to Sharp, 13 October 1903. A/DFS 1/20.



second instalment of *Folk-Songs from Somerset*, but a different text was used, 'The Crafty Lover; or, The Lawyer Outwitted'.<sup>69</sup> While this does mean that unlike Baring-Gould, they used a traditional text, collected from a Captain Lewis in Minehead, there is a degree of misrepresentation.<sup>70</sup> This is a pairing of song and tune that had never been observed in the field, the 'Rosemary Lane' tune always accompanying a narrative on the theme described above. What contributed most to this misrepresentation is the admission by Sharp in his 'Notes on the Songs' section of the book that Captain Lewis sang his song to a 'poor tune' and, 'As his words were good and the tune of "Rosemary Lane" an excellent one, we have mated the two together. Mr Marson has condensed the ballad and adapted the words to the shorter metre of "Rosemary Lane."<sup>71</sup> 'The Crafty Lover' too was altered to fit the collector's standards of taste and form.

### **Gentrification versus vigour**

One of Marson's criticisms of earlier collectors was the way in which they 'gentrified' the material. He wrote of Bishop Percy's *Reliques*: 'unfortunately he was steeped in the artificial poetry of the XVIII century and could not help turning the Shepherd boys and farmers into knights [...] or swains and the girls in to nymphs, Chloes and Amaryllises'.<sup>72</sup> The subjects of the songs and ballads in Marson and Sharp's books remain Dicky, Kitty, Jim and Polly: sailors, soldiers, maids and farmers, and a few lawyers too. There are of course lords, knights, and Robin Hood, but the landscape of Sharp and Marson's collection is not Percy's pastoral idyll. The merging of the prosaic world of farmers' daughters and roving sailors with a romantic world of knights and lords is a function of the ballads and their singers' repertoires, not Marson's editing. The idea of simplicity and directness, rather than genteel idyll, as a valuable aspect of folk culture is increasingly the focus of Marson's prefaces to their collections. In the *First Series*, Marson explained:

The collection here made is presented to the public as nearly as possible just as it was taken down from the lips of the singers; in the tunes with exact

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<sup>69</sup> 'The Crafty Lover; or, The Lawyer Outwitted', in *Folk Songs from Somerset, Second Series*, pp. 32-4.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Text of a lecture on Ballads given by Marson, Minehead, 1904. A\DFS/1/20, Marson MS. SHC.

fidelity. [...] We have reluctantly changed the weak perfects into strong ones, but this can easily be *seed* and *knowed* and changed back again by the reader who chooses to do so.<sup>73</sup>

The tone is reserved, carefully intimating that the collection is only as 'nearly as possible' accurate, and shows Marson 'reluctantly' ruled by the demands of the project. By the second book, this had changed:

The words in this series have been rather more freely dealt with. They have sometimes survived only in a mutilated form. [...] The ballad-mongers supply the defect, but they often edit the words out of all vigour and vivacity. To restore the original is hardly possible, or [...] can only be done by a bolder treatment [...]. The words have been re-cast without hesitation where they were mere doggerel or obscure.<sup>74</sup>

The words Marson chose to describe his editorial practice demonstrate the way in which he wanted to present folksong, and indeed the people and communities who sang them: the music was, if uncorrupted by ballad-mongers, full of 'vigour and vivacity', and he and Sharp had to 'venture' on a 'bolder treatment' or deal 'freely' with the text. Gone was the reluctance and reserve, for the editors now acted 'without hesitation.'

Marson felt that Percy had destroyed this 'vigour and vivacity' with his gentrification. Of course, Marson gentrified the songs, stripping them of ideas and expressions too risqué for the drawing-room, and in the case of 'The Oak and the Ash', excising the text from the tune and replacing it with the words of another song. Yet as the letter discussing changes to the text shows, Marson did not believe there was any real offence to be taken at the original narrative. This suggests that Marson was under pressure from Sharp, who thought the tune 'an excellent one', to provide a text that would allow him to showcase the tune.<sup>75</sup> There also remains the fact that without some measure of bowdlerization, the collections could not have been published, at least not in a way which could have given them access to the intended middle-class audience for

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<sup>73</sup> *Folk-Songs from Somerset, First Series*, p. xvi.

<sup>74</sup> *Folk-Songs from Somerset, Second Series*, p. xi.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

Marson's interpretations. The very role of 'translator' or 'interpreter' between classes which Marson carved out for himself was just that: translating involves the input of the translator, with the material being interpreted inevitably gaining some of the ideas and motives of the interpreter along the way. The presentation of a cultural object in a form other than that in which it was received, in this case a song received aurally and passed on in the form of printed music and text, involves some degree of interpretation, whether a conscious or unconscious act. Sharp promised that the tunes in the *First Series* were given with 'exact fidelity', but this was impossible, since they were transcribed by a third party.<sup>76</sup> Until Percy Grainger began to use phonograph recording in 1906, collectors' reliance on their own skill and ear meant that recording without interpretation was unachievable.<sup>77</sup> Interpretation was inevitable, even between one 'genuine' folk singer and another, for each individual singer altered the tune or words of the songs either to introduce their own improvements or, if they sang from memory, because they might use slightly different turns of phrase. Vaughan Williams called folk song 'an individual flowering on a common stem': the underlying corpus of traditional song being the plant, but each performance a unique expression of the plant's possibilities, rooted within the system as a whole but nevertheless individual and transient.<sup>78</sup> The very process of oral transmission in which Sharp believed was one of interpretation, with songs existing in a permanent flux, changing according to the tastes of their singers.<sup>79</sup> Of course, Sharp and Marson's interpretations differed from the singers' in that they were deliberately tailored for a specific audience (Sharp noted that most of the 'risqué' songs were not censored by their singers in the field, because they 'do not violate the communal sense of what is right and proper'<sup>80</sup>) and because their interpretation was preserved in printed form. But as David Atkinson posits, tradition and revival in fact shared many of the same notions of selectivity. Certain songs or types of song were privileged by their singers using their own 'affective criteria', including continuity with the past, and these criteria often coincided with those of the collectors, allowing for 'a degree of theoretical continuity between traditional and

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<sup>76</sup> *Folk-Songs from Somerset, First Series*, p. xvi.

<sup>77</sup> David Tall, 'Grainger and Folksong' Lewis Foreman (ed.), *The Percy Grainger Companion* (London: Thames Publishing, 1981), pp. 55-6.

<sup>78</sup> Vaughan Williams, 'National Music', pp. 32-3.

<sup>79</sup> Sharp, *Conclusions*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

revival activities'.<sup>81</sup> Marson and Sharp's interactions with tradition, though they differed in their printed form, were in line with a larger pattern of interpretation and selective preservation undertaken by the singers themselves.

The interpretative task was important to Marson as a socialist priest. But the contradiction was that in interpreting this material, damage was inevitably done to the very characteristics which made it so politically important. In preserving one particular interpretation in printed form, the process of continual alteration and communal improvement in which he and Sharp believed was halted, at least for the new audience. The folksong, wrote Sharp, 'will always be approaching a form which will accurately express the taste and feeling of the community; what is purely personal will be gradually but surely eliminated' through the process of natural selection, with less-popular interpretations falling out of use.<sup>82</sup> This idea was vastly important to them politically, as it demonstrated the power of the collective will and the expression of community as a whole, not of powerful individuals: a socialistic art. Sharp wrote that art-music was 'the work of the individual, and expresses his own personal ideals and aspirations only' and 'committed to paper, it is forever fixed in one unalterable form,' negatively comparing it to the communal folksong without realising that his publications performed the same function of fixing.<sup>83</sup> Sharp clearly thought that his and Marson's editing was sympathetic and in tune with the 'spirit of the original', writing that 'the editor must be in close sympathy with the aims of the folk-poet. He must divest himself of all acquired literary tricks', intimating that he had these skills and had applied them in his work.<sup>84</sup> Marson, on the other hand, made the connection that Sharp missed, having complained that 'The Ballad leaves our head and hearts and gets into our Libraries. So it is much better not to try to date and dissect, but simply to love and enjoy them.'<sup>85</sup> In the programme for a lecture, Marson joked that he would provide ballad 'specimens stuffed and alive', all being 'difficult to obtain, owing to the vice of editing.'<sup>86</sup> In his notes for the lecture itself, he commented that most of the very popular and highly-regarded 'Scotch ballads' were not Scottish at all, but had been labelled as

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<sup>81</sup> David Atkinson, 'Revival: genuine or spurious?' in Russell and Atkinson (eds.), pp. 144-62 (p. 152).

<sup>82</sup> Sharp, *Conclusions*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>85</sup> Text of a lecture. A\DFS/1/20.

<sup>86</sup> Lectures upon some aspects of English Literature, A\DFS/1/20, Marson MS. SHC.

such because they were 'caught in Scotland written with a' instead of all.' He believed that the comparison between these and what were thought of as 'dull, whining prosaic so called English ballads' was unfair, as the English ballads 'have not been captured alive from the people, but have been bought stuffed and have come from Broad Sheets, which have been edited or often originated in Seven Dials Catnach'.<sup>87</sup> Marson clearly believed that the process of printing and publication was damaging to the aesthetic properties of ballads, but seems not to have realised until much later that it was also potentially damaging to the spirit of them as communally-made, adaptable and useful 'people's art', one of the reasons which drew him to them in the first place.

### **Flickering shadows versus immutable records**

This realisation was explored in *Village Silhouettes*. The book could be taken as his rejection of the continuing development of the folk revival. Marson had withdrawn from the movement in late 1906 following a catastrophic disagreement with Sharp. The fourth and fifth instalments of *Folk-Songs from Somerset* appeared in 1908 and 1909, with Sharp as sole editor, Marson having turned over all of his rights to Sharp in the aftermath.<sup>88</sup> The quarrel itself is explored in further depth in Appendix I.

With *Village Silhouettes*, Marson's focus shifted from the culture of the common people to the people themselves:

People were once kind enough to applaud the writer for his discovery of a great gold mine of beautiful song [...] Now the prospector wishes to proclaim a far greater discovery. The graceful, manly and fine-wrought melodies are not separable accidents, they belong to lives and characters at least as interesting, as full of fine art and exquisite melodiousness, as are the songs [...]. Not only is the expression great, but the life which is so delicately expressed is worthy of our utmost attention and admiration.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Text of a lecture. A\DFS/1/20.

<sup>88</sup> Typescript of letter to Bertha Clarke, 30 November 1906. A\DFS1/20, Marson MS. SHC. Letters with the same information were also sent to Etherington on the 5th and the 19th December: A\DFS1/19, Marson MS. SHC.

<sup>89</sup> Marson, *Silhouettes*, pp. v-vi.

This is the task that Marson set for his *Silhouettes*, to express the life, or 'wholeness' of the person hidden beneath what would at first seem to be their defining quality. Marson titled each 'Silhouette' with a descriptor designating the interesting quality which marked out this particular person, for example 'John Moore: The Village Musician' or 'Village Spinsters: I. Ann Warnford'.<sup>90</sup> Yet these simple designations were not what they seemed, for beneath their veneers of spinsterhood, musicianship or pessimism ('Mrs Horser: Pessimist'<sup>91</sup>), lay the human qualities, strong personalities, and unexpectedness Marson was so ashamed of having discovered too late. Marson's use of the name *Silhouettes* and the silhouette as a method of illustration implies a tribute, as by this time the silhouette had come to be associated with the frontispieces of biographies.<sup>92</sup> By illustrating his short biographies of the villagers in this way Marson ascribed dignity and worthiness to their life stories. Yet silhouettes, despite their use in such weighty publications and their popularity in the eighteenth century as a parlour game also hint at humbler origins: they acquired their name from Etienne de Silhouette, a notoriously thrifty French finance minister. The name became associated with anything done cheaply, and as the 'shade' or 'profile' was proliferating as a cheap form of portraiture at the time, the phrase stuck with the art form.<sup>93</sup> Emily Jackson in her 1911 history of silhouettes calls the form 'the pioneer of cheap portraiture,' and it may be that Marson's use of the silhouette was a choice to illustrate his stories of the rural working classes with an art form that was accessible to those for whom a detailed portrait was unaffordable. Black profile art was also used in classical times to depict everyday scenes of working or domestic life in a decorative rather than portrait format on pottery, alongside depictions of mythology and deities. Marson's depiction in silhouette of James Vincent hedging and Al-Parn (Alice Perrin) resting on a gate, along with his frontispiece of agricultural tools and animals, draw also on this heritage of the silhouette as an artistic glorification of everyday life and visualisation of folklore, an ennoblement which was the aim of Marson and many others active in the folk revival, and a sanctification of these tales as modern folklore, a mythology of their time and

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-10; pp. 27-34.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-18.

<sup>92</sup> Emily Jackson, *The History of Silhouettes* (London: The Connoisseur, 1911), p. 18.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

place.<sup>94</sup> Marson had even declared the ennobling of domestic life as a vital aim in a socialist manifesto written in 1886, demonstrating the political importance he vested in culture even at that early stage, and showing that these concerns were still in force nearly thirty years later.<sup>95</sup>

The use of the word silhouette was also an admission of a fact never addressed in the folksong collections: namely that the information or depiction contained therein was but a *shadow* of the living reality. The lover's silhouette is a keepsake, but it is the beloved in reality that is the focus, and now, for Marson, it was the people themselves who were important, just as the enjoyment and spirit of the folksongs had become more important than their literary potential. Marson was comfortable enough with the fact that his writing was 'mere' interpretation to address this directly. After explaining that it was the lives behind these stories he wished to celebrate, he went on to candidly admit how difficult this really was:

But all this is hard to say; and when said it is like a silhouette. It is an adumbration rather than an imitation. It has a kind of Platonic abstraction about it, which is the real secret of the silhouette. It is the mere idea of the person, perhaps nearer than we think him. [...] Finally, it always has a sense of fun and laughter in it, which is chiefly why some of us value a form of art which is cheap and quick and very limited. But the poetry, the pen, or even the scissors which laugh, can often say more than even can be got into anything wholly in "the big bow-wow" vein.<sup>96</sup>

A silhouette is the preservation of a shadow which, for a time, is cast upon the artist. Marson was at pains to point out that his silhouettes were impressions made upon him, and not imitations of the people he described. His interpretations of the folksongs he edited were the same: they record the impression cast upon Marson and Sharp as they heard the songs sung to them, and the editorial work Marson performed was to allow the 'idea' of the song, like the 'idea of the person', to come through within a limited and specific context. There is something paradoxical in the attempt to capture something so

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<sup>94</sup> Marson, *Silhouettes*, p. 20; p. 50; pp. ii-iii.

<sup>95</sup> Manifesto of the Christian Socialist Society, May 1888, repr. in Sutcliffe, pp. 82-3.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vi.

fleeting and transient as a shadow, and this is in effect what Marson and Sharp were attempting with their collection. Each version of any song existed only briefly, during the time taken for its performance. So in effect 'fixing' the song through publication was capturing an elusive shadow: the real thing remained at large, flexible and changeable despite the preservation of an impression it once left behind.

### **Relevance through irreverence**

Marson's insistence on light-heartedness, 'fun and laughter', is also important, in that it emphasised the vitality he found in his subjects. "The big bow-wow" vein', used by Walter Scott as an opposition to the 'exquisite touch' able to render 'ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting', missed the point in the same way that Marson thought Percy missed the point of the folksongs, and in the way Marson hoped not to with his own editing.<sup>97</sup> His dissatisfaction with the 'stuffed specimens' of folksong was a part of his larger dissatisfaction with anything made too serious or with the life taken out of it. For Marson, who as a folksong editor and also as an Anglo-Catholic had a strong focus on the past, despaired at the thought that this meant reverence and stuffiness:

Loyalty to the past causes the keys of the kingdom to be so deeply respected that they are hung up in a museum and stared at. We call the museum a Church, and the staring, reverence. Modern wits suggest that the keys might now be put upon the scrap-heap [...] But [...] the keys should be taken down, oiled, and used. [...] The Church [...] was never meant for a museum at all.<sup>98</sup>

To lock away or to preserve untouched was not to respect the past. Irrelevance would soon render even the most important ideas and forms contemptible, if they were allowed to become disconnected from present-day needs and realities. It was vitally important to Marson that the folksongs he and Sharp collected would bring enjoyment to people, and if possible some sort of reconnection with the common or community

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<sup>97</sup> Scott's journal entry for 14 March 1826. Walter Scott, *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott from the original manuscript at Abbotsford*, Vol. I, David Douglas (ed.) (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1890), p. 155.

<sup>98</sup> Marson, *God's Co-operative*, p. 123.



life of the nation. Sharp, despite his stated aim for the 'restoration of the English folk-song to those to whom it belongs by right of inheritance', focused strongly on the fact that his own work was 'done in the right spirit, scientifically, accurately' and on the 'exactness of his transcriptions'.<sup>99</sup> Sharp believed that along with the aesthetic value and potential for enjoyment and enlightenment these songs held, there was great 'scientific value' because they threw 'a searching light upon the character of the peasant'.<sup>100</sup>

Marson, with his *Village Silhouettes*, would have argued that there was no such thing as a peasant character for light to be shone upon, engaged as he was in celebrating the quirks and qualities of the individuals who made up the Hambridge community.

Marson had set out to interpret one nation to another, but as he made clear in *Village Silhouettes*, he was not striving after an immutable and universal peasant character. He did not see indistinguishable masses, passive carriers of a culture they did not understand, as Harker has argued.<sup>101</sup> His entire approach as a Christian socialist was rooted in the notion that the priest must do his utmost to convince the 'class to which they belong' that the working classes were not abstractions, economic, spiritual, or otherwise. This would, he hoped, galvanise the comfortable classes into socialist action:

Then it will follow that all the things which do or can protect the disinherited will be their delight. [...] They will be openly in favour of the existence, strength and health of Unions. They will support all laws [...] which make for the health and are against the helplessness of the governed.<sup>102</sup>

The fact that Marson believed strongly in Christian socialism meant he saw the Church as holding the potential to become a progressive institution involving itself in contemporary politics. This extended to the belief that churches as buildings had the same potential to become key centres of communal life. Marson saw the Church, in both the organisation and the physical sense of the word, as an element, like folksong, of a shared cultural and national heritage which was not only historically and aesthetically valuable, but valuable also because it offered a sense of community and

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<sup>99</sup> Sharp, *Conclusions*, p. xi; p. vii; p.vii.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>101</sup> Harker, *Fakesong*, pp. 187-8.

<sup>102</sup> Marson, *God's Co-operative*, pp. 106-7.

belonging, a cultural possession inherited through the ages. Marson articulated his idea of the same words or actions holding meaning and importance for groups of people throughout history in a letter to Chloe:

The Church service is more and more wonderful as one studies it. [...] these cries have fitted the lips of the generations [...] Fancy all the folk repeating them in turn, all one's poet friends, Shakespeare listening to them, and Raleigh, Sidney, Colet, Mad Cap Hal, Kings, king-makers, king-haters, rascals, Piers-ploughmen, crusaders. They outlive oaks and empires and democracies and are steeped in the best life of man.<sup>103</sup>

Marson delighted in the fact that the simple, almost folk-poetry of the Church was heard by his favourite poets, figureheads of the literary history of the nation who may well, such is the implication, have been inspired partly by taking part in this unfolding national cultural heritage. Equal to this was his observation that people from all classes would have heard them too, from kings to ploughmen. The reason that the Collects of the Church were 'steeped in the best life of man' is that they were steeped in communal life, and also because they were part of a chain of continuity linking English culture and common experience through a long history. Both ideas were very important both to the Christian socialists of the time and to the folksong collectors. The Christian socialists would have both the Church and society as a whole run on the terms of what was useful and spiritually valuable to the people and the community, rather than 'top down' by Bishops and Archbishops who were taken from the higher echelons of society and, according to Marson, out of touch.

### **Neglected priestly duties**

Marson wrote on his views of the episcopate, dwelling especially upon their removal from the everyday lives of both clergy and laity, both spiritually and practically. He did this directly through his essay 'And Ard', a tilt at the inadequate training of would-be vicars, in particular its focus on the minutiae of the Bible at the expense of the necessary pastoral skills. 'And Ard' was itself a follow-up to another essay named 'Huppim and Muppim', which bemoaned the irrelevance and inefficacy of

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<sup>103</sup> Letter to Chloe, 9 August 1889. A/DFS1/5, Marson MS. SHC.

contemporary practices in the religious education of children. Both pieces were named after the biblical sons of Benjamin in order to highlight the kind of trivial information fed to both children and trainees for Holy Orders instead of the social and spiritual tools he believed true religion to provide. He also dealt with the inefficacy of the episcopate indirectly through one of his *Turnpike Tales*, in the fictional story of a bishop's spiritual crisis and redemption.<sup>104</sup> The bishop of Marson's tale is having a 'spiritual dry time' in which the exercise of his religious duties had become distasteful to him, and where he yearned instead to be 'a striker, given to wine, the husband of ten wives, or anything rather than the pompous "dignity" men had made of him, and for which they ridiculed him'.<sup>105</sup> The bishop felt that he was meant to do great things, but his forced 'dignity' had made his life a prison to him, removed from those he wished to spiritually lead and shielded from the realities of their lives. Eventually, leaving behind anything which marked him out as a bishop, he runs away to a small seaside town, where 'he drank in the sweet air with the keenest relish, for it was not heavy with the incense of clerical praise'.<sup>106</sup> After becoming lost he is rescued by a carter, who offers him a place to sleep for the night as there is no room at the inn. The bishop and the carter talk of religion, the carter telling that he cannot abide the clergy and that the man for preaching in his village is a cobbler named Sandy.<sup>107</sup> After moving to stay at the inn, the bishop watches and listens and talks to the people of the village: 'He raised no word against oaths or beeriness, or coarse jest. He simply looked at life as he saw it, almost eagerly hoping to find in theirs, honesty and reality, at any cost and any sacrifice of the other virtues'.<sup>108</sup> As he himself did with his folksong collecting and his *Village Silhouettes*, Marson has the bishop look to the common people of rural England for 'honesty and reality.' The bishop's dismissal of the rougher characteristics, which in their appearance in song form demanded bowdlerisation, is what Marson would have preferred to have done: ignored the coarse expression in favour of the sentiments beneath. 'Honesty and reality' were for him well worth the sacrifice of superficial 'virtues.' The bishop's story is about the reversal of this idea: he had become so laden down with superficial virtue and

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<sup>104</sup> Charles Marson, 'The Bishop' in *Turnpike Tales*, pp. 67-86.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-7.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

clerical dignity that he could no longer access these simple truths. His journey to this rural enclave turns him into the kind of bishop Marson hoped for in real life, in touch with the spiritual needs and values of the people, rather than divided from them by social and religious hierarchy. Marson pointed out, although veiled in fiction, the undeniable lure of Nonconformity to the working classes, because of the capabilities of the 'ordinary man' to be a spiritual leader: unlike the gentleman bishops and priests, Sandy is a mere cobbler, yet is cast by Marson as the central figure in the spiritual lives of the villagers:

The man who was the in the best sense of the word the educational force of the place, and whose views coloured the minds of the villagers in a way that would have made the Rector green with envy, if he had known anything about his parishioners' souls, which of course he did not.<sup>109</sup>

Sandy tells the bishop 'things about the poor and their hopes and their wrongs', but more than this Sandy gives the bishop an opportunity to actually witness these things in reality and undergo a painful spiritual upheaval and conversion.<sup>110</sup> One evening Sandy is called for by a woman in the village because her husband has gone missing. Sandy realises that he has gone to shoot a swan and will be in danger from quicksand. Sandy and the bishop race to the marshes to find the man sinking, only his hair visible. The bishop leaps in and tries to pull the man out, but sinks to his armpits himself. The bishop tries to pray in the face of death but finds his faith and his words failing him. Sandy manages to slowly pull both men out, though it takes over an hour, and the man they had come to rescue takes his final breath as they make firm land. The bishop breaks down and lays bare 'his despair and his doubts and his spiritual dryness to the cobbler, and how in the dark some sort of Light has come back to him'.<sup>111</sup> The final paragraph of the story takes place at the home of one of the bishop's former chaplains, and is a conversation between that man and another former chaplain, speculating on what they think to be the peculiar behaviour of the bishop:

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

"He went for a holiday somewhere and came back quite a different man - converted or something, and he has got the queerest fish you can imagine for a chaplain - a fellow, who is not even a gentleman. They live like ascetics, and I hear that a board schoolmaster and a plumber are to be ordained next September. What are we coming to?"

"O the chaplain's name is Sandy, he's every bit as mad as the bishop."

"What a dreadful thing for the diocese." said his friend. "Thanks! Yes - take it with soda."<sup>112</sup>

The two chaplains here are the epitome of the 'easeful and gentlemanly shepherds' Marson complained of both in fiction and in the press, discussing the bishop's conversion as mere gossip over their brandy rather than engaging in the serious discussion that the bishop's example should provoke.<sup>113</sup> Their discussion is inward-looking, focussing on their gentlemen's-club clique: "What are we coming to?" The subject is dismissed almost as soon as it is brought up. Marson gave, in these two fictional chaplains, an example of the kind of clergymen 'And Ard' railed against: closed-minded in believing that their vocation should place them above others socially, and believing too strongly in the efficacy of knowledge and dignity over real engagement. They are contrasted with Sandy, and the board schoolmaster and plumber who are also to be ordained, in that despite (or even due to) his lack of formal religious training and lower social status, Sandy has an innate knowledge both of spiritual matters and of the minds and souls of those around him: he is able to tell the bishop, supposedly his superior in both religious and pastoral matters, things which are both new to the bishop and strike a deep chord within him.<sup>114</sup>

The problem was present not only in the highest echelons of the episcopacy but began at the very lowest orders. According to Marson, even candidates for the diaconate were rarely the right men for the job. Marson wrote in 'And Ard' that 'The Prayer Book implies that the Deacon is chosen because by nature, learning and morals he is apt for his work', which includes a number of things, focussing mainly on pastoral care, including baptism, teaching Catechism and performing good works among the

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., pp. 85-6.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

poor.<sup>115</sup> Marson suggested that owing to the duties expected of the man, his accomplishments should include the following:

a mastery of the form and content of Public Worship, an articulate and resonant intonation, some such sense of discipline as a pupil teacher is required to show, an expert knowledge of Baptism, a capacity to talk sense if loosed upon a congregation, and an acquaintance with social problems, with much leaning to the poor man's side of the question.<sup>116</sup>

According to Marson, the candidate was not in practice chosen for these reasons, nor were his abilities in any of these areas scrutinised: 'Actually he is examined in none of these matters. The first qualification for the office of a deacon is to have been educated in a public school and to have graduated at a University, where none of these things are learnt'.<sup>117</sup> The chaplain in 'The Bishop' seems more horrified by that fact that Sandy is not a gentleman than by his eccentric behaviour. A footnote in 'And Ard' asked 'is it our profound humility which makes us believe that if we waive our claims to be accounted gentlemen and squires minor, we shall have no other possible claim to be revered?'.<sup>118</sup> At theological college the practical aspects of the social work involved in clerical orders continued untaught, and eventually the candidate was faced with exam papers which tested him not on his suitability for a pastoral or even spiritual role, merely upon biblical knowledge. Marson gave two example sets of real exam questions in 'And Ard', the first from the diocese of Canterbury:

1. Explain the symbols P, JE, SS, and D.
2. Distinguish Commemoration and Memorial.
3. Say what you know of the principles underlying the English Calendar.
4. What does Row consider to be the most useful argument in discussing Christian Evidences?
5. Comment upon "Lo! we heard of it at Ephrathah."

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<sup>115</sup> Marson, 'And Ard', p. 55.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

6. What can you say (*in seven minutes and a half*) of the philosophical and theological use of the word substance?
7. What conception of the Person of Christ should we draw from the synoptic Gospels alone?
8. Describe the geographical position of Decapolis.
9. Parse six Hebrew verbs.
10. What does England owe to the Irish Missions?<sup>119</sup>

Another set of questions, set by the 'co-operative society of examining bishops':

1. Where was Nob?
2. Examine the foreign policy of Ahab.
3. Comment upon "Moab is my washpot."
4. What date would *you* assign to the Epistle of St. James?
5. Explain clearly the heresy of Nestorius.
6. Explain the term "shawm."
7. Sum up the gains and losses from the establishment of Christianity, as a State Religion. (*This is a sprynge to catch woodcocks.*)
8. Who were the Non-jurors?
9. Translate a few snacks of St. Augustine, of the Kings in Hebrew, and of the same book from the LXX.s<sup>120</sup>

Marson wrote that these questions were the sort that ought to be asked of aspiring theologians, not those who wish to follow the shepherding vocation of a parish priest.<sup>121</sup> In Marson's view, those who wished to become parsons should learn instead the practical skills which would be called upon far more often during their ministry, skills not thought of in theological colleges:

Not a word about reading, voice-production, music, not a suggestion of slums, sweating, soup kitchens, balance sheets, truck acts, sanitation, allotments,

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-8.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

diseases, and school teaching. Not a hint at the first principles of stage management, without which all public functions, civil or religious, are apt to be ridiculous. Not a question as to how to christen a child validly.<sup>122</sup>

Marson's views in this matter take us to the heart of his views on many other aspects of his life and work, including his interest in and collection of folksongs:

the knowledge which saves is small and easily gotten. [...] Gentlemen who know Hebrew and Greek and Latin [...] are too apt to forget that it is not by grammar, [...] not by rote knowledge [...], that the Lord wills His people to enter into life. The narrow way and the strait gate may be small, but they are simple. The one is not a maze and the other is not fitted with ingenious and complicated locks.<sup>123</sup>

His attitude here echoes his earlier sentiments on folksong, that it is 'so much better not to try to date and dissect, but simply to love and enjoy them.' Religion, in Marson's view, was not meant for the kind of dissection it was subjected to both in religious educational schemes and in the training of the clergy, but it was also not useful to its adherents if it could be minimised into such. To be worth his salt, the priest had to be able to reach out and provide something of real use or value to the people: like the folksongs, religion was worthless if it could not be loved but had instead to be locked up in musty tomes and scholars' dens, an idea strongly foreshadowing Mary Neal's later attitudes to Morris dancing. As Marson wrote in *God's Co-operative Society*, churches were not built to be museums and their keys not made for relics, but to be used to give access to new worlds.

### **Beyond the lych-gate**

Marson endeavoured to make his religious teaching useful to his parishioners by ensuring that it touched their everyday lives and did not remain shut up in the church for Sundays only. When he moved to Hambridge Marson began organising a Nativity Play to be performed by the villagers each Christmas. He did not, however, provide

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>123</sup> Marson, 'Huppim and Muppim', p. 52.



them with a text, but instead asked them to improvise their own play based upon the age-old story. A letter to Etherington contains an extract from one of these plays, the twelfth play, produced in 1908:

I Some do say there be'ant a God but I say how did thic moon come & they stars? But it do'nt sim like as he do mind w'old shepherds out in the wind.

II May be not! But I have a good hope they zongs of Davud may come to so'thing yet & things be better after a bit.

III Zim so!

I. But d'ee thing folks do live after they be dead?

II They tell so in the Temple & I kind of think so but it's queer to think.

III Ah! T'is so - but there's not much to hope for here, the rich has it all their own way, making motor tracks of poor folk.

[...]

& after the angels came the shepherds said how glad with the bit of news they were & then went on.

I. The rich wo'nt oppress the poor not any more.

II. no! t'is we will begin to oppress they.

III (enthusiastically) - I've often eyed w'old 'Erod & wanted to oppress he, many a time & now I reckon I wull."

Faint protests from the prompter.<sup>124</sup>

The villagers' interpretation of the nativity gave Marson what Sandy had and the bishop wished for in his story: real insight into the spiritual element of his parishioners' lives. Their improvised script allowed him to catch a glimpse of how they interpreted his teachings, both religious and political, and see how, almost like alterable and orally disseminated folksongs, religious material was both shaped and utilised by its consumers. Marson would have been gratified to note that his socialistic interpretations of the gospels were readily grasped by his parishioners, as demonstrated by their discussion of Herod and the oppression of the poor by the rich. More importantly, Marson was allowed a glimpse of doubts and scepticism of the kind shown to Sandy in 'The Bishop', part of his knowledge of the villagers of which the parson could only

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<sup>124</sup> Letter to Etherington, 4 January 1908. A/DFS1/19, Marson MS. SHC.

dream: 'Some do say there be'ant a God but I say how did thic moon come & they stars? But it do'nt sim like as he do mind w'old shepherds out in the wind [...] They tell so in the Temple & I kind of think so but it's queer to think.' Marson was conscious of his unusual position in being allowed by his parishioners to hear such subtle musings, indicating more than a superficial liking for or trust in him by his flock. He wrote to Etherington that 'they said wonderful things about God & immortality such as perhaps folk say in cottages, never in our hearing'.<sup>125</sup> The play itself also formed an application of the Christian religion to everyday life in a relevant way, marking a seasonal communal celebration. The villagers in their script moved effortlessly between the setting of first-century Bethlehem and twentieth-century Hambridge, weaving together their own lives and concerns. Linguistically, they moved easily from 'the Temple' used instead of the word church in a nod to their antique setting, to 'motor tracks.' Marson had published the 1898 play in *Goodwill* magazine, demonstrating that he thought the material as worthy of wider dissemination as the folksongs he and Sharp were later to publish.<sup>126</sup> Of course, as with the folksongs, the published script may not have been an exactly accurate record of the words spoken by the actors of Hambridge (who were in this earlier incarnation of the play, children rather than adults as in the version above), yet neither can they have been dressed up in pastoral idyll or had their roughest edges smoothed to drawing-room tastes, as the script enraged one reader enough that he wrote to Marson directly to complain:

I think your "Drama(?) on the Shepherds" in Dec. No. of 'Goodwill' comes as near rank blasphemy as it is possible to get. It's a very dangerous thing [word illegible] to suggest putting such twaddle in the reach of children.<sup>127</sup>

The complainant, Rev. Arden-Davis, went on to write that he is 'not squeamish', but even for him the play was 'beyond endurance.' The 1898 play was, as could be expected from Marson, not without its irreverent humour: before the shepherds go to offer their simple gifts (here a whistle, a ball, and a book) to Christ in his manger, they must first discover one of their stolen lambs, disguised by the local sheep-rustler and

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> C.L. Marson, 'The Shepherds (A Drama)', *Goodwill*, 5, no.12 (1898), pp. 280-83.

<sup>127</sup> Letter from Arden-Davies, 4 December 1898. A/DFS1/2, Marson MS. SHC.

his wife as a baby in a cradle, the explanation for baby's ovine appearance being a case of the measles.<sup>128</sup> On receiving the sheep-rustling villain, the child playing Mary commented: "They say he's a bad fellow; but I expect my Son will make something of him."<sup>129</sup> Even before Arden-Davies' letter, Marson knew that his presentation of the spiritual lives of his parishioners in their own words and with their own imagining of scene, character, and meaning would prove controversial, and pre-emptively defended his attempt to allow his parishioners ownership of their religious heritage in staging their own localised and communal version:

surely the story is 'not too bright and good for human nature's daily food'? Is it the worse for the fact that English shepherds found an English Bethlehem, and angels sang in our modern tongue of a modern Saviour? If it did not degrade the Eternal Son of God to take flesh in one age and one place, neither does it degrade Him to appear elsewhere and else-when. There [...] is no need to fear the human element in the Eternal Story of the Word made Flesh.<sup>130</sup>

The 'Eternal Story of the Word made Flesh', and the statement made by its highly contemporary re-enactment in the Hambridge Shepherds' Plays were centrally important to Marson's worldview, in that his socialist politics were derived in large part from the incarnation. R.J. Helmstadter posits that the increased contemporary popularity of the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man, itself a justification for the equality of all on earth and expressed most fully by Marson's colleague Charles Gore, meant a movement away from the idea of 'Christ as the way toward salvation' and towards the incarnate Christ as a moral model.<sup>131</sup> Christ the man on earth, an outspoken critic of the society in which he lived, was not only the premise of Noel's *Jesus the Heretic* and the starting point for much of his political theology, but the earthly Christ was so much the centre of Marson's theology, deeply intertwined as it

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<sup>128</sup> Marson, 'The Shepherds', p. 282; p. 281.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>131</sup> R.J. Helmstadter, 'The Nonconformist Conscience' in Gerald Parsons (ed.) *Religion in Victorian Britain, Volume IV: Interpretations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 61-95 (pp. 84-5).

was with his politics, that it led him to discount almost entirely the supernatural aspects of his religion in favour of the example of Christ the Man.

### **Humanistic Community**

Marson's final publications, *Village Silhouettes* and *God's Co-operative Society*, delineated conclusions he had been moving towards through his work with the folksong revival. His realisation that the relationships between shared culture and individual lives bound together communities brought together his political, religious, and cultural views into an overarching social policy founded upon the acknowledgement of a single fact: 'The absolute inefficiency of the individual to help himself by himself, the consequent need of a society, a club, a country, a Church - whatever we call it'.<sup>132</sup> As Matt Carter states, for Christian socialists individualism was not only a 'false account of society' but also a 'mistaken theory of religion', brought together in Marson's decision to title his book *God's Co-operative Society*.<sup>133</sup> Marson and his colleagues worked towards a society characterised by co-operation and goodwill:

There are, of course, two nations in every modern country. [...] But the Churchman, who stands for a City that is at unity with itself, must face the fact that he is fighting [...] a losing battle; for the two nations are drawing apart, industrially (which is dangerous), and mentally (which is disastrous).<sup>134</sup>

It was this drawing apart mentally, divisible into culturally and socially, that Marson wished to halt. A much earlier essay, however, sheds light on the more theological elements of Marson's thoughts regarding God and society, within the context of an exchange of views on socialism with Dr Edward Aveling. *Christianity and Capitalism*, the eventual publication containing these essays and rejoinders, had its genesis in a series of letters which appeared in *To-Day* in January, February, and March 1884.<sup>135</sup> Within this debate on whether or not Christianity was compatible with socialism,

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<sup>132</sup> Marson, *God's Co-operative*, p. 74.

<sup>133</sup> Matt Carter, *T.H. Green and the development of Ethical Socialism* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), p. 112.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>135</sup> '*Christianity and Capitalism*' (London: The Modern Press, 1884).

Marson made striking statements about the nature of God, going as far as to claim that the idea of a supernatural God was a risible premise. Marson refuted the notion that Christianity was a belief in the supernatural and insisted that it was instead an effort to follow the example set by the historical Christ:

religion involves no belief in the supernatural whatsoever, but is a belief in the ideal, realised at least once in history, often partially realised, and never wholly absent from any man; so that to realise this ideal is the one and only end of human life.<sup>136</sup>

Marson was also resistant, as was Noel, to the idea that God existed outside or apart from the universe and at a remove from human life:

To believe in a great First Cause, who originally set the ball rolling, and has once or twice superseded natural laws, I consider to be unworthy of the name even of Theism. If a deity sits outside the universe watching our struggles [...], our defeats and annihilation, [...] and will not interfere to help, I am not only an atheist, I am an anti-theist.<sup>137</sup>

The practice of Christianity, argued Marson, was compatible, even a basis for, socialism, because it merely meant a method of seeking after the ideal, both as an individual and a society, as well as the kind of bond or community within which an individual could flourish. Marson argued also in his riposte to Aveling that Christianity was vital in building a socialist society because 'We are more the creatures of the past than the creatures of the future', the long continuity of the 'idea' demonstrating its social usefulness in much the same way that the long oral tradition and process by which folksong were transmitted showed also the social utility of the form.<sup>138</sup> So where was God in all of this? Marson, like Noel, believed in the Divine Immanence as present within humans on earth:

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

God, the kingdom of Heaven, the reality of which Nature is the garment, is within us. We find that nature is something within our consciousness, a part of our understanding, and to seek for God in the reality of Man.<sup>139</sup>

God, for Marson, functioned as an idea strongly similar to the concept of society: a bond or force which bound together individuals, an idea nourished by continuous use and repurposing and itself nurturing those individuals and allowing them to flourish, a process which would be perfected in a socialistic society. Despite his ordination as a Church of England vicar, we see here a humanistic Marson, inspired both by the communal cultural achievements and continuity embodied in folksong and the complex, rounded lives of those Hambridge villagers he celebrated in *Village Silhouettes*.<sup>140</sup> His socialism reflected this:

when Jerusalem is built in England's green and pleasant land, there will be no wages and no profits at all, no landed estates, no rival classes, no combinations of employers or employed, no dirtied streams, no hedged orchards [...]. Meantime why should not both nations unite to fight against the outrage of this inhuman division? to transform a system of captivity [...] into a co-operative polity.<sup>141</sup>

Marson advocated not for class warfare but for a truly co-operative society. His earlier use of folksongs as interpretative material and as a basis for a common cultural heritage with which to turn the middle-classes into the allies necessary for this societal model was one aspect of this lifelong effort to foster community. From strong, functioning communities was derived the godly concept of society itself, both an expression and a fulfilment of (Christian) socialism. These ideas, including his championing of folk tradition, were extended and, importantly, applied practically by Marson's colleague Noel during his tenure in Thaxted.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>140</sup> Reckitt describes Marson as 'a Christian Humanist in the truest sense of a term not always very satisfactorily employed.' Reckitt, p. 92.

<sup>141</sup> Marson, *God's Co-operative*, pp. 107-8.

Sharp and Marson parted ways in late 1906 following their quarrel, nominally over accusations made against Marson over his treatment of Chloe (see Appendix I), but perhaps also because Sharp no longer found Marson or his contacts useful, and wanted to be in full control of the *Folk-Songs from Somerset* brand. Sutcliffe is suspicious, with reason, of Sharp having 'engineered a rift' in order to rid himself of Marson's collaboration.<sup>142</sup> Sharp did act in distinctly underhand ways towards other colleagues, attacking former ally Mary Neal's approach to Morris dancing with enough vehemence and repetition that his versions became those widely accepted. He also offered to help collector Henry Hammond revise the harmonies for his Dorset folksong collection, and then had his name placed on the cover instead of Hammond's.<sup>143</sup> Sharp comes across as ruthless, yet it is fair to point out, as Sutcliffe does, that he maintained other working relationships up until the very end of his life, including those with Sabine Baring-Gould, Herbert MacIlwaine, and of course Maud Karpeles.<sup>144</sup> This however was of little comfort to Hammond, Neal, and Marson, left in the cold outside of the movement that they too had worked to create. With the end of his involvement in *Folk-Songs from Somerset*, Marson's brief but important part in the folk movement ended also. Although he delivered a lecture on folksong in 1912, he did not continue to collect.<sup>145</sup> Nonetheless, his interest in the lives and culture of his parishioners remained strong, and he went on to produce his *Village Silhouettes*. It may even be that he was able to produce such a work only because he was no longer looking at local art and culture through the lens of the revival, and was instead able show the individual lives of his parishioners rather than hinting at them second-hand through the songs they sang. Marson's relationship with folk culture outlived his relationship with the folk revival, but his contribution to the movement's early days was vital and should not be underestimated.

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<sup>142</sup> Sutcliffe, p. 262.

<sup>143</sup> Sutcliffe, p. 271; Typescript of letter to Bertha Clarke, 24 June 1908. A\DFS/1/22, Marson MS. SHC.

<sup>144</sup> Sutcliffe, p. 262.

<sup>145</sup> Typescript of summary statement by Maud Karpeles of the differing accounts of Cecil Sharp's hearing 'The Seeds of Love.' A\DFS/1/20, Marson MS. SHC.

## Chapter Two: Conrad Noel, Thaxted and a Socialist Nation in Microcosm

### An inherited mantle

Marson died in 1914, a few short years after his withdrawal from the folk movement. The Christian socialist movement, however, continued an association with the folk revival through Conrad Noel, who was mentioned in Chloe's diary as a visitor to the Marson family home during their time in London in the early 1890s.<sup>1</sup> After Marson's death, Noel was seen by some as a successor to him, with a parson remarking on one of his sermons in 1918 that it was 'a fine and inspiring sermon in which one seemed to hear Charles Marson again.'<sup>2</sup> Noel did share many traits with Marson: he was a High Churchman, a staunch socialist, placed great store on the aesthetic adjuncts of his religion, and interested himself in folk culture. However, he developed many of these aspects much further than Marson. He formed in 1918 'The Catholic Crusade of the Servants of the Precious Blood to transform the Kingdoms of the world into the Commonwealth of God,' seeking like Marson to bring about the Kingdom of Heaven on earth itself, but where Marson sought *God's Co-operative Society*, Noel was for 'the Catholic doctrine of revolution'.<sup>3</sup> Like Marson, he was refused ordination several times, most notably because one bishop believed he was a pantheist, an objection stemming from his insistence that God dwelt within all men and women on earth, sanctifying humanity itself.<sup>4</sup> His eventual appointment to his living in Thaxted in 1910 came from Daisy Greville, the Countess of Warwick: she was the patron of this and several other livings, and following her conversion to socialism, appointed prominent Christian socialists to these positions.<sup>5</sup>

He was not interested in collecting or publishing folksongs, but in using active participation in folk dance, specifically Morris dance, as a physical and artistic expression of his ideas on socialism and community. Noel's use of these folk forms was widely different from Marson's, in that Marson attempted to use it to foster

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of Clotilda Marson, A\DFS/2/3.

<sup>2</sup> Groves, p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> Noel, *Catholic Crusade*, p. 2, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Noel, *Autobiography*, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Groves, pp. 11-13.



understanding between different classes, whereas this kind of mediation was anathema to Noel. As he wrote in his Catholic Crusade manifesto:

HELP THE CATHOLIC CRUSADE to defeat Welfare Workers, social reformists and patronizers of the poor, who would bolster up the class system, and attempt to reconstruct it by softening the asperities between class and class.<sup>6</sup>

Rather, Noel argued, his followers should join the Catholic Crusade in order to take power from below, not wait for sympathy from those in power:

if you believe in seizing power from below and not in social sops from above; if you believe in doing things swiftly for yourselves instead of waiting for "enabling Bills," a better system, or till the rich fling you a few slices [...] or till the great Slug-God Evolution evolves something, or Progress pushes you down into Hell. - HELP THE CATHOLIC CRUSADE.<sup>7</sup>

Essentially, Noel believed in 'destruction, not reconstruction', in marked contrast to Marson's careful learning and explaining.<sup>8</sup> He was also full of contempt for the existing Christian socialist societies, of which Marson was a committed member. In his autobiography, Noel related an anecdote about his friend G.K Chesterton, whose wife was attempting to form a branch of that 'mild and watery society for social reform, the Christian Social Union', and had organised a meeting to that effect, at which Chesterton was to be chair and Noel was to speak. They got extremely drunk before the meeting, Chesterton so much so that Noel had to dress him in his suit; and once the meeting had begun, he fell over, dragging with him desk, papers and ink. They drunkenly mocked the 'respectable and earnest' crowd before the meeting broke up in 'confusion', with the result that Mrs Chesterton's branch of the society was never formed.<sup>9</sup> In short, Noel had

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<sup>6</sup> Noel, *Catholic Crusade*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Noel, *Autobiography*, pp. 71-2.

'an emotional blockage to "moderate" terms like "reconstruction."<sup>10</sup> Before forming the Catholic Crusade in 1918, Noel had been, along with Marson, a member of Church Socialist League (Noel represented, at one debate in 1909, the CSL, ILP, SDP, and the Fabian Society in one sitting<sup>11</sup>). The CSL was distinctly more rooted in economic socialism than its predecessors the CSU and GSM, and was in this respect more clearly linked with the socialism practiced by secular organisations.<sup>12</sup> Noel himself was the chief policymaker, as, according to d'Alroy Jones, no other priest in the country could claim a deeper knowledge of the wider labour movement, and he was highly regarded by both Labour Churches and the ILP.<sup>13</sup> The CSL laid out its principles thus:

1. The Church has a mission to the whole of human life, social and individual, material and spiritual.
2. The Church can best fulfill [sic] its social mission by acting in its corporate capacity.
3. To this end the members of the League accept the principle of socialism.
4. *Socialism is the fixed principle* according to which the community should own the land and capital collectively, and use them co-operatively for the good of all.<sup>14</sup>

The CSL, and Noel's leading role in it, demonstrated a much sterner, economic socialism than had the CSU or GSM. But this does not mean that it had forgotten either its Christian basis, or, as was strongly present in Thaxted, its tradition of aesthetic socialism in the William Morris tradition previously embodied in the GSM. The 'democratic commonwealth' the CSL wished to create would of course be a Christian one, but it would also be one of song, dance, and joy.<sup>15</sup>

Noel's strategy for bringing about the commonwealth, both of the socialist and heaven-on-earth variety, in Thaxted was formed of a drawing together of several key

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<sup>10</sup> Judith Pinnington, 'Gentlemen into Social Democrats: an Anglican evolution', in Leech (ed.), pp. 1-22 (p. 18).

<sup>11</sup> W.H. Boulton (ed.), *Ought Christians to be Socialists?* (London: The New Age Press LTD., 1909).

<sup>12</sup> D'Alroy Jones, p. 243; p. 247.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>14</sup> Declaration of the CSL, repr. in d'Alroy Jones, p. 241.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

elements, brought together neatly in this hymn written for Noel's use in Thaxted by resident poet Charles Dalmon. It was to be sung to the hymn tune *Wir pflügen* (the tune commonly used for 'We Plough the Fields and Scatter'):

God is the only landlord  
 To whom our rents are due  
 He made the earth for all men,  
 And not just for a few;  
 The Four parts of creation,  
 Earth, water, air and fire,  
 God made and bless'd and stationed  
 For every man's desire

Uplift Saint George's banner  
 And let the ancient cry  
 'Saint George for Merry England'  
 Re-echo to the sky!<sup>16</sup>

The elements Noel linked together throughout his time at Thaxted were socialism, nation, and gaiety, all of them intersecting of course with his Christian faith. By gaiety, Noel meant dance, song, colour, art, music, participation, and procession. He brought these together in striking and effective ways, as did Dalmon when writing hymns for Noel's use, invoking in the verses above both socialism and the idea of nation, and in the final lines, given below, these join together with 'holy mirth' to bring the promised kingdom closer:

O have no fear, my comrades,  
 Cry out in holy mirth!  
 For God to us has promised  
 His Kingdom here on earth.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Dalmon's poem is reproduced in Groves, pp. 141-2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

The folk revival offered to bring together all of these things. Miriam Noel's invitation to Neal's Espérance Guild to teach Morris in Thaxted not only began a long tradition of Morris in the town, but also enriched and enhanced Conrad Noel's preaching, aesthetics, socialism, and most of all, the sense of strong community he promoted as both the means and the end of his Christian socialist project to build the Commonwealth of God on earth in a small Essex town.

### **Strong identities**

Harker wrote in the 1980s that vastly different types of nation state (his examples include Britain, Zimbabwe, S. Africa, USA and the Warsaw Pact states) shared a common need to reinforce nationhood through state sponsorship of organisations which promoted folk arts, because nationalism was inherently disruptive to the building of 'the only power which can challenge them - international working class solidarity.'<sup>18</sup> Bearman, in turn, accuses Harker and fellow Marxist assessors of the folk revival of disliking the revival because of its inbuilt cultural nationalism, as Harker and his colleagues had 'a fundamental hostility towards nationalism, and a more generalised antipathy towards the concept of tradition.'<sup>19</sup> Bearman argued that 'Revolutionaries' 'tend to dislike traditions because established practices of any kind are a bar to the complete transformation of society that they wish to accomplish.'<sup>20</sup> But the case of Noel contradicts both Harker and Bearman. Noel absolutely saw 'established practices' and traditions, both of the religious and folk varieties, as a starting point for the transformation of society. And for Noel, as it later was for Vaughan Williams, nationhood and cultural nationalism were a basis for internationalism, engaging in a symbiotic relationship in which international solidarity was strengthened by the unity of equal but individual nations, each bringing to the whole the very best they had to offer.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Harker, *Fakesong*, p. xi.

<sup>19</sup> Bearman, 'English Folk Movement', pp. 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'Nationalism and Internationalism' in *National Music and Other Essays*, pp. 154-59 (p. 155).

The Gospels, then, suggest this interplay of nationalism and internationalism as essential to the building up of the World to Come. The flags of Nations and the flag of the International should therefore be lifted up together as ensigns of the Faith in Christian churches.<sup>22</sup>

For Noel, folk culture was important to the building of this international community, especially so because it represented an idea of nationhood based upon the history and culture of the people, not of the State. Noel saw the Kingdom of God on earth which he hoped for as a 'Divine International', and had blazoned across the Red Flag which hung in Thaxted church the motto 'He hath made of one blood all nations'.<sup>23</sup> Noel did not wish to deny the nation a place in the International, and wrote that 'Christ's Co-operative Commonwealth was to be no mere cosmopolitan world, secured at the expense of national variety'.<sup>24</sup> Noel's situation of English nationhood within a strong International was an ideal configuration shared with the wider British Left of the time: Paul Ward argues that their internationalism was often fitted 'around an affection for English traditions', rejecting 'the Marxist axiom that "workers have no country" [...] in favour of a view of the plurality of national identities'.<sup>25</sup> It was these independent, strong nationalities working in 'comradeship and mutual service' to build an equally strong Socialist International that Noel hoped for.<sup>26</sup> As with his other political views, Noel found support for this idea in his interpretations of the Bible: Noel's Christ saw his own nation as 'blessed among the nations, the salt of the whole earth,' but was not afraid to warn that that his nation, that salt, must work not for itself but for the Divine International as a whole, else the privilege of membership should be rescinded: according to Noel, it was Jesus' patriotism which tempered his praise with 'if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men.'<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Noel, *Battle*, p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62; p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: England, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), p. 52; p. 57.

<sup>26</sup> Noel, *Battle*, p. 96.

<sup>27</sup> Ward, pp. 63-4.

Nationhood for Noel was a careful balancing act. It balanced the need for unity and the shared identity of a community, be it parish or a country, with the hope for much wider fellowship amongst the whole human race. Such a bond of national identity between individuals functioned in a similar way to the relationship between strong nationalities in an international commonwealth, both being a communion between a smaller unit and a larger whole that Noel thought to be 'the basis and meaning of all human life' through a 'Social God, in the Blessed Trinity, One-in-Many, Many-in-One, VARIETY IN UNITY.'<sup>28</sup> A revival of dance as a shared heritage could bring about this communion of the individual with the wider community, as Mary Neal wrote in one of her many articles for Noel's *Country Town* magazine:

I think that this revival of folk music which has taken place throughout the length and breadth of the land is leading us to oneness and a communion in which the life of the individual is tuned to the life of the nation.<sup>29</sup>

Such communion would be a strengthening bond, a basis for an adoption of unity and co-operative living which would grow outward in ever-widening circles to form the Divine International Noel craved. Echoing Marson's later humanistic focus on community as the ultimate good, Noel declared that 'the Source of our life is the Triune God, the Comm-Unity, and that the substance of all life is Community.'<sup>30</sup> It was because of his deep-seated belief in the value of community that Noel poured so much energy into his work in Thaxted. Both his friends and the patron, who had appointed him because she wished for him to use the position as a base from which to tour, lecturing and fighting the socialist cause while a curate did the actual parochial work, were surprised by his efforts. But as John Orens notes, Noel believed that it was 'in the parish that the life of God's Kingdom is born and nurtured.'<sup>31</sup>

This balance of local community and global fellowship, of inward-looking social bonds and outward-facing internationalism, was delicate. Both nationalism and internationalism had the potential to become 'evil', as Noel's Biblical analogy

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<sup>28</sup> Noel, *Catholic Crusade*, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Neal, 'To the Thaxted Morris Dancers', pp. 8-9.

<sup>30</sup> Noel, *Jesus the Heretic*, p. 219.

<sup>31</sup> John Orens, 'Conrad Noel: Vision & Paradox' in Leech (ed.), pp. 23-42 (pp. 29-30).

explaining the salt of the earth previously demonstrated. Noel believed that 'Nationality is evil when it denies the International, and [...] the International is evil when it scoffs at Nationality.'<sup>32</sup> Nationality should not overreach:

Just as there is an internationalism which despises the nations and is so far evil, there is a nationalism which wrongly motivated, being purely parochial and pharisaic. If a nation resisting an empire [...] fights in order that it may itself become the dominant empire of the world, its cause is accursed of God.<sup>33</sup>

The empire provided a new host of problems. It was formed by the kind of narrow and insular patriotism Noel eschewed: its relationship with the international was acquisitive, not co-operative. Its own internationality denied the variety and difference of its subject nations, demolishing the harmonious symbiosis of a true International and creating instead a blank uniformity of centralised power. To halt the growth of this catastrophic imperialism, the right kind of nationalism, able to take its place in the Socialist International and the Divine Commonwealth, was needed.

### **Patriotism as antidote to Imperialism**

Noel became famous as the Red Vicar of Thaxted predominantly for his hanging of the Red Flag and the flag of Sinn Féin in his church, and for his refusal to fly the Union Flag. His book *The Battle of the Flags* details the ensuing battle between the opposing forces of Cambridge University undergraduates and his own acolytes and residents of Thaxted, as well as giving a detailed account of his reasons for hanging these flags as Christian ensigns. Empires were evil because they obliterated difference, destroying the individuality and variety which would speed the coming of the Kingdom. The idea of variety within unity was essential to Noel's philosophy, as he wrote that God is a 'Sociality', 'One in Many and Many in One' through the Holy Trinity: the 'secret of that Being and of this world is better expressed by the variety in unity of the rich chord than by the thin unit of the single note'.<sup>34</sup> Noel described cosmopolitanism as a 'smooth' and 'undifferentiated' 'mush', and Empire building as the forcible and violent creation of this

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<sup>32</sup> Noel, *Catholic Crusade*, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Noel, *Battle*, p. 65.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

'dull and smooth whole'.<sup>35</sup> He flew the Sinn Fein flag not only as a protest against British dominion over Ireland, but also because of the meaning of the words 'sinn fein,' one of the conditions of membership of the Catholic Crusade being belief in the self-determination of nations:

IF YOU BELIEVE in Nationality; in a national community of free families; in the right of every nation, small or great, Ireland, Germany, England, Poland, Russia, Belgium, etc., to be a Sinn Fein (ourselves - Independent) Republic, not trying to live in isolation, nor domineering over other nations, but of its own free choice desiring inter-dependence;<sup>36</sup>

The 'unity of the international' had to be 'built up by the variety, distinction and individuality of the nations'.<sup>37</sup> The proliferation of empires precluded this ideal harmony and interdependence by preventing the necessary self-determination of each nation.

One of the strands of the manifesto of the Catholic Crusade was a call to 'shatter the British Empire and all Empires to bits, wrestling against principalities and Kaiserdoms and highly-placed powers' in order to 'Create a Free England in a Communion of Free Nations'.<sup>38</sup> In Noel's view, the State was imperialist, and the Union Flag 'not the old flag of this country' but 'the modern flag of brute force [...] constructed to celebrate the triumph of a swollen, greedy Empire'.<sup>39</sup> A 'Free Nation' was a community of its people, self-determining both politically and culturally, in contrast to the empire ruled over by the faceless State. As Edward Freeman put it in 1890, 'The English folk have homes; the British Crown has dominions'.<sup>40</sup> Home could be loved, and inspire loyalty. Dominions could not, as they were a function of the state and not of the people. Noel's friend and frequent collaborator G.K. Chesterton wrote that empires

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>36</sup> Noel, *Catholic Crusade*, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Noel, *Battle*, p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Edward Freeman 'The Latest Theories on the Origin of the English', *Contemporary Review*, 57 (1890), pp. 36-51; quoted in Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 134



and states were but fashions, but 'the smallest nation is something greater than a fashion - it is a custom.'<sup>41</sup> Noel's loudest argument for the refusal of the Union Flag is that the people themselves loved their nations, defined by shared culture not military might, and did not love their governments or the Empire:

That first splendid rush to colours in the early days of the war was not inspired by Imperialism, but by Patriotism. [...] Who believes that those first volunteers were inspired [...] to safeguard a dominion [...] over subject peoples [...]? What does the soldier care about the furthest boundaries of the British Empire? What he cares for is England, its green fields and country lanes, the flare and laughter of its cities, his own home, even with its dwindling rights and liberties; [...] They loved the Union Jack, and were willing to die for it, because they were deceived into believing that it was the symbol of their country by [...] Imperialists, who were anxious that they should forget the flag of old England; for financiers, politicians and newspaper proprietors grow fat upon Empire, while they build an England fit for heroes to starve in.<sup>42</sup>

Noel's writing above discussed the First World War, but his actions continued a practice of 'oppositional Englishness' first used to demonstrate opposition to the Boer War from 'positions of radical patriotism', a patriotism supportive not only of its own right to national self-determination but also that of other nations.<sup>43</sup> Instead of the Union Flag, Noel hung in his church the flag of St. George, which alongside the Sinn Fein flag attested to his beliefs in nationhood over statehood, and the community of Free Nations which would come to make up the Divine International represented by his flying of the Red Flag. Nations could be both Christian and socialist: Empires emphatically could not.

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<sup>41</sup> G.K. Chesterton, 'The Patriotic Idea' in Lucian Oldershaw (ed.), *England: A Nation, being the papers of the Patriot's Club* (London: R. Brimley Johnson, 1904), pp. 1-43(p. 21).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>43</sup> Ward, p. 59.

## Preparations for the Kingdom

Noel's belief in nationhood as immanent in the people reflected his religious belief, shared with Marson, that God is within men and women themselves: 'The God, the kingdom of Heaven, the reality of which Nature is the garment, is within us.'<sup>44</sup> God and his kingdom dwelt within humans on earth, and so did the potential for the coming of Noel's Divine International:

the passages of the New Testament which the nineteenth century referred to a life beyond the grave undoubtedly refer to the coming of the Kingdom here. [...] [Christ] laid the stress undoubtedly on what our Evangelical friends call the Milleenium [sic], ie, the Golden Age to be established here.<sup>45</sup>

The potential Kingdom was not only immanent in the people and on earth but also directly affected by the actions of men and women: it could be 'delayed or hastened' by their actions.<sup>46</sup> In order to hasten the coming of the Kingdom, Christians (and socialists) could take part in preparations:

*The Preparation for Christ's Kingdom* meant the conversion [...] of mankind from injustice and greed, impurity and cowardice, to justice, generosity, purity, courage, and *the Kingdom itself* meant either (a) the natural expression of this common conversion in a New Order of things where all should serve each other in joy and life and peace, or (b) the coming down in some more sudden and miraculous way of just the same order of things in answer to this same preparation. Either the coming on the clouds [...] is [...] poetry or [...] fact, but *there is absolutely no doubt whatsoever* that the Kingdom was to be realised here, and was to be enjoyed by those of mankind who had prepared themselves in the above manner for it.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Marson, *Christianity and Capitalism*, p. 18.

<sup>45</sup> Noel, *Battle*, p. 48.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-8.

The key here is that these preparations could in fact actually constitute the Kingdom itself, by virtue of the altered behaviour of men and women towards their fellows. Because he and his followers had to be 'impatient' to bring about the Kingdom, and not wait 'complacently', Noel tried throughout his life and especially during his time in Thaxted to undertake as much as preparation as possible. He, along with his wife Miriam, his followers and latterly his son-in-law, curate and eventual successor Jack Putterill, endeavoured to create a small corner of the Kingdom in Thaxted, whether as a preparation for or as that 'natural expression' of a better way of life.<sup>48</sup> His founding of the Catholic Crusade in 1918 was an attempt to extend that Kingdom beyond the parish borders. Other chapters were established in Sneyd, Ancoats, Stepney, Poplar, Burslem, and Delabole.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, the Crusade never numbered more than 200 members at any one time, and despite Noel's 'audacious promise of a new world' the old remained in 'stubborn persistence'.<sup>50</sup> This does not, however, mean that Noel's Christian socialism, and the Thaxted movement in particular, can be counted a failure. Arthur Burns dismisses the idea that Noel's actions in Thaxted were those of a 'fantasist' or stunts 'pulled off in part at the expense of the parish', seeing them instead as the foundation of a strongly local 'tradition of rural Anglican activism' which was after Noel's death carried on and nourished 'by the very community which others have suggested could not digest such heady political religion' for over forty years.<sup>51</sup> Burns refutes the notion that Thaxted's rural setting showed up Noel's Christian socialism as 'hopelessly ill-adapted', pointing out that 'Neither Noel nor Putterill preached over the heads of the congregation'; and demonstrates also the Noel's staunchest supporters were not outside ideologues but long-established Thaxted families, with the members of certain working-class families such as the Catons serving on the Parochial Church Council, as sidesmen, and as churchwardens.<sup>52</sup> After Noel's death, the congregation went on to 'demand that later incumbents match either in fervour or objectives the precedent set by the red vicar' in both liturgy and in politics.<sup>53</sup> Noel's commitment to his

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<sup>48</sup> Noel, *Jesus the Heretic*, p. 60.

<sup>49</sup> Kenneth Leech, 'Some light from the Noel Archives', in Leech (ed.), pp. 43-56 (pp. 44-5); Groves, p. 321.

<sup>50</sup> Orens, p. 32.

<sup>51</sup> Burns, 'Beyond the "Red Vicar"', pp. 101-124, p. 106.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116-17, p. 119.

preparations may not have brought about the Divine International, but they did lay a strong foundation for an ongoing religious, cultural, and political tradition in his own parish.

### **Holy joy and socialist gaiety**

The preparations were also to be joyful, to form a fitting prequel to the merry utopia of the coming commonwealth. 'Why should not the cry of "St George for merry England" drown the bombastic cry of St Jack for dismal Empire?' and 'why should not the patriot's festival of St George replace, as it does in Thaxted, the new-fangled festival of Empire?', Noel wrote.<sup>54</sup> In Thaxted St George and England had, through flags and festivals, replaced the British Empire, and Noel tried to make his England really a 'merry' one too, and this is why he turned to the folk revival. It offered him a national culture based in that of the people, but also fulfilled through its inclusion of folk dance forms an expression of the gaiety and joy he believed to be implicit in Christian and socialist tradition. Another of Mary Neal's *Country Town* articles about the folk revival also positioned present-day merry-making as a prequel to a coming happier time, that of a new socialistic society full of joy for the youth of England: 'May this May-time in England be a foretaste in all days to come when English youth will be a real May-time both for the girls and the boys.'<sup>55</sup> As with preparations for the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth possibly actually constituting that kingdom, so too could happiness now engender future happiness.

The idea of a coming better time anticipated with joyful celebration was itself an historical one, another aspect of the medieval Christianity Noel drew so heavily upon. Noel loved the medieval poem 'The General Dance', also known as 'Tomorrow Shall be my Dancing Day', and as well as displaying it in Thaxted church, sometimes read it from the pulpit instead of giving a sermon.<sup>56</sup> The poem describes the ministry of Christ as a dance, to which will call his 'true love', Christian believers who will dance with him in joy:

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<sup>54</sup> Noel, *Battle*, p. 27.

<sup>55</sup> Mary Neal, 'The National Revival of Folk Art. IV: May Day Revels', *The Country Town*, 2, no.4 (1912), p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Noel, *Autobiography*, p. 102.

To-morrow shall be my dancing day,  
 I would my true love did so chance  
 To see the legend of my play,  
 To call my true love to my dance.

Sing, oh! my love, oh! my love, my love, my love,  
 This have I done for my true love. [Chorus]

The rest of the song consists of verses describing Christ's birth, life, and death. The final verse explains that the reason for the entire story of Christ's incarnation had been so 'that man/May come unto the general dance'.<sup>57</sup> Gustav Holst, a resident of Thaxted between 1914 and 1925, heard Noel reciting the poem during a service, and was struck by its beauty. Noel dug out the tune to which the poem was traditionally set, but both men thought it rather gloomy. Holst suggested that he compose a new tune, but no more was said about this until two years later, when Holst presented Noel with a new setting called 'This Have I Done for my True Love' on his birthday.<sup>58</sup> His use of the poem caused Noel some strife, with the bishop complaining of his use of a 'secular song' and requesting the removal of a copy of the words he had hung up in church (which was not possible, the item having already been stolen by Noel's opponents).<sup>59</sup> Noel 'reminded him that the music was by the famous Gustav Holst, and that *The General Dance* was sung at festivals in most of our cathedrals', and the bishop was suddenly 'delighted that it should be sung at Thaxted and adorn the walls of our church'.<sup>60</sup> Such was Noel's love for this song that it almost had its own altar in his church:

We have a version of *The General Dance* in coloured manuscript, framed in carved wood. It hangs over the chest by the entrance door. This chest was carved by Arthur Brown, with panels, beginning with the preaching of the Gospel from Thaxted pulpit, resulting in the treading down of dynasties and

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<sup>57</sup> 'To-morrow Shall be my Dancing Day' in William Sandys (ed.), *Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern* (London: Richard Beckley, 1833), pp. 110-12.

<sup>58</sup> Noel, *Autobiography*, p. 102.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

crowns; the hammer and sickle adorn the third panel, the symbol of artisans and labourers coming into their own, and the fourth panel represents the music of the spheres, which will be the music of the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth. On this hutch rest the delicately shaped "Praying Hands" by Eric Kennington, flanked by two shapely candles in black.<sup>61</sup>

This display demonstrates just how interwoven were Noel's religious, political, and aesthetic beliefs, particularly with regard to music and dance. His successor Putterill continued in this vein, and when four of the church's bells were recast in 1949, they were given names, decorations, and dedications related to the ongoing political and cultural traditions of the Thaxted Movement. The recast third bell was named the 'Justice Bell', and was engraved in large letters with the motto 'I RING FOR JUSTICE IN ALL THE EARTH'. 'He hath made of one blood all nations', the motto used on Noel's Red Flag, was engraved on the shoulder of the bell. The recast fourth bell was paid for by the Morris Ring, and was called the 'Dance Bell', its large motto being 'I RING FOR THE GENERAL DANCE'. This bell was also decorated with a large embossed frieze of Morris and country dancers, and a verse from Psalm 150: 'Praise him in the cymbals and dances; Praise him upon the strings and pipes.' The new fifth, the 'Peace Bell', stated 'I RING FOR UNIVERSAL PEACE.' Finally, the new seventh was the 'Craft Bell', and like the Dance Bell, it was decorated with friezework: around the shoulder of the bell the works of God, including the sun, stars, moon, earth, mountains, rivers, sheep and cattle, birds and trees, clouds etc; and around the base the works of man: pottery, agriculture, clock-making, painting, music, books, cutlery-making, spinning and weaving, and brick-making. The motto was 'I RING FOR THE JOY IN CRAFTSMANSHIP'.<sup>62</sup> The bells themselves were music for praise and to call worshippers together, and through their new decorations and dedications, were strongly linked to the political concerns of Noel's successor.

Noel and Holst also translated together the Apocrypha of St. John, in which the heavenly spheres make music for Christ and his disciples to dance in worship on the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> All the information regarding the bells is taken from a pamphlet produced contemporarily by Putterill, and still available in reprint from Thaxted church. Jack Putterill, *Thaxted Bells* (Linton: E.E. Plumridge, 1949), pp. 5-11.

night of the last supper.<sup>63</sup> Noel clearly saw dance and music as important to his theology as an expression of the joy of Christian belief, as well as an allegory for the rich harmony of the commonwealth to come:

And if Variety in Unity, the rich harmony of Being, be indeed our source, it is no dull world of uniformity that we shall be building, [...] In the New World Order then, there will be an infinite variety of types, of persons, of families, of nations - no longer divided and disharmonious, but expressing themselves through their different instruments in the great orchestra of God's will.<sup>64</sup>

It was also a foreshadowing of the happiness and fellowship to be had in the Kingdom to come. So as preparations for coming of the Kingdom were to bring about the coming of the New Order, either upon the wings of angels or by a change in attitudes and restructuring of society, Noel set about not only foreshadowing the communal joy of the Kingdom but attempting to create it. He transformed the church into the aesthetic expression of his Christian socialism with flags, flowers and poetry, instituting mixed choirs with girls in brightly-coloured headscarves, processions of colourful banners. His wife Miriam began organising Morris dancing lessons for the residents of Thaxted in 1910, a development which was a wholly natural fit in a town that was quickly responding to Noel's combination of aesthetic socialism and divine (inter)nationalism.<sup>65</sup> The people of Thaxted were taught by Blanche Payling, a member of Neal's Espérance Club, despite the fact that Noel knew Sharp and had even lectured on Ibsen at the Hampstead Conservatoire at his request during Sharp's tenure as Director.<sup>66</sup> Neal's approach, focused on participation and joy, would have presented a far stronger appeal to the Noels, considering that they, like Neal, were attempting to foster a strong sense of shared community and social gaiety. Noel wrote that although the dancing of Sharp's team was beautiful to watch, both he and Daisy Greville found it spiritually-lacking:

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<sup>63</sup> I have been unable to find Holst's translation of the Apocrypha, however, a translation of the passages in question is available at 'Apocrypha: Acts of John, 94-97' translated by M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), repr.

<<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/actsjohn.html>> [accessed 15 January 2016].

<sup>64</sup> Noel, *Jesusthe Heretic*, p. 179.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 104-5.

Lady Warwick [...] was disappointed because I had told her that the dances were for [...] working people, and although the team contained wonderful performers, such as Douglas Kennedy, who [...] is, perhaps, the most blithe and graceful dancer I have ever seen, the team at Easton Lodge was certainly not of the soil, and unkind critics might have said it smacked of Bloomsbury.<sup>67</sup>

Despite the central role later played by the post-war Thaxted men's Morris side in the formation of the Morris Ring and its enshrinement of Morris as a masculine rite, the beginnings of Morris in Thaxted were firmly rooted in the social recreation ethos of Neal's Espérance Club. As Burns argues, the encouragement of Morris dancing in Thaxted by the Noels should not be 'treated as a mildly risible distraction from more serious matters': Noel's intermingling of politics with his liturgical and cultural interests was a key element in his worldview.<sup>68</sup> Rather than 'diluting' the 'message' of Noel's politics, the dancing and other related cultural pursuits 'gave the tradition traction well beyond those who might have rallied to a more narrowly articulated political argument, fostering involvement and commitment.'<sup>69</sup> The choice to bring Morris to Thaxted stemmed from the desire for a communal activity having its cultural and aesthetic roots in English folk culture: a national culture as an antidote to bombastic imperialism, an expression of joy in dance as the rightful inheritance of a medieval English tradition of Christian gaiety, and a socialistic expression of corporate unity in shared activity.

### **Anti-Puritan revelry**

By July 1911 the Morris dancers of Thaxted numbered 60 strong, and included a youths' team, girls' team and two children's teams.<sup>70</sup> The teams performed to an audience of 2,000 at a flower show in nearby Stisted, and Mary Neal was drawn to visit in spring 1911 by reports of the huge take-up, selecting some of the best dancers to perform alongside her Espérance teams at the invitation of Rupert Brooke in

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>68</sup> Burns, 'Beyond the "Red Vicar"', p. 120.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Groves, p. 74.



Cambridge.<sup>71</sup> Groves described the summer of 1913 as being a high-point for the Thaxted Movement in terms of dance, with much of the town participating, if not in Morris but in country and social dance. He states that the phenomenon had taken off across all social classes, breaking down barriers between landowners, clergy and sweet-factory workers. Here he quotes Arthur Caton, a Thaxted resident:

You try to tell people what it was like then, and they don't believe you [...] You say everyone danced, and they look at you. Everyone? Well, it was true, everyone did, even the youngest children were playing dancing games - why, I me'self was taught to dance by the two sons of a Tory farmer! People would come here then - and just stare and listen in amazement. They couldn't believe it when they saw it. There was everyone, everywhere in the town, dancing or singing or whistling. It was like a wave running over the town!<sup>72</sup>

It was the joyful and participatory nature of folk dance which made Morris perfect for Miriam and Conrad to foster in Thaxted. Noel saw himself as an anti-Puritan (according to Pinnington, he was prone to 'labelling everything he liked as "Catholic" and everything he disliked as "Protestant" irrespective of historical context'<sup>73</sup>). He believed that 'carousing is a Christian duty' and the bright colours, merry-making, and music of Morris appealed to his sense of religious gaiety.<sup>74</sup> After Noel's death, his friend Kingsley Martin described the legacy of his work in Thaxted:

There was fun [...]: streamers with happy devices; children's drawings; the women wore bright handkerchiefs on their heads, and the congregation was expected to take part in the service. I won't say there was nothing precious about Thaxted. There were odd-looking men in sandals and women in hand-woven costumes, and [...] a certain artiness in the shops. True, Conrad's disciples did dance morris-dances in the road and deliberately revive a medieval atmosphere.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.; Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 151.

<sup>72</sup> Groves, p. 136.

<sup>73</sup> Pinnington, p. 18.

<sup>74</sup> Orens, p. 23.

But the dancing was fun, and [...] It would be a superficial observer who dismissed Thaxted as "ye olde."<sup>75</sup>

Noel himself did not take part in the dancing, but his curates did, and the vicar who succeeded him, his son-in-law Jack Putterill, danced well into his 70s and played pipe and tabor until almost 80.<sup>76</sup> Conrad allowed dancing in church upon occasion, but Jack began to actively encourage this, and the offertory dance during the church service remains a feature of Morris Ring events throughout the country.<sup>77</sup> As Martin mentioned in his reminiscence, Noel liked the dancing because it was fun, and this was something he increasingly found lacking in wider the British Left. He worried that Marxism would 'imprison the human soul in a regime of grey and joyless uniformity', and despised the 'Fabian Desire for Tidiness, Order, Efficiency', so instead injected colour and raucousness wherever he could.<sup>78</sup> Groves writes that Noel was disappointed by the 'imaginative and intellectual poverty of Labour's leaders', and felt they would have their followers 'accept a handful of grudgingly-given bribes in place of the bright, generous world which Morris and others had called upon them to win.'<sup>79</sup> For Noel, the object of socialism was not to manage an economy, but to transform a society, and though these objectives were undeniably related, they were not the same.

Contemporary Marxists and Fabians both appeared to Noel in the guise of Puritans, casting a disapproving eye over the traditional merriments of the English, a birthright and heritage he believed to have been stolen before by the first Puritans. Noel, and Neal too in her writing for his magazine, held up their revival of Morris and country dancing as a rejection of Puritanism:

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<sup>75</sup> Kingsley Martin, 'As his friends knew him, I', in Noel, *Autobiography*, pp. 125-8 (pp. 125-6).

<sup>76</sup> Mark Arman, *Conrad, Miriam, Jack and Barbara: For 63 years they influenced Thaxted Church and Thaxted Town* (Thaxted: The Workshop Press, 1992), p. 1, p. 12.

<sup>77</sup> Alan Gibbs, 'Holst's church music and his contribution to our cultural life', <[www.holstmuseum.org.uk/aboutholst-holsts-church-music.htm](http://www.holstmuseum.org.uk/aboutholst-holsts-church-music.htm)> [accessed 13 January 2016].

<sup>78</sup> Orens, p. 37; Noel, *Catholic Crusade*, p. 18.

<sup>79</sup> Groves, p. 75.

We of this generation have changed these scruples and we see in the dancing feet the merry song and happy laughter of the children and of the young men and women, that which will make England a land of which we can be proud.<sup>80</sup>

An England that Noel and Neal could be proud of was one in which all could be happy. The rightful heritage of merry traditions, stolen by Puritans and seen as unimportant by modern-day Marxists, was bound up with Merrie England's other heritage of freedom, justice, and fairness. These joint inheritances could not thrive independently:

IF, while you believe in dancing, colour, merry-making, you are not deluded into thinking that these things can be restored, while Justice, Comradeship, and Liberty are refused, HELP THE CRUSADE.<sup>81</sup>

While such dancing and merriment would help the socialist cause, the true goal of happiness, and likewise the Kingdom of Heaven, could not be achieved without the establishment of the right conditions: a society anchored by the principles of justice, comradeship, and liberty. But as was also true of the coming kingdom, preparations could speed the transformation, and so dancing now could lay the foundations for more dancing later.

'Helping' Noel's Catholic Crusade was a serious enterprise. The organisation asked a lot of its members, the manifesto warning them that joining meant 'the enmity of the world', and that 'whoso hateth not his family, his reputation, his possessions, and his own self also, cannot be a Crusader'.<sup>82</sup> Unless they were 'prepared to lose your job and your friends; if you are willing to give not only your money or your life, but if necessary, your money and your life', potential followers could not enlist in his crusade.<sup>83</sup> But for all the stern words (and the bloodshed: some of Noel's acolytes were wounded, and one curate almost strangled to death, during the ongoing Battle of the Flags; Noel himself received several death threats<sup>84</sup>), Noel never lost sight of the end

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<sup>80</sup> Neal, 'May Day Revels'.

<sup>81</sup> Noel, *Catholic Crusade*, p. 11.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>84</sup> Noel, *Autobiography*, p. 112; Groves, pp. 226-7.

object of their fight, which was that joyful Kingdom Come on earth. Orens notes that Noel's zeal could easily have turned Thaxted into a 'spiritual boot camp' if it were not for the fact that he 'desired more for his parish than stern alarms. There must also be merry music; for God's people do not simply await the Kingdom, exhausting themselves in struggle.'<sup>85</sup> Noel, Miriam, and their followers did not simply wait, so the merriment and music they attempted to build their Kingdom with had to be active and vigorous. This echoes Marson's earlier approval of the vitality of folk forms, as well as Noel's choice to approach Neal and her London seamstresses for dance lessons on behalf of his wife, rather than Cecil Sharp. Groves somewhat disingenuously suggests that Noel did not approach Sharp despite his acquaintance with him because Sharp had only just begun his work on folksong collecting and was not yet involved in the folk dance movement.<sup>86</sup> Yet Sharp had been song collecting for seven years by this point, and the first part of his *Morris Book* had been out for three years.<sup>87</sup> Noel's summary of Sharp's dancers as highly-skilled but ultimately savouring of 'Bloomsbury' was the heart of the matter. Neal's dancers on the other hand were working-class young people. The crucial fact of her dance classes and performances, and the element which Noel was keen to have for his Thaxted groups, was that they provided fun and active participation for those involved, and were not, as Sharp and the EFDS classes were becoming, predicated upon education and the acquiring of a fashionable skill. Boyes argues that for Sharp, the art in itself was the end as well as the means, that the revival of a national art such as Morris or folk song was the object to be hoped for and should not be side-tracked into having any social purpose.<sup>88</sup> This is perhaps true, especially after Sharp began to fall out with those who, like Neal, saw practical applications for the dance. Noel's, like Neal's Morris, was supposed to be for the people, to be enjoyed not acquired. It had much more in common, except for the participation in Thaxted of women and children before the war, with the 'outdoor' Morris later fostered by Rolf Gardiner, the Cambridge Morris Men and ultimately, the Morris Ring. It was even possible for Jack Putterill to emphasise that after the war, Morris in Thaxted had 'restarted along the lines advocated by Cecil Sharp and it has carried on ever since',

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<sup>85</sup> Orens, p. 30.

<sup>86</sup> Groves, p. 69.

<sup>87</sup> Cecil Sharp, *The Morris Book, part 1* (London: Novello and Co., 1907)

<sup>88</sup> Boyes, *Imagined Village*, p. 83.

which meant in short, minus the women and children who gave the original venture such a sense of shared community.<sup>89</sup>

### **Culture as a social bond**

Along with the potential for joyous activity in building God's Kingdom in Thaxted, Noel was attracted to the folk movement because it so strongly aligned itself with nationalism and put its music and dance forward as a national art. Both Noel and Marson seemed very drawn to Ireland as an example of a nation in touch with its cultural identity, holding it up as a model for what England could hope to achieve in self-recognition and celebration. In Marson's *Village Silhouettes*, ostensibly a loving tribute to the Somerset village of Hambridge, the chapter 'A Whiff of Ireland' intrudes strangely.<sup>90</sup> Marson eulogised 'sad, fresh, poor, tender Ireland, brown and bright-eyed', with its woods 'twisted and ferny' and its 'rock wells', as well as its people: 'Everyone there [...] is a poet and a gentleman, though the poet cannot write and the gentleman has been obviously unseated by time and the sharpness of the rocks upon which he sits'.<sup>91</sup> Sharp also praised the way in which 'Irish patriots' were 'fully alive' to the way in which their language and art were expressive of their national culture.<sup>92</sup> By the time Noel came to hang the Sinn Fein flag in Thaxted church, the cause of Ireland and Irish independence had become a representative of the idea of national identity itself, and Noel used this as a symbol to demonstrate his political and theological views on the freedom and independence of nations:

The [...] tricolour of Ireland hangs in Thaxted church as a symbol of the right to freedom of Ireland and of all oppressed nations. Sinn Fein does not mean bloodshed, but is simply Irish for "ourselves." The Sinn Fein flag is, then, the emblem of the principle of self-determination, for which we are supposed to have fought the war.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Jack Putterill, *Folk Dancing and Religion*, (Linton: E. & E. Plumridge LTD, nd.), p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> Charles Marson, 'A Whiff of Ireland', in *Silhouettes*, pp. 67-76.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67-8.

<sup>92</sup> Sharp, *Conclusions*, p. 136.

<sup>93</sup> Noel, *Battle*, pp. 28-9.

English patriots, via Noel's reasoning, had also to embrace such self-determination, not only politically but culturally. Claiming ownership of a shared cultural heritage, including folksongs and dances, would be also to claim a stake in society itself: self-definition would lead to self-determination. Mary Neal's letter to the Thaxted dancers makes clear this link:

When you dance the Morris Dances and sing the folk songs I want you to feel that you are part of the truest and best movement towards righteousness and sincerity and upright dealing. And I want every boy and girl to realise the inspiration which only comes from this consciousness of communion with the whole nation, with the universal and with God.<sup>94</sup>

If the nation's culture were to be determined by the communal cultural inheritance of the people, then so too could its society and its politics be determined by its people.

The Noels made use of the material and the associations of folk revival in a way which was intended to be socially useful. Like Marson, Noel believed in a deep intersection between cultural movements and social change, with the expression of communality through shared culture and the revivifying effects of joyful dance and song helping to drive social change through the building of strong communities of active and engaged individuals. Folksong and dance strongly appealed to these Christian socialists. It did so because they believed in both a culture and a God which were embodied in the common people, and their interest in and in particular the Noels' active encouragement of the material aligned the folk revival with progressive politics and a bold hope for a better society.

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<sup>94</sup> Neal, 'To the Thatxed Morris Dancers', p. 9.

## Chapter Three: Community, Continuity and Citizenship: folk dance in the social work of Mary Neal and Grace Kimmins

### A coherent movement?

'But come up on the roof of my flat, and you shall see them dance.'

[...] And up the stairs, into the gleaming September sun, stepped six pretty English maidens dressed in pink and blue and white cotton print costumes, with charming caps [...] or with their heads enveloped in the simple and becoming sun-bonnet still worn by English peasant women. [...]

'Hum,' said Miss Neale [sic], and with a preliminary laugh the 'side,' 'la la'-ed a simple tune, and [...] the 'Beansetting' dance began. It was all very simple and sweetly pretty.<sup>1</sup>

This account appeared in *The Daily Chronicle* in September 1906. Along with a plethora of others describing performances by the Espérance Club, this report offers insight into public (or at least Press) reaction to the folk movement's growth.<sup>2</sup> It was a 'happening', a performance on the roof of a St Pancras house; bathed in sunlight, performed by blushing maidens in cheerful frocks, laughing and "la la"-ing. It was 'sweetly pretty', feminine, and appeared on the surface to be totally devoid of the progressive and politicised undercurrent driving the involvement of social workers such as Mary Neal and Grace Kimmins. The aesthetics may have been sentimental, but they were a basis for distinctly forward-looking efforts towards social change. This chapter examines the use of folk dance and the related concepts of heritage and tradition as a foundation for the social work of Neal and Kimmins, analysing their use of a 'Merrie England' aesthetic in a thoroughly contemporary manner in line with their socialistic aims. The quaintness and femininity emphasised in such descriptions was to become a battleground in a struggle to define the meaning and use of the folk revival, and in this conflict, the political and social implications were increasingly inseparable from the

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<sup>1</sup> 'Teaching Morris-Dance: Girls' Pretty Performance on House Roof', *The Daily Chronicle*, 19 September 1906. MN Box 4, VWML.

<sup>2</sup> Many articles are preserved at the VWML, including 'Revival of Morris Dancing', *The Daily Chronicle*, 4 January 1907. MN Box 4, VWML; 'Old English Dances: Delightful Entertainment by London Work Girls', Newspaper title missing, 4 April 1906, MN Box 4, VWML.

aesthetics with which they were entangled. In the work of Neal and Kimmins, a pastoral facade and the emphasis the Press placed upon these attributes were coupled with a serious, practical, and highly-successful project to improve conditions for participants. The folk revivalism of both Kimmins and Neal must be seen not only in context with but as foundational elements in their work to improve both the social and economic lives of slum children, disabled youths, and working women and girls.

The consistent characterisation in the above and other news articles of the folk revival as innocent, cheerful, and sentimental demonstrated that the revival was beginning to be seen as a coherent whole: not just a scattering of similar events but a movement with a public, newsworthy face. The revival itself responded to its newfound topicality. With a changing focus from song to dance, the revival began to transform from one of appreciation into one of active participation, and with participation through schools and clubs came a need for definitive aims and systems of operation. A conference was called at the Goupil Gallery, Camden on 14 November 1907, in an attempt to do just that. Neville Lytton presided, opening the conference by stating that 'This Folk-Song movement is one of such extreme interest & importance that I am exceeding proud to occupy the position of Chairman of this conference.'<sup>3</sup> Mary Neal echoed his sentiments: 'The mere fact that we are able to call a Conference like this shows that the subject interests other people besides the working boys and girls'.<sup>4</sup> The folk revival was growing, and it had entered the public consciousness. But although the public now knew that there was such a thing as a folk movement, and knew what kind of events and music to expect, the movement was beginning to suffer from internal divisions. The conference highlighted the fact there was no consensus on the meaning and use of folk dance. Two opposing factions began to emerge, each with their own very vocal public face, Cecil Sharp and Mary Neal. Neal noted that the ensuing disagreement was 'a controversy between a then very little known collector of folk songs and dances and an equally unknown woman who ran a Girls' Club,' but as she went on to say, 'this controversy rang through England and the most important newspapers took it up and printed interviews and letters about it'.<sup>5</sup> From the beginning

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<sup>3</sup> 'English Folk-Music in Dance and Song', Report of the Conference held at the Goupil Gallery, 14 November 1907. Dean-Smith MSS, VWML, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 163.



of April to the end of June in 1910, the disagreement between Sharp and Neal was played out publicly in the correspondence columns of the *Morning Post* and *Westminster Gazette* and in numerous interviews. The revival had succeeded in gaining the public eye, and kept its place there through the controversy between Sharp and Neal. The controversy came as a direct result of the movement's newfound success and public engagement. Now that they held the attention of press and people, what should be done with it? From the beginning the revival of folk music had appealed to the politically progressive due to their belief in its roots in the working classes and in 'Merrie England.' The new potentials offered by mass participation in the movement had also been noted, as demonstrated by this notice of an Espérance performance in *The Clarion*:

Unfortunately the cheapest seats will cost 2s. 6d., but the hall is small, and the club, which gives much joy, wants funds. [...] It would surely be suitable to remind the comrades, just now, that money for our own little Sunday School children's Morris Dances would be most welcome.

For the good are always the merry,  
 Save by an evil chance,  
 And the merry love the fiddle,  
 And the merry love to dance.

It is this "evil chance" which we Socialists are fighting to sweep away. And our children *should* be merry. [...] The revival of the dear old folk songs and the glad sight of the Morris dancing we owe to that admirable Fabian Mr Cecil Sharp, more than to anyone else.<sup>6</sup>

Sharp eventually came to decide that the use of Morris dance in social work ventures was leading to its corruption, its status as art form damaged by philanthropists who wanted children to be 'merry' and did not scruple that the dances which made them so were performed with the utmost precision. Neal counted herself among 'those who see in [the revival] unlimited possibilities of happiness and well-being for the coming

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<sup>6</sup> Georgia Pearce, 'Music Notes', *The Clarion*, 15 November 1907. Sharp Press Cuttings Book 4, p. 72. VWML.

generations of England,<sup>7</sup> as did Kimmins, who was one of 'those who feel pity is an insult if it does not lead to action.'<sup>8</sup> Both women saw transformative potential in folk dance, both culturally as a 'healing' return to innocent, rural Englishness for poor urban children, and practically as healthy, structured exercise.

Clara Sophia Neal, an educated woman from a middle-class manufacturing family in Edgbaston ran away from the 'pageant of snobbery' and 'hypocrisy' at home to work in the Methodist West London Mission, where she took charge of the Mission's Girls' Club, taking the name of Sister Mary.<sup>9</sup> Kimmins joined the same Mission upon leaving school, moving to the Bermondsey Settlement in 1895.<sup>10</sup> Kimmins' social work was focussed on disadvantaged children, and also administered through clubs: Kimmins founded the Guild of Play to provide organised play through games, songs and dance to children in slum areas, and the Guild of the Brave Poor Things to offer opportunities for recreation and socialising to disabled people, predominantly the young. Both Guilds were to take hold outside London in the future, spreading to many industrial towns and also achieving great longevity, continuing operation in Bristol until 1987, albeit under an updated name.<sup>11</sup> Those involved in the Settlement movement were absolutely convinced that it would 'in the future [...] be noted as the most remarkable outcome and result of all the teaching and writing of this age,' and Neal and Kimmins were just as convinced that folksong and even more so folk dance had a significant part to play in the building of a better system of social work, and by association a brighter hope for the children of the very poorest.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Neal, 'Folk-Art' in Reginald R. Buckley (ed.), *The Shakespeare Revival and the Stratford-upon-Avon Movement* (London: George Allen and Sons, 1911), pp. 191-230 (p. 214).

<sup>8</sup> Hamilton Fyfe, 'The Most Beautiful Thing in Sussex'[1930?], HB130/11, The Keep.

<sup>9</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 14; p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Seth Koven, 'Kimmins, Dame Grace Thyrza', 2006, in *ODNB Online* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34315>> [accessed 3 April 2014].

<sup>11</sup> Michael Mantin, 'A Great Army of Suffering Ones': The Guild of the Brave Poor Things and Disability in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', University of Bristol Department of Historical Studies Best Undergraduate Dissertations of 2009, p. 39. <<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/history/media/docs/ug-dissertations/2009mantin.pdf>> [accessed 6 April 2014].

<sup>12</sup> Walter Besant, 'On University Settlements' in Will Reason (ed.), *University and Social Settlements* (London: Methuen, 1898), pp. 1-10 (p. 1).

## Settlement work

The Settlement Movement, active in urban areas from the mid-nineteenth century, aimed to bring middle-class young people, predominantly students, into close contact with the very poorest by placing them in Settlement Houses in slum areas. The purpose was twofold: to provide useful services such as education, healthcare, crèches and social clubs aimed at improving the lives of their new neighbours; and to forge a strong community built upon links between classes. Settlements often ran Play Centres, which as well as providing a warm, safe space for children between leaving school and the late return of their parents from work, also intended to inculcate citizenship through participation in singing, dancing, and organized play.<sup>13</sup> Attendance at Play Centres increased dramatically from the 1890s to the early 1900s, with 10,000 children per week attending across London by 1906, and it was within this rapidly expanding aspect of the movement that both Neal and Kimmins worked.<sup>14</sup> Neal, like many others involved in the Settlement movement, was inspired to take part after experiencing a strong reaction to Andrew Mearns' *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*.<sup>15</sup> Neal was 'haunted by the conditions of which it spoke', and credited Mearns as being the first to make any kind of 'dent in the complacency of the upper and middle classes', herself included.<sup>16</sup> Stephen Yeo writes that the conviction of socialism was experienced by some in a way 'indistinguishable' from religious conversion, and following this convulsive epiphany, demanded 'commitment, sacrifice, and missionary activity by the newly converted.'<sup>17</sup> Neal's friend and fellow club-worker Emmeline Pethick also wrote of their shared socialist beliefs in terms of a religious conversion: 'Mary Neal and I had accepted quite definitely the gospel of Socialism as it was preached in our day by Keir Hardie in the political field, and by Edward Carpenter as a philosopher and a poet.'<sup>18</sup> The actions of both women exhibit the 'commitment, sacrifice, and missionary activity' spoken of by Yeo. Clara Sophia Neal was reborn into her new religion of socialism as

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<sup>13</sup> Janet Penrose Trevelyan and Mrs Humphry Ward, *Evening play centres for children; the story of their origin and growth* (London: Methuen, 1920), pp. 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (London: J. Clarke, 1883).

<sup>16</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 47.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896', *History Workshop*, 4 (1977), pp. 5-56 (p. 10).

<sup>18</sup> Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part in a Changing World* (London: V. Gollancz, 1938), p. 75.

Sister Mary, but her colleagues at the Mission preferred a social religion to the religion of socialism. Margaret Sewell and Eleanor Powell of the Women's University Settlement wrote that the Settlement movement was ultimately doomed to failure in attempting to create 'fellowship between class and class', due to the 'somewhat abnormal conditions of life in a Settlement' which accentuated the distance both physically and in status of those whom the workers were trying to live alongside.<sup>19</sup> Neal and Pethick also felt this:

all attempts to help people from a platform of superiority were futile [...]. Only by living amongst people and being one of them could one establish real, as apart from professional, friendship.<sup>20</sup>

The pair became unhappy with the effects of this situation on their own work: 'We became more and more dissatisfied with the unnatural institutional life which shut us off from the problems and experiences common to working people', Pethick's assessment echoed by Neal who felt that the Mission had become smug and sectarian, resembling a large middle-class home with 'social meals' and servants.<sup>21</sup> Neal and Pethick's departure from the Mission after 7 and 4 years respectively was imminent.<sup>22</sup> Alongside their dissatisfaction with institutional life and its effects upon their work lay the friction between the devout Methodism of the Mission's leadership and their own religion of socialism. Pethick reported that 'The influence of writers like Whitman and Edward Carpenter had acted powerfully. We were already called "that element" by the more orthodox officials'.<sup>23</sup> As well as being set apart by their socialism, Neal and Pethick drew disapproval because of their wish to use dance and drama, against which there was 'a traditional Methodist prejudice', in their Girls' Club.<sup>24</sup> This was the final straw. Neal wrote upon looking back that 'only the Salvation Army and some Roman and Anglo-Catholic priests [...] ever had any real influence in the slum life of big cities

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<sup>19</sup> Margaret A. Sewell and Eleanor G. Powell, 'Women's Settlements in England' in Reason (ed.), pp. 89-100 (pp. 94-5).

<sup>20</sup> Pethick-Lawrence, p. 95.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 97; Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 71.

<sup>22</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 73.

<sup>23</sup> Pethick-Lawrence, p. 96.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

as they were fifty years ago'.<sup>25</sup> It is no coincidence that the Salvation Army placed great emphasis on music, and that Anglo-Catholics (such as Marson and Noel) saw participation in song and dance, as well as the theatrical drama of worship itself, as important. Neal and Pethick wished to bring more of these elements into their own work, and, held back by the combination of institutional detachment, marginalisation within the Settlement, and disapproval of alternative methods, felt that they were 'getting out of touch with [their] environment and that sooner or later a new departure would have to be made'.<sup>26</sup> At first the pair tried to reach a compromise with the Mission's leadership, making their approach through a letter to Katherine Price Hughes, wife of the superintendent. They hoped to be able to move out and take a flat together, working more closely with the public, while still remaining members of the Settlement and working under its auspices. Rather than opening discussion, though, the letter resulted in a public rebuke by Hugh Price Hughes himself at breakfast the next day. Neal and Pethick resigned not long after, in August 1895.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Espérance Club and the Morris dance**

Neal and Pethick took a flat in St Pancras and attempted to support themselves entirely (Neal, estranged from her family, had little choice). They appear to have managed this mainly by writing, Neal's pamphlets and stories being sold by Pethick's mentor Mark Guy Pearse on his preaching tours.<sup>28</sup> Free now to work upon their own lines, they formed the Espérance Club for working girls, most of whom were seamstresses, taking on the majority of the girls who had attended their previous club at the Mission. Neal was Honorary Secretary, and, as the focus of the club was to be upon music, Pethick the Musical Director. The leaders of the Espérance Club believed in the positive influence of music and dance and in particular of participation in its performance. Several years later, that interest in the potential of music as a tool for social work had developed into a passionate belief in the healing power of folksong and dance, at least in the mind of Neal, who later wrote of the 'lovely healing effect of the rhythm of folk dance and song':

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<sup>25</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 50.

<sup>26</sup> Pethick-Lawrence, p. 96.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

jazz rhythm is centrifugal, it shatters the personality [...] but the folk rhythm [...] is centripetal. It gathers in the personality to a centre and so enriches and vivifies [...] I recalled the effect of folk music I had seen on the members of my Club [...]. How they would come tired out from work, shut in in factory and workshop, and how I had seen them coming alive and harmonious as the evening wore on.<sup>29</sup>

For Neal, as well as for the other revivalists, it was not necessary to be avant garde to be progressive: in fact, modernity could be detrimental to social progress. The deleterious effects of both modern civilization and its culture were implicit in the folk revivalists' stance, as such a wish for change acknowledged that the status quo was flawed, or at least contained a desire to mitigate or to manage the pace of change, as has been suggested by Readman and Mandler. This resistance is particularly true of Rolf Gardiner, whose work was almost entirely based on a valiant resistance to modernity, but Neal's work can be seen as management, 'preserving a durable sense of national belonging' in the face of change by emphasising continuity.<sup>30</sup> Folk forms and their 'centripetal' forces could step in where modern forms failed to offer social progress, precisely by their ability to offer this "restitutive link" with the past to make change manageable.<sup>31</sup> The Espérance Club made its first foray into English folk dance and song in the winter of 1905. Pethick had moved on, replaced as Musical Director by Herbert MacIlwaine. True to original intentions, the club had maintained a focus on music-making, and always put on a performance at Christmas to which members of the public were invited, partly to raise funds. The fare had for many years been school cantatas, though the girls had become bored of these, so in the two years preceding 1905, the programme had been Scottish songs and dances, followed by Irish ones.<sup>32</sup> By then folksong had attracted public notice due to Sharp and Marson's books, and the idea of using English folksongs in the club came from MacIlwaine's reading of an interview with Sharp in the *Morning Post*. Neal's telling of this story is itself an assertion of the

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<sup>29</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 167.

<sup>30</sup> Readman, *Land and Nation*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Mandler, *History and National Life* (London: Profile, 2002), p. 58.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

values of beauty and joy she placed on folksong and dance, and the positioning of it as a direct answer to the social problems she was attempting to solve. In her autobiography she set up a tableau of the moment when MacIlwaine told her about folksong, with herself standing in the garden of the club's holiday home in Sussex, watching the girls depart to return to London:

I was tired of the few hours in which we vainly tried to lighten burdens far too heavy for young shoulders to bear. I was tired of interviewing employers, sitting on Committees, soliciting charity [...]. I longed for some life giving wind which would sweeten these lives and lessen the weariness, some weapon which would conquer the dirt and the dreariness [...]. I grudged their youth to the industrial machine their health and strength to the toil which brought so few amenities to the worker.<sup>33</sup>

Industrial modernity, the machine age, was damaging, as were its attendant cultural developments. The healing power of past culture could offer respite from modernity, but also a 'weapon' with which to 'conquer' it: not mere sentimental urges to return to the past, but the inspiration to build a better future. As Neal mused, MacIlwaine mentioned reading the interview and that he thought the songs would suit the *Espérance* girls. Neal was enthused and followed up her interest by immediately seeking out Sharp.<sup>34</sup> As a result, The *Espérance* concert on 15 December 1905 was a programme of English folksongs; and, after its striking success, Neal again contacted Sharp to ask if there were any dances of a similar nature. Having obtained his details from Sharp, Neal organised for Oxfordshire Morris dancer William Kimber to visit the club and instruct the girls, and so the first revival Morris display was staged on 3 April 1906.

### **Renewal through recreation**

In the mind of Neal, and indeed several other Settlement workers, such as Will Reason, a real evil of slum life was the lack of opportunities to have fun and to socialise without having to hand hard-earned wages over the bar. These social workers were some of the first to recognise the value of recreation, part of a larger movement towards socialism

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 137-8.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

dealing not only with economic ills but attempting to improve life for the poorest in a more holistic manner. They were concerned not only with the improvement of wages and housing but of 'quality of life' in a more abstract sense, as was Noel with his fight for a world in which all could be happy. Reason argued that middle-class professionals valued recreation and time spent socially as their due in winding down after a hard day at the office, so why should this be any different in the slums?:

But is human nature in Deptford, Bermondsey or Bethnal Green as strikingly different from that in Hampstead, Kensington or Clapham? Not at all. In all, man is a social being, desiring converse with his fellows; in all, his constitution demands the alternation of work and play, of strain and relaxation, of expenditure of effort and renewal of power - in a word, that continual *re-creation* that is necessary to restore the elasticity of life. The difference is not in the need but in the means of satisfying it.<sup>35</sup>

Neal herself wrote on this idea, positing that the middle and upper classes had 'thrown off the iron yoke of Puritanism' in their pursuit of recreation but the working classes had not been 'allowed a shared in this new liberty'.<sup>36</sup> For Neal this was especially true for women and girls: she complained that 'The woman who encouraged her daughter to dance and sing and take an intelligent interest in drama, still considered these things wicked for her maid and her dressmaker'.<sup>37</sup> She saw herself, and more importantly the young seamstresses in the Espérance Club, as leading a charge against this kind of Puritanism. Her insistence on the idea that improving the lives of the very poorest should involve opportunities for fun and enjoyment was a significant aspect of what drew her to folksong and dance, a socialistic anti-Puritanism strongly comparable to that of Noel but with a distinct focus on the intersection between class and gender absent in the work of the other revivalists. She wrote that 'We are passing on from the negation and denial of Puritan days to a Catholic acceptance of joy and beauty as our national inheritance', and worked to make sure that this inheritance was available to

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<sup>35</sup> Will Reason, 'Settlements and Recreations', in Reason (ed.), pp. 71-88 (pp. 72-3).

<sup>36</sup> Neal, 'Folk-Art', p. 217.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



young women.<sup>38</sup> Neal told those gathered at the Goupil conference that 'No one has been asked to come [to Espérance performances] as a charity or as philanthropy; they have been asked to come & enjoy themselves'.<sup>39</sup> In itself, the enjoyment was the object of her social work, an important aspect of her interaction with the folk revival which later became a major sticking point between Neal and Sharp. Just as Kimmins believed that pity was mere insult if it did not lead to change, Neal often wrote of the dire conditions her girls faced growing up and working in the slums, for example in pamphlets such as *Dear Mother Earth* and *My Pretty Maid*, but unlike Mearns, she never ended without offering a glimpse of hope or the possibility of happiness.<sup>40</sup> Neal positioned participation in folk dance and song as an attack on the squalor of slum life, writing that Keir Hardie approved of her use of folk culture as he understood the 'appeal of beauty as an appeal against the sordid and cruel conditions'.<sup>41</sup> She also believed that to focus entirely on poverty and misery was to deny dignity:

I used to be distressed at the picture of dirty and starving children displayed in the appeal for Dr. Barnado's Homes. I felt somehow that it was wrong. Now this appeal is changed and the posters with their lovely children and charming nurses make a far more urgent appeal to me.<sup>42</sup>

This outlook is strongly echoed in the values of the folk revival, in that it focused on and celebrated the creative and artistic capacities of the working classes (though there was, of course, a heavy bias towards the rural poor) at a time when most of the attention levelled at the poorer sections of society was distinctly negative in tone. Kimmins also wished to alter negative perceptions of a particular group. She was known to Neal and Pethick through the Settlement network, and is described in Pethick's autobiography:

The sight of crippled people, and especially of crippled children, aroused in her a passion of protest, and she used to confide in me her dream of creating a new

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>39</sup> 'English Folk-Music in Dance and Song', p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Neal, *Dear Mother Earth* (London: Headley Brothers Printers, 1900-01). MN Box 3, VWML.; Mary Neal, *My Pretty Maid* (London: Headley Brothers, nd.). MN Box 3, VWML.

<sup>41</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 110.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

public opinion on this subject. She set about collecting all the cripples in the neighbourhood and founded a Cripples Guild. She tried to imbue them with hope and courage, and with the sense that they were not isolated but had a part in life to play.<sup>43</sup>

The Guild spoken of by Pethick was The Guild of the Brave Poor Things, founded in 1894.<sup>44</sup> This was a mawkish name, but one taken, along with many further trappings of the Guild, such as its motto 'Laetus sorte mea' (Happy in my lot), from Juliana Horatia Ewing's *The Story of a Short Life*.<sup>45</sup> The Guild at first aimed at providing a social space and fellowship for the disabled in London and other urban areas, performing functions common with many other clubs, including teas, trips, recreation, and the conferral of 'Guild' trappings such as medals. It was not, however, a charity organisation in the sense of others which already existed to cater for the disabled. Kimmins intended her club to work alongside existing charities to provide a more holistic approach: 'when a Society provided a crutch, or a high boot, the Guild, with its social meetings, country holidays, and general all-roundness, saw that that crutch or high boot was put to the best possible use'.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Kimmins wrote that it was 'easier to supply a surgical boot or a pair of crutches than to inspire a soul with courage. The Guild essays the higher and harder task'.<sup>47</sup> The Guild appears therefore to have focussed not so much on alleviating the physical ailments of its members but on what they called 'moral' cure, by which opportunities for living a more full life were extended.<sup>48</sup> The vast majority of the scholars at Kimmins' schools, Chailey Heritage Craft Schools, born out of the Guild, were suffering from the long-term effects of non-curable diseases like polio, tubercular

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<sup>43</sup> Pethick-Lawrence, pp. 86-87.

<sup>44</sup> Kimmins, *Heritage Craft Schools and Hospitals*, p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> Juliana Horatia Ewing, *The Story of a Short Life* (London: S.P.C.K, 1882). Ewing's young protagonist, Leonard, dreams of becoming a soldier but is crippled in a carriage accident. He is inspired to bear his lot bravely by conversation with a VC, who is moved by Leonard's stoicism and says that his bravery in living life to the full matches that of a soldier fighting a good battle. Leonard creates a book of 'Brave Poor Things', collecting the stories of disabled people who are brave in living full lives. pp. 54-6, pp. 64-5.

<sup>46</sup> Kimmins, *Heritage Craft Schools and Hospitals*, p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> 'The Heritage Craft Schools, The Guild of the Brave Poor Things, The Guild of Play...a sheaf of notes and pictures relating to the above work.' [1914] HB 130/2, The Keep. p. 21.

<sup>48</sup> Sir Cyril Burt, 'Preface' in Kimmins, *Heritage Craft Schools and Hospitals*, pp. 7-9, p.8.

joints, or amputations.<sup>49</sup> Chailey and the Guild of course worked to alleviate physical symptoms through the use of appliances, exercise, and surgery (Chailey had its own operating suite), but for the most part, the aim was to facilitate the best possible quality of life and enjoyment for the scholars and Guild members. 'Happy in my lot' can be seen with the emphasis on the word 'happy', rather than as an expression of resignation: Helen Keller wrote to Kimmins to express her approval:

It is good to give the unfortunate a living; it is still better to raise them to a life worth living. It is not so much the infirmity that causes unhappiness as the grief of a useless, dependent existence. [...] It is the fundamental right of every one to realize himself, however imperfectly.<sup>50</sup>

Kimmins' organisations were based very firmly upon the idea that happiness was an inalienable right given to every child: 'We are all glad to see the children happy, we all recognise play as their "right."<sup>51</sup> Happiness was in itself a weapon against both physical and social ills. Kimmins strongly believed in the value of play, song and dance, and used these in her Guild work in an attempt, like Neal, to find a happiness that would be a 'life giving wind'.<sup>52</sup>

### **Physical health**

As well as the spiritually-renewing effects of recreation, its benefits for the physical health of children and young people, particularly those dwelling in urban slums, were of interest to both women. The poor health of the children was also a cause for alarm both to the authorities and to those interested, like Kimmins and Neal, in the future of the English nation: there could not be a healthy, bright future for England, without similarly healthy and bright future citizens. Neal wrote of the folk revival as a weapon 'to check physical deterioration, and to make English boys and girls what every lover of

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<sup>49</sup> Kimmins provides anonymised data relating to scholars at Chailey between 1903 and 1913 in 'The Heritage Craft Schools.' HB130/2, pp. 16-19.

<sup>50</sup> 'The Heritage Craft Schools', HB130/2, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> 'Booklet The Guild of Play, describing the Guild's activities and appealing for funds.' HB146/1. The Keep. p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, pp. 137-8.

our native land would like to see them - upstanding, clean living, and joyous'.<sup>53</sup> The girls of the Espérance Club were seamstresses, working long hours in unhealthy conditions: indoors, in dark, badly ventilated rooms, bent over their work. Kimmins offered active play to the children in her Guilds, but Neal's club members were older teens. Singing and dancing provided physical activity combined with much needed recreation. Both women were strongly of the opinion that exercise, while important, was secondary to the aspect of enjoyment, part of a growing recognition of recreation as a necessity to fulfilled lives and necessary also to a more holistic socialism which focussed on quality of life rather than wholly on economics. Enjoyment was now a political question, with Robert Blatchford asking 'what are your wages? I don't mean how many shillings a week do you get but what *life* do you get as the reward of your toil?'<sup>54</sup> The organisations run by Neal and Kimmins were aimed squarely at providing for recreation through play, dance and song. They advocated physical activity and exercise, but as a secondary benefit of the enjoyment to be had from the play or dancing itself. John Scott Lidgett wrote in his preface to *Festival and Dance* that the 'remedy' for the ills of slum life was 'not to be found in drill, but in restoring the gift of play'.<sup>55</sup> Kimmins was in agreement:

All the faculties are seen in full play, both mental and physical, therefore dancing is one of the most truly recreative things for children possible. Those who study children from a medical standpoint will surely agree that it is better that all physical exercises should be really and truly enjoyed than merely performed perfunctorily, like taking a powder.<sup>56</sup>

Drill was nevertheless a popular form of exercise at the time, and despite the reservations of Lidgett, Kimmins made use of it at her schools in Chailey.<sup>57</sup> Neal, however, disliked it intensely:

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<sup>53</sup> Neal, *Espérance Morris Book I*, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Blatchford, *Merrie England*, p. 42.

<sup>55</sup> J.S. Lidgett, 'Preface' in Kimmins, *Festival and Dance*, p. v.

<sup>56</sup> Kimmins, *Festival and Dance*, p. ix.

<sup>57</sup> In 'The Heritage Craft Schools', two photographs on page 12 show girls and boys at drill. HB130/2, The Keep. 'Leatherbound Loose-leaf album' also contains photographs of boys performing drill. HB131/1, The Keep.

I dreamed of the joy and laughter giving rhythm of the Folk dance taking the place of the hard and mechanical rhythm of Military drill and of the harmony which follows naturally when lessons, play and work are set to the music in which all take part.<sup>58</sup>

Neal's distaste for perfunctory drill, 'mechanical' like the industrial machine it was intended to provide refuge from, marks her opposition to Sharp's version of Morris, with his team drawn from the ranks of the Chelsea Physical Training College where they had mastered the kind of regimented physical culture she despised, as a difference in ideological as well as stylistic outlook.

The dance advocated by Neal and Kimmins' recreational revivals gave enjoyment, with a secondary benefit coming in the form of physical activity for many who spent their days in demanding but sedentary occupations. This was not limited to the evenings on which attendance at the club or Play Centre was possible. Kimmins pointed out that her Guild taught games that could be of use to the children when the street was the only option:

The Guild's primary idea is not so much to take children out of the streets, as to teach them games and amusements which can be played by them all the other days of the week, in those very streets where at present they have to live. [...] the bad things about the gutter are not so much the games they play there, but the place in which they are played. Anything out of doors is better than indoor and confined play.<sup>59</sup>

The Guild of Play, aimed, like the Espérance Club, to provide opportunities for socialising and enjoyable activity. It was aimed at children younger than Neal's seamstresses, but the two organisations shared a foundational focus on mental and physical renewal through recreation and play.

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<sup>58</sup> Mary Neal, 'The Theatre of my Dreams', CC/2/270, Clive Carey MS, VWML. p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Kimmins, *National Dances*, p. 2.

### Traditional characteristics

Play was seen as having healing qualities, and, like folksong and dance, to carry with it certain traditions:

True play is the carrier of social traditions, not only those traditions which carry the form of play, dances, ceremony and games, but [...] those traditions which prevent the strong from trampling on the weak, that give to each equal opportunity. [...] The value of traditional songs, dances and games cannot be over-estimated, for instinctive sociability is best expressed in this form of play.<sup>60</sup>

Neal too wanted to make an 'appeal' to the 'beauty physically and spiritually inherent in every child', trying to coax out these qualities with equally beautiful and spiritual music.<sup>61</sup> Both women decided upon folksong, folk dance and traditional games as appropriate forms of these activities. A significant aspect of this choice was to do with the fact that the children and the music shared a cultural background, and so were seen to have a special affinity. Just as Sharp believed Neal's girls would take to Morris because of their English blood, Kimmins wrote that folk forms were appropriate structured play for the same reasons.<sup>62</sup>

Singing, dancing, and mumming have always been the recognized means of recreation for the English people [...] dancing is one of the most truly recreative things for children possible.<sup>63</sup>

Kimmins placed great emphasis on the 'national' aspect of the dances, and within all of her books of instruction, further emphasis is placed upon delineating and replicating national culture: each contains several pages of photographs of the Guild children dressed for dance performances in national dress, each costume relating to one of the dances in the book. Song, dance, and play were in themselves seen as transformative

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<sup>60</sup> 'The Heritage Craft Schools', HB130/2, pp. 39-41.

<sup>61</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 110.

<sup>62</sup> 'A Quaint Revival: Old English Songs and Dances', *Daily News*, nd. MN Box 4, VWML.

<sup>63</sup> Kimmins, *Festival and Dance*, p. ix.

and inherently giving of health and joy, but Kimmins and Neal chose folksong, dance and traditional games because they in particular were seen as having further positive, even healing, qualities, which set them apart from other forms available at the time. The framing of these songs and dances as a national culture was the source of some of these further positive qualities.

A reviewer of Neal's *Espérance Morris Book* for the *Morning Post* wrote that it should be read by 'everybody interested in the revival (that is to say, every true lover of the true England)'.<sup>64</sup> That the revival was for and about the 'true' England was a central tenet of the folk movement for the figures examined here. The folk revival was engaged in a symbiotic relationship with 'Englishness': a process whereby English national identity was both (re)created by the expansion of the folk revival, but crucially, also lent credibility and an aura of authenticity to the movement itself. The revivalists set about using folksong and dance to find a lost Englishness, a hidden force within which slumbered a kind of absolute truth about themselves and their own identities: 'One has always felt that the national treasure was not all in gold and silver and merchandise, nor with the great and learned, but that somewhere, somehow, it was in the people themselves,' wrote Neal.<sup>65</sup> And this 'national treasure' was lost: E.V. Lucas spent the greater part of an *Espérance* performance unable to see the stage for his tears, brought forth by the beauty of the 'lovely, lovely airs' but more so by 'the thought of this lost England of ours.'<sup>66</sup> The 'people', were the possessors of this 'national treasure' of 'lost' and 'true' England. The folk revival focussed on the working classes in that it simultaneously harvested and sowed its material from and amongst them, and the movement's relationship with the concept of national identity was much the same: within their collections of song and dance they found the building blocks of the national culture they were searching for, but the very concept of national identity, a unified culture, lent to these collections of artefacts and to their usage a greater weight of significance. In the teaching of these songs and dances to children, they took on the role of a birthright, containing healing virtues that could make disenfranchised youth whole again. Kimmins, who believed in the healing powers of both dance and cultural

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<sup>64</sup> Neal, *Espérance Morris Book, Part I*, p. 65.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> E.V. Lucas, 'Introduction (reprinted from *The Country Gentleman*, 19 January 1907)' in Neal (ed.), *The Espérance Morris Book, Part I*, pp. vii-viii (p. viii).

nationalism, brought the two together in her methods, producing pageants and dance displays showcasing not only the *Peasant Dances of Many Lands* but their restorative effect on the slum children of her Guilds, who displayed their renewed bodily health and joy in dancing. In her foreword to *Peasant Dances of Many Lands*, Kimmins extolled the educational value of dance, with particular reference to its relationship with the nation:

the most balanced and brilliant lives of past ages have been attained by those whose system of training the young included dancing as fundamental and essential - who regarded the games and dancing of a people as expressions of its corporate life - who realised that national poise, mental as well as physical, was woven into national character by the dance more than by any other means.<sup>67</sup>

Dance in and of itself was full of positive attributes, but when that dance was a *national* dance, these positives were magnified tenfold. Of course, these folksongs and dances were thought to have originated with the class to which they were being taught (the material being transferred from the rural peasantry to the urban proletariat), and therefore to be real expressions of national culture. Kimmins displayed this viewpoint in *National Dances*, noting that state ceremonial did not have the same unifying effect as national expressions actually participated in by the people: 'Processions, fireworks, all go to make some national joy, no doubt, but they are inadequate to express real emotion or genuine feeling, by comparison with the dance'.<sup>68</sup> Participation was to become a core tenet of the revival by the 1930s, when the music-making of the ordinary citizen was heralded by Vaughan Williams as a central facet of the concept of national music.<sup>69</sup>

### **A rightful heritage**

Alongside their origins with the 'true' English people, the commoners, the songs and dances were themselves seen as innately English in tone: 'the kindliness of English scenery, the equability of English climate, the pleasant healthy sentiment of the English

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<sup>67</sup> Kimmins, *Peasant Dances*, p. 7.

<sup>68</sup> Kimmins, *National Dances*, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> Vaughan Williams, 'National Music', p. 7.



countryside inspired these dances'.<sup>70</sup> Kimmins also wrote about the national characteristics present in folk dance, saying that 'few dances' were more 'characteristic of a nation' than the 'Russian Sleigh Dance', and that the dances of Serbia were 'mirrors of the splendid independence of this brave people'.<sup>71</sup> English cultural products contained an essential English identity, and, through careful ministrations to those in need of this 'pleasant healthy sentiment', they could become a healing force, both for the recipients but also for England herself:

England is to be less stiff and less self-conscious. She is to dance and sing from pure lightness of heart [...] The Utopians, in their vision of a future England, always see lithe young men and graceful sunburnt girls footing it upon the turf, and bands of merry children playing games [...] Should this dream ever be fulfilled [...] England will have turned for the liturgy of her revels not to the imaginings of contemporary specialists, but to the accumulated folk-lore of her ancient sons and daughters, some of whom are of this generation. "Traditional" is the word. The expression of national joy in the Utopian England is to be traditional.<sup>72</sup>

Macer-Wright's naming of 'this generation' as England's 'ancient sons and daughters' is particularly interesting. A significant aspect of Macer and Kimmins' uses of the folk revival in their social work was the idea of returning a lost heritage or identity to those with whom they worked. Kimmins named her schools 'The Heritage' schools because she believed that 'every child has a heritage...and these children most of all have been robbed of theirs ...by all sorts of conditions', and she felt it was 'up to us to see they get it back'.<sup>73</sup> Both women, along with Sharp, believed that this lost heritage was merely slumbering within them, ready to be reawakened with exposure to their 'true' culture: dormant, but so strongly held within them due to their working-class status, only a few

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<sup>70</sup> Philip Macer-Wright, 'England-to-be: The Esperance Guild of National Joy' in Neal (ed.), *The Espérance Morris Book, Part II*, pp. xiv-xv (p. xv).

<sup>71</sup> Kimmins, *Peasant Dances*, p. 30; p. 19.

<sup>72</sup> Macer-Wright, p. xiv.

<sup>73</sup> Maurice Whitlow, 'Strengthening the Weak Hands and Confirming Feeble Knees: A Great Adventure on the Sussex Hills', Interview with Mrs C.W. Kimmins, C.B.E. of the Heritage Craft Schools', HB130/11, The Keep.

generations away from the open fields themselves. Neal wrote that Sharp had told her that despite the difficulty of the songs, 'there was something in the English girl which would respond to the Music - something like a spiritual 6th sense,' and corroborated this view with her own evidence of their delighted 'intoxication' with the songs.<sup>74</sup> Regardless of the responsibility as guardians of national heritage placed upon the working classes through this belief in inherent Englishness - a duty Boyes asserts that the revivalists believed to have been unfulfilled by the folk themselves - there was in fact a more affirmative aspect to these social workers' espousals of cultural nationalism.<sup>75</sup> Neal felt that it would have been preferable for the dances to have remained lost, rather than become a burden upon the shoulders of her young club members.<sup>76</sup> Rather, they were attempting to claim ownership of national identity, and the cultures which defined it, for the working classes and for progressive causes.

Although heritage and preservation have been predominantly associated with conservatism and with the Right, Samuel writes of the precedent set during the French Revolution for the association of the idea of heritage with the Left. Samuel states that '*patrimoine* was a Jacobin coinage', made 'to establish the nation's claim' to treasures both literal and cultural, and that 'the idea of *patrimoine* ran in tandem with that of republican education and the creation of republican consciousness.'<sup>77</sup> Like Conrad Noel, Neal and Kimmins were hoping that the reclaiming of national identity for people rather than state would lead to a better life for the working classes. Indeed, Noel's name appears in a special handmade book listing contributors to a 100 guinea award in recognition of the 'value and importance' of Neal's 'life and work' for the 'fabric of the national community.'<sup>78</sup> As with Noel's vision of a worker's International in which every nation, free and distinct, gave of its best to the common whole, so also Kimmins argued that 'Comradeship winds the world's wheels; but no man has ever been a true comrade who has not first been true to himself.'<sup>79</sup> The working classes needed a strong, unified

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<sup>74</sup> 'English Folk-Music in Dance and Song', p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> Boyes, *Imagined Village*, p. 36.

<sup>76</sup> Neal, *Espérance Morris Book I*, p. xii.

<sup>77</sup> Samuel, pp. 289-90.

<sup>78</sup> Small green clothbound book, painted with white roses and 'Mary Neal, 1925', MN Box 2, VWML.

<sup>79</sup> Grace Kimmins, 'Booklet The Guild of Play', HB146/1. Unlike Noel, though, Kimmins was a staunch imperialist. Her books included pageant programmes to celebrate Empire Day, a festival which was anathema to Noel.

working-class identity, and England needed Englishness, before there could be true comradeship on either an individual or an international level. Social work as a whole at this time was seen by some as being about ensuring the future of the nation by the nurturing of its people:

vital significance [...] lies in its suggestion of a spiritual ideal, a new human relationship, the co-operation of all classes of society in a fellowship of sympathy and service that shall give heed to the interests of all while preserving the freedom of each: that it has made us see that the true worth of a man consists not in his economic value as an industrial unit, but rather in his moral and intellectual and spiritual value as a necessary factor in the whole life and destiny of the nation.<sup>80</sup>

Uplifting the individual meant uplifting the nation, and here we find another relationship of exchange, this time between the concepts of citizenship and national identity. As Vaughan Williams later put it, cultural nationalism was necessary for political internationalism, an enrichment of the international community whereby each nation brought to the whole the best of what they, and only they, could offer.<sup>81</sup> Just as Noel was hoping for a co-operative international community of distinct nations, Neal and Kimmins were attempting to build a cohesive community of individuals who could contribute their best to the common whole as citizens.

### **Claiming citizenship**

In order for the individuals of Neal and Kimmins' Guilds to contribute to the common good as members of a community, they needed to claim citizenship as well as heritage. These two birthrights were seen as coincidental by the women. The young people with whom they worked were seen as having lost or been denied their cultural inheritance, either through their downtrodden status as sweated workers and their

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<sup>80</sup> Arthur Sherwell, 'Social Settlement and the Labour Movement' in Reason (ed.), pp. 115-36 (pp. 132-3).

<sup>81</sup> Vaughan Williams, 'Nationalism and Internationalism', p. 155; Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'Elizabethan Music and the Modern World', *Monthly Musical Record*, 63, no.752 (1933), pp. 217-8, repr. In David Manning (ed.) *Vaughan Williams on Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 67-70 (p. 68).

disenfranchisement as women, with Neal's club girls; their limited opportunities and unhealthy surroundings, as with Kimmins' slum children, or the combination of the physical disability and discrimination experienced by members of Kimmins' Guild of the Brave Poor Things. Their status as citizens had been taken from them by the same causes, and reclaiming their cultural heritage would, the social workers believed, also allow them to re-establish their citizenship and to take an active part in society. The children would also need preparation in how to exercise that citizenship. Dancing supposedly trained children in peaceful co-operation, the first seed of citizenship, as shown in a Mayday scene from *Polly of Parker's Rents*:

"What opportunities of laying the foundations of future citizenship this Guild of Play offers!" thought Sister Katherine. There danced Matilda Smithers hand-in-hand with Moggy Dawes; yet that very morning Mrs. Dawes had threatened "ter kick yer black an' blue ef I ketches o' yer talkin' ter that Mrs. Smithers' young 'ussy." But all that was changed now. Mrs Smithers and Mrs Dawes hailed each other in the most friendly manner.<sup>82</sup>

Kimmins also wrote that she planned and designed her dances and pageants to be performed by large numbers of children, as 'an avenue for a massed feeling', hoping to 'produce a special kind of unity and sympathy' between the members of the group and instilling a feeling of membership in a community. In this case the membership imparted was to be that of a nation: the national dances 'contain the germs of true citizenship' because they are 'linked with the mighty past' and 'will carry, by happy memories, that community of feeling to future generations of children'.<sup>83</sup> 'True citizenship' was gained by re-establishing a link between past and future, repairing a thread which had been damaged or parted through the influence of the slums or through marginalisation due to disability. Dancing was both a 'school for citizenship' and a 'school for patriotism', because it trained 'children from the beginning, in the history of their country and of the world'.<sup>84</sup> Their rightful 'heritage', their citizenship of the English nation, would be restored to these children through the joint actions of

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<sup>82</sup> Kimmins, *Polly*, p. 85.

<sup>83</sup> Kimmins, *National Dances*, p. 8.

<sup>84</sup> 'The Heritage Craft Schools', HB130/2, p. 42.

historical continuity and community feeling. Kimmins noted that the children of the middle classes took 'possession of their birthright' having grown with healthy physical development, and from that, the step from 'a sound body to a sound mind', followed naturally.<sup>85</sup> Slum children, however, were coming into their inheritance of citizenship under 'unfavourable conditions'.<sup>86</sup> The Guild of Play was meant to give these children the opportunities for play and physical recreation that were given to middle-class children, and so allow these 'thousands of embryo citizens of the future' to 'take possession of their *mental* inheritance' from a more favourable position.<sup>87</sup> Alongside the benefit to individual children, the benefits for the nation and for society were strongly emphasised: a hopeful future was assured in the hands of these better developed 'embryo citizens', in full possession of their rightful inheritance. As Kimmins summed up: 'the men and women who are to make or mar this country are themselves being made or marred to-day', and it was up to Kimmins, Neal, and their colleagues to 'hinder the marring and help the making'.<sup>88</sup> It is interesting that Kimmins equated a restoration of cultural heritage with the restoration of rights. This restoration was what both women were hoping to achieve through the introduction of folksong and dance to their social work. Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw's definition of tradition as 'the enactment and dramatisation of continuity; it is the thread which binds our separate lives to the broad canvas of history' perfectly illustrates the women's intentions<sup>89</sup>. What Neal and Kimmins were attempting by encouraging such enactment of continuity in folksong and dance was to rebind the 'separate lives' of the disinherited back into the broad canvas of not just history, but contemporary society. Both women believed in dance as an expression of corporate joy, and felt that helping slum children to claim their cultural heritage would also allow them to claim citizenship. Heritage and citizenship were linked together by Kimmins, in that she asserted that the 'germs of citizenship' were present within folksong and dance directly because of their role as heritage, carrying within them the continuity and cultural memory of the community,

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Kimmins, *Festival and Dance*, p. xii.

<sup>89</sup> Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw, 'The dimensions of nostalgia' in Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase (eds), *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 1-17 (pp. 10-11).

even physically manifesting this cultural memory as embodied performance as Buckland has argued.<sup>90</sup>

The practice of folksong and dance was also intended to confer citizenship through the building and enacting of community. Neal and Kimmins believed that citizenship could be instilled through a heightened awareness of the presence of others in moving together and in time with each other, 'the faint outlines of the duty of citizenship' being present in such play.<sup>91</sup> Zimring's recent work presents interwar folk revival dancing as both literally and symbolically enacting community, through shared recreation and communal effort in sustaining a dance or song, as well as in the literal organisation of individual bodies into ordered, coherent groups, and her assessment applies equally well to Neal and Kimmins' work pre-war.<sup>92</sup> McNeill suggests that the psychological effects of moving together in time have a vital role in sustaining human society. McNeill argues that this response, which he calls 'muscular bonding', helps individuals to define 'with whom we share a common identity', binding together communities to 'guide' lives and 'give them meaning'.<sup>93</sup> In St. Pancras and Bermondsey, Neal and Kimmins endeavoured to foster community by using folk dance to perform this function, hoping to transform the chaos and disorder of the slum and the sweated workshop into ordered co-operation, knitting individuals into groups within which they could flourish. The sense of belonging and communal bonding generated by group dancing would strengthen communities, the building blocks of society and citizenship.

The very happiness of the dancing children came to be heralded by Kimmins as a force for national redemption. Her husband, the educational psychologist C.W. Kimmins, conducted research into the 'therapeutic benefits of child laughter', and Seth Koven writes that under the influence of Ruksin's views on the 'redemptive power of beauty', Grace Kimmins saw 'children's play as a vital moral agent' which could transform society.<sup>94</sup> Both Neal and Kimmins' young dancers were hailed as the heralds of a brighter future by observers: Philip Macer-Wright wrote of Neal's *Espérance*

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<sup>90</sup> Buckland, 'The politics of embodiment', p. 1.

<sup>91</sup> Grace Kimmins, 'The Use of Folk Songs and Games', *Child Life*, 10, no.44 (1908), pp. 266–267 (p. 267).

<sup>92</sup> Zimring, p. 146.

<sup>93</sup> McNeill, p. 150.

<sup>94</sup> Koven, 'Kimmins, Dame Grace Thyrza', *ODNB*.

children as 'small prophets, telling of a promised land in which the child shall be paramount'.<sup>95</sup> A.F London (Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram, Bishop of London and President of the Guild of Play) wrote in his preface to *National Dances* that the Bermondsey children were the 'unconscious leaders of thousands more' and that 'their dancing is of that genuine kind which preaches new life [...] into all who see it'.<sup>96</sup> The folk revival inevitably had a strong focus on the past, celebrating folk material as imbued with important messages and values from the past and as a positive national birthright or heritage; but as can be seen in the writing above which casts participants as 'prophets' and talks of the 'new life' in dance, and Kimmins and Neal's emphasis on the nurturing of future citizens, the revivalist eye was focussed very much on the future. In fact, it was through looking simultaneously to the past and to the future that they hoped to achieve their present aims. Judge points out that folk dance and song and children's games had for twenty years prior to Neal's work been widely seen as the constituent parts of an 'English folk heritage', but it was now that they were 'presented positively as the direct and transforming restoration' of that heritage.<sup>97</sup> More than a decade after her first use of folksong and dance, Neal wrote about a theatre she hoped to establish, centred on English traditions. Neal in this piece continued to argue for a symbiotic relationship between the practice of art and the building of citizenship, each inspiring and strengthening the other: 'the truest inspiration [...] comes from a sense of *common* unity and a sense of citizenship and responsibility and it is this which must be the basis of all art which is living and life-giving'.<sup>98</sup> But more than this, Neal stated that the theatre should 'embody not only the best traditions of the past, but also the best hopes and aspirations of the future'.<sup>99</sup> National identity and thus citizenship were conferred through continuity with a communal past, best summed up by Vaughan Williams:

by a nation I mean not necessarily aggregations of people, artificially divided from each other by political frontiers or economic barriers. What I mean is any community of people who are spiritually bound together by language,

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<sup>95</sup> Macer-Wright, p. xv.

<sup>96</sup> A.F. London, 'Preface' in Kimmins, *National Dances*, p. v.

<sup>97</sup> Judge, 'Mary Neal', p. 551.

<sup>98</sup> Neal, 'Theatre Of My Dreams', p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

environment, history, and common ideals and, above all, a continuity with the past.<sup>100</sup>

Vaughan Williams looked to the Elizabethan age for inspiration, and decades before him, so did Neal and Sharp, allying their Morris revivals to the contemporary Shakespeare revival in order to further their artistic and social aims.

### **Lessons from the past**

Neal's club taught and performed Morris in Stratford upon Avon and for the Shakespeare League, as well as with Noel's newly founded Thaxted dancers at the 'Shakespeare's England' festival at Earl's Court in 1912.<sup>101</sup> They also performed on stage in Harley Granville-Barker's 1912 production of *The Winter's Tale*, though Granville-Barker later remarked that having seen Sharp's more professional dancers, he would have preferred them in his production to Neal's young enthusiasts.<sup>102</sup> Neal also wrote a piece on the value of Shakespeare's work and influence, in which she argued that all of 'England's best ideals of national life' were 'incarnated in the personality of Shakespeare' and were 'manifested' in his work too.<sup>103</sup> She also discussed the great social utility of his work to those who were ready to 'perceive to what high purpose his art can be made to serve both as a means of education and of recreation.'<sup>104</sup> Sharp, Neal, and her Musical Director, MacIlwaine, all acted as folk dance judges at the Stratford Festival of Folk Song and Dance, of which Neal had been Director for several years.<sup>105</sup> By 1910, though, Sharp was beginning to win favour with the other organisers, and eventually Neal's position in Stratford became precarious. Neal was under the impression by late 1911 that there was to be a public discussion around the merits of her own and Sharp's

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<sup>100</sup> Vaughan Williams, 'National Music', p. 68.

<sup>101</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 147; Judge, 'Mary Neal', p. 552;

<sup>102</sup> Letter from Mary Neal to Clive Carey, 26 November 1912, CC/2/237, Clive Carey MS, VWML. 'While 'the Winter's Tale' was running, Sharp gave a display at the Polytechnic and invited Barker [...]. When Barker saw the dancers, he said 'By God, that is what I ought to have had'. [...] Barker has been weeping with rage that he did not have Sharp, and that our omnium gatherum dances had survived the play!'

<sup>103</sup> Neal, 'Folk-Art', pp. 200-201.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Judge, 'Mary Neal', p. 558.



opposing approaches, and so resigned her position in order to approach the consultation with freedom. The position, however, was swiftly awarded to Sharp without public consultation.<sup>106</sup> Sharp and Neal, in their struggle for control of the folksong and dance aspects of the Stratford Movement, and Kimmins in her productions of such historical pageants as *The Masque of the Children of Empire*, (a history of England from the Saxons to Victoria), and staging of Elizabethan and Restoration-themed fairs at Chailey, made their appeals to the English past in far more direct manner than other revivalists.<sup>107</sup> Livingston notes that in general, musical revivals look to traditions associated with a period of particular stability in the past, and so 'the revived practice comes to represent that feeling of cultural and social well-being.'<sup>108</sup> This would almost suggest that the revivalists were acting in the manner of a cargo cult, mistaking the relationships between a society and its culture and attempting to resurrect that well-being through the performance of its original expression.

Yet despite their deliberate evocation of Elizabethan Englishness and the presentation of folk material as a direct link to this glorious past, the folk revivalists were not labouring under any illusions about what they were doing. They were not merely hoping to banish the ills of the present by forgetting their cares in merry dance and song, but had developed theories and strategies as to how the revived culture would help to create a better present through building strong communities, though inculcating citizenship, and by giving physical health and rejuvenating recreation. Sharp was quick to counter any accusation that revival involved regression:

people have an idea that we are a lot of antiquarians and archaeologists who want to revive the past. We have no wish whatsoever to put back the clock [...] we do not seek to revive the Merrie England of the past, we want to create a Merry England of the present. These things are still living, we have still got a

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 556; Neal had been aware of the precarious nature of her position at Stratford for some time, and wrote to Clive Carey, Herbert MacIlwaine's successor as Espérance musical director, on the subject. Letter from Mary Neal to Clive Carey, [9 May 1911], CC/2/209, Clive Carey MS, VWML.

<sup>107</sup> Kimmins, *Masque*, pp. 1-3; 'Programme for Elizabethan Fair, July 15th 1920' in Leatherbound loose-leaf album HB131/2, p. 4; 'Programme for St. Swithun Fair, 1921' in Leatherbound loose-leaf album HB131/2, p. 10.

<sup>108</sup> Livingston, p. 69.

strong vitality; there is a message for us in the present & for those who are to come after us.<sup>109</sup>

The idea was not to recreate the past, but to apply some of its lessons, methods, or inspirations in the present and future. According to Buckland, such revivalists were not 'merely preserving what was perceived as a threatened cultural inheritance against the tide of modernity', but advocating for 'the revival of the cultural past [...] with a view towards social change' and finding ways in which 'the best of the past might be utilised for progressive aims.'<sup>110</sup> As Kimmins wrote:

All lovers of children should be sturdy advocates of the revival of all that is national and traditional, particularly in all matters relating to education, for there is but little doubt that the historical method is the right one.<sup>111</sup>

Kimmins was aiming for a positive refashioning of historical elements for use in the present day: as Buckland writes, the past for these social workers was 'viewed as a common resource from which to model the present and future.'<sup>112</sup> Yet in truth, what Kimmins achieved was indeed not a revival or a re-connection. Despite the strong motivation of the social benefit of continuity, she did not succeed in reviving traditional dance, but in popularising newly-created forms *inspired* by the past.

### **Reviving dance or reviving ideas?**

Kimmins' dances were ultimately characterisations of folk culture, not collected material sourced from fieldwork or print sources. Presenting such songs as 'Scots, wha hae', written by Robert Burns, and 'All hail to thee, Cambria', written by John Jones 'Talhaiarn', as traditional folksongs and such dances as 'The Dance of the Rose, Shamrock, Thistle, and Leek' and 'Dance of Cousin Jonathon' as 'peasant' or 'traditional' dance, she conflated the 'national' and the 'folk' in a manner which Sharp himself was

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<sup>109</sup> 'English Folk-Music in Dance and Song', p. 4.

<sup>110</sup> Buckland, 'Dance and cultural memory', p. 51.

<sup>111</sup> Kimmins, *Festival and Dance*, p. ix.

<sup>112</sup> Buckland, 'Pioneering England's dances', p. 321.

enraged by when committed by the Board of Education.<sup>113</sup> But what Neal and Sharp both achieved with their Morris revivals was just the sort of historical re-connection that had so eluded Kimmins. As Judge points out, previous attempts at a revival of Morris, in particular the work of D'Arcy Ferris in Bidford during the 1880s, had had more in common with theatrical stage Morris and Elizabethan pageantry, a romantic extension of the 'Merrie England' idea.<sup>114</sup> Kimmins certainly relied much on theatrics and pageantry, but despite paying their dues both to Shakespeare and to the concept of 'Merrie England' (though Sharp later came to detest the term), Neal and Sharp's Morris revivals were that much closer to the 'village Morris' which still survived in such places as Eynsham and Bampton in Oxfordshire.<sup>115</sup> For all Neal's talk of Merrie England, for all her avowal of the power of Shakespeare and her belief in the dance's essential 'spirit', her revival more than any other was built upon the solid foundation of real practice: her club dancers were taught at first hand by village dancers, invited by Neal to London.<sup>116</sup> Neal wished for ownership of these dances to remain with the working classes, and so her girls themselves taught the dances they had learned throughout the country, including to the Thaxted youths. Neal wrote of the future development of the Morris through dissemination among young, working class practitioners:

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<sup>113</sup> 'Scots, wha hae' and 'All hail to thee, Cambria' appear in *National Dances*, pp. 24-5 and pp. 34-35. Though both were recently written lyrics, and written deliberately in the national vein, both took their tunes from traditional melodies. 'The Dance of the Rose, Shamrock, Thistle, and Leek' appears in the same book, pp. 40-43; 'Dance of Cousin Jonathon' is in *Peasant Dances*, pp. 42-3. The dance is listed under the section titled 'Peasant Dances', but appears to be a characterisation of the 'national' dance: John Bull and Cousin Jonathon dance alongside girls dressed as the Statue of Liberty, taking far more inspiration from the State than from 'the folk.' Sharp was incensed by the Board of Education's conflation of 'folk' and 'national' songs, as such lack of distinction neglected the difference between popular but recently composed songs, and the positive attributes of songs created communally and shaped through the process of oral tradition. He exchanged a series of letters with Sir Charles Stanford, who defended the Board, in the *Daily Chronicle* in 1906 following the Board's publication of a list of songs for schoolteachers' use. The letters and context are reproduced and discussed in Maud Karpeles, *Cecil Sharp: His Life and Work* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 58-63.

<sup>114</sup> Judge, 'Merrie England', p. 126.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>116</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 147.

The most we can do is to hand on the spirit of the dance and a general idea of its form gathered from all available sources, and leave the boys and girls to develop it as all folk-art has been developed, according to the tastes of its present interpreters.<sup>117</sup>

Kimmins had wished to hand on the 'spirit' of folk culture and of the English past, seeing great potential for her social work in both, but she had neglected to tether that spirit to any sort of robust attempt at reviving authentic dance. She was aware of this: 'what was suitable and beautiful, and absolutely in keeping with the peace and quiet of the village green [...] may not be, and often is certainly not, suitable for our city children of to-day'.<sup>118</sup> She wrote that 'in reviving the life of long ago we have to deliberately face the conditions of to-day.' The 'spirit' and the 'idea' of folksong dance were to her more suitable than the actual reality. This inspiration, despite its lack of relation to the reality, was clearly a strong motivation for Kimmins and was at the centre of her social work achievements. But it was Neal's revival which provided the direct reconnection with historical, rural English culture that the movement's leaders were looking for, and demonstrated through this concern for continuity a commitment to the future, not only of the unfolding development of the folk movement itself, but also to the future of those young interpreters themselves as they became fully-fledged citizens, guided by the positive influence of the 'spirit of the dance.'

### **Tangible benefits**

The Espérance Club's foremost goal was to foster happiness. The first statement in its list of aims was that '1. The club stands to the girls for "the home", 'happy shelter' and 'the interest and mental stimulus and good comradeship of the happy family circle'.<sup>119</sup> Extolling the importance of happiness, Neal expanded on the idea of the club as a happy home:

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<sup>117</sup> Mary Neal, 'The Morris Dance Step', correspondence to *Country Life*, 15 October 1910, Sharp Press Cuttings Book 5, p. 95. VWML.

<sup>118</sup> Kimmins, 'The Use of Folk Songs and Games', p. 266.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

We started our club with one idea and one idea only; we would make for our girls a bright and a happy Christian home, and we would share with them as literally as possible all the good gifts which had been given to us in our lives. Anything like a night school or an institution is of no use to the ordinary working girl; her work has been so hard during the day, [...] that in the evening she must have life and light and as much merriment and joy as it is possible to give her.<sup>120</sup>

This idea of sharing their lives with those whom they were endeavouring to help was what had first driven Neal and Pethick to leave behind the restrictions of the Mission, and was the underpinning aspect of all of Neal's work with the *Espérance Club*, and therefore her interaction with the folk revival. In an echo of Marson, Neal wrote that folk music was 'the truest meeting ground for all classes', and that the 'greater patriotism' resulting from the revival of folksong and dance brought about 'a closer knitting together of class and class'.<sup>121</sup> Just as Marson believed that an important duty of the priest lay in interpreting the lives and needs of his flock to those of his own class, Pethick felt that the duty of interpretation fell to the social worker:

I believe the girls' club [...] may greatly influence the adjustment of industrial questions in the near future. The club leaders have a unique opportunity of getting at the facts, they have sources of evidence which it is exceeding difficult for the factory inspector to touch.<sup>122</sup>

Living more closely alongside the girls, as Marson had endeavoured to enter into the lives of his parishioners, afforded access to their views, views they could then 'explain [...] to the class to which they belong' to put it in Marson's words; or 'represent the rights and claims of the young until they have entered into their citizenship' and 'give utterance to their claim upon society, for a life that is worth the living', to use Pethick's.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Neal, *Pretty Maid*, p. 4.

<sup>121</sup> Neal, 'Set to Music', p. 2; Neal, 'Folk-Art', p. 224.

<sup>122</sup> Pethick, 'Girls' Clubs', p. 113.

<sup>123</sup> Marson, *God's Co-operative*, pp. 106-7; Pethick, 'Girls' Clubs', pp. 113-4.

Along with the social benefits of communal recreation and the empowerment of reclaimed citizenship, both Neal and Kimmins also passed on more tangible benefits to the young people in their Guilds. 'Life skills' were of course the main focus of Kimmins' schools at Chailey, but the members of the *Espérance* Club also learned transferable skills through their participation in the revival, as Pethick reported:

As children their whole experience had been drawn from London, but when they became teachers of "the Morris" they began to travel all over England. They met many varieties of people and they mixed on an equal level with all classes of society. [...] they were often entertained in the homes of very influential people and were always treated as honoured guests. With marvellous adaptability they rose to the new conditions. It was surprising to see one of these girls, whose circumstances in the past had been so limited, teaching a village population - not only boys and girls but men and women of all ages - with complete authority.<sup>124</sup>

These children were treated as the owners of something valuable, of which they should be proud, and, important to Neal, something that *only* they could pass on. Winnington-Ingram wrote of the Guild of Play children as 'leaders of a national movement', and Neal wrote of her girls as 'doing a national work, and doing it well!'<sup>125</sup> The girls were to be empowered by the knowledge that 'for the first time we have something in our possession for which others are glad to ask, and which we are glad to share.'<sup>126</sup> Pethick noted that most of the girls had never been out of London. The club offered them the chance to travel not just as teachers but also to go on a holiday, generally to the Green Lady Hostel in Littlehampton, co-owned by the club. These holidays were paid for through funds raised from dance performances, and as well as a broadening of horizons, performed an important function in allowing the girls respite from the heavy duties expected of them as young women at home in addition to their wage-earning work: the girls, even as young as the eight-year-old 'Ader' who appeared in a fundraising pamphlet for an *Espérance* holiday, were tasked with caring for several younger

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<sup>124</sup> Pethick-Lawrence, pp. 137-8.

<sup>125</sup> A.F London, p. v; Mary Neal quoted in 'Teaching Morris-Dance', MN Box 4.

<sup>126</sup> Neal, 'Set to Music', p. 2.

siblings. Neal wrote that 'These children ought to get away from the constant demand on their time and energy which the exigencies of life as lived by the poor makes on them'.<sup>127</sup> They were able to have this respite as a result of the money earned from sales of tickets to and donations made at their dance performances, earning for themselves a reward for their hard work and accruing benefit from cultural products of which they had become keepers.<sup>128</sup>

The girls also accrued this benefit more directly: through teaching Morris, they could make up to 12s. 6d. a week as well as their ordinary wages.<sup>129</sup> Chief Instructress Florrie Warren was teaching full-time by 1907, and three more, Blanche Payling (who taught the Thaxted team), Rose Mallet, and May Start, were eventually able to transition into full-time dance teachers also.<sup>130</sup> Some of the girls also worked at their dressmaking co-operative, Maison Espérance. Pethick wrote that their aim in setting up the tailoring business was 'to raise the standard of living for these working girls who had become our friends to somewhat the same level as our own', at the heart of which was the payment of a 'living wage.' The minimum wage paid to the most junior workers was 15s. per week, 'a very low minimum' as she admitted, 'but nearly double the money that these girls had been earning hitherto'.<sup>131</sup> The club always focussed upon the emotional benefits of both the folk material and its performance and the sense of belonging to a tight-knit club, the ideal of happiness at the heart of all of Neal's work: 'We wanted to put as much happiness as we could into the two hours spent together, and we hoped to build up in the club human relationships that would influence and uplift the rest of the life.'<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless, underneath all of this there was cash, or at least the means of earning it, with greater dignity and in better conditions than was offered these young women in their previous sweated employment.

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<sup>127</sup> Mary Neal, *Ader..Ader..Ader!!*. MN Box 3, VWML.

<sup>128</sup> An article reports that £50 towards a holiday for the club girls was raised by a performance of folksong at the Queen's Hall. 'Folk-Songs and Morris Dances', *The Morning Post*, nd. MN Box 4, VWML, London.

<sup>129</sup> 'Teaching Morris-Dance', MN Box 4.

<sup>130</sup> Bearman, 'English Folk Movement', p. 96.

<sup>131</sup> Pethick-Lawrence, p. 118.

<sup>132</sup> Emmeline Pethick, 'Working Girls' Clubs' in Reason (ed.), pp. 101-14 (p. 104).

Neal and Pethick were attempting to help the girls achieve a standard of living at 'somewhat the same level as our own,' but this approach drew scorn from fellow socialists:

There were people of some importance in the Socialist movement who used to [...] point out that what we were doing was quite worthless, since we were only extending to a handful of people some of the benefits that the capitalist régime had bestowed upon us [...].

This was perfectly true [...]. The fact was that we did not know how to change the system; all we could do was to change our own manner of living, and to change the conditions of a few young people who had become dear to us.<sup>133</sup>

They did not know how to change the system, and neither could they 'close the doors on the world outside, or forget its facts in the charmed circle about the fireside' at club meetings.<sup>134</sup> The realisation, helped along by the important naysayers, that 'there were twenty-two hours every day to put against the two hours spent in the club' meant that Neal and Pethick needed a more potent strategy:

The conditions, not only of the home, but of the factory or workshop, had to be taken into account. It became our business to study the industrial question as it affected our girls' employments, the hours, the wages, and the conditions. And we had also to give them a conscious part to take in the battle that is being fought for the workers, and will not be won until it is loyally fought by the workers as well.<sup>135</sup>

They would help the young women of their club to help themselves and their colleagues by studying the 'industrial question' and passing on their findings. P. Bagwell in his book on the West London Mission wrote that Neal emphatically did not see her club as a means of keeping 'troublesome teenagers' off of the streets and 'out of

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<sup>133</sup> Pethick-Lawrence, p. 119.

<sup>134</sup> Pethick, 'Girls' Clubs', p. 104.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.



mischievous', but as a "training school for working women who will be instrumental in the very near future in altering the conditions of the class they represent."<sup>136</sup> Neal's young women were to be politically aware as well as to take possession of their rightful heritage: they were given lectures by WSPU member Jessie Kenney, who joined them on one of their holidays to Littlehampton.<sup>137</sup> As Noel also believed, Neal wrote that much social work was counter-productive in that it 'was really keeping people from realising their position and keeping would-be helpers from making efforts to bring about a better state of things'.<sup>138</sup> The Espérance Club was to be different; they would make sure that the girls were aware of their 'position' and encouraged to work with 'would-be helpers' to create a 'better state of things.' The commitment to the political empowerment of the club's members was enshrined in its list of the aims: 'III. The club stands to its members for the first training ground for the social organisation of women.'<sup>139</sup> Despite the seemingly domestic and 'soft' focus upon leisure and the 'happy home', the aims of these social workers, Neal in particular, were of a genuinely political and progressive kind, involving political, social, and economic empowerment for young women and asserting the rights to citizenship of dispossessed children. Folk material as used by Neal and Kimmins was more powerful than it would seem on the surface: the aesthetics were quaint and the methods homely and sentimental, but the underlying ideals were serious and focused on real change, and they adopted such quaintness and sentiment as the driving force for the social projects.

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<sup>136</sup> P. Bagwell, *Outcast London, a Christian response: the West London Mission of the Methodist Church, 1887–1987* (London: Epworth Press, 1987), p. 31.

<sup>137</sup> Bearman, 'English Folk Movement', p. 61.

<sup>138</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 104.

<sup>139</sup> Pethick, 'Girls' Clubs', p. 112.

## Chapter Four: Letter versus Spirit: the fight for the revival's transformative potential

### Definition in opposition

It is widely accepted that the Morris revival in the 1910s and 1920s was largely shaped by two individuals of strong personality, and the disagreement between their two respective visions of what Morris was for. Mary Neal's progressive revival with its foundations in social bonding and the strengthening of a common good was increasingly at odds with Sharp's genteel and artistic movement. But it was through this opposition that Neal's socially useful revival continued to develop, defined by its antithesis to Sharp's own conception of the dance and its meaning. Seemingly minor disagreements on points of technique, such as the whether the knee should be bent or kept straight in the basic step, allowed each opponent to develop a strong brand identity, and to use it to publicise their own vision not just of the style, but the social purpose, of Morris, the combination of culture and ideology at the heart of the revival. This chapter examines this intersection of personality and culture, aesthetics and ideology, and the ensuing conflict as a driver of development and a factor which both helped to define and to damage the revival's potential for transformative social change. Previous work by Boyes has established that Neal's revival was socially-minded in a way Sharp's was not, and that her defeat removed such aspirations from the revival.<sup>1</sup> What has not been argued, though, is that the testing experience of this conflict in fact helped Neal to define and to develop her social work. Kimmins' experience of this defining period and its contrast with Neal's have also not been previously examined.

There was, before their disagreement became a full-blown schism, an initial period of peaceful co-operation between Sharp and Neal, during which Sharp gave explanatory lectures at *Espérance* performances, and both dedicated publications to each other.<sup>2</sup> The active revival of folk dance among working girls, the movement from

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<sup>1</sup> Boyes, *Imagined Village*, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Neal's pamphlet *Set to Music* was dedicated to Sharp; Sharp and MacIlwaine's *The Morris Book* was dedicated to 'Our Friends and Pupils The Members of the *Espérance* Girls' Club', and further mentioned the 'invaluable help' of Florrie Warren, from whose dancing the notation was made. The post-disagreement 1912 edition of Sharp's book omitted this dedication, along with mention of Florrie. Neal

theory to practice, had brought with it a sense of shared purpose and enthusiasm later remembered by Neal with mixed emotion:

I am writing just on an impulse after yesterday because when you were talking to those children I was very vividly reminded of the early days of our friendship when I felt we had so much in common that we were sure to be able to work together.

I want you to come and have a talk [...] because I am very grieved at the various misunderstandings that have entered into our work.

I came away yesterday inspired both by the successes and the shortcomings and full of ideas for future development and improvements. After all we have helped one another to make England a more beautiful place for the young folks, the work must go on and it is a thousand pities not to do it together.<sup>3</sup>

Making the world a better place for the young was Neal's decided aim and the source of her unbridled enthusiasm. But it was not so for Sharp: he hoped for 'the restoration of the English folk-song to those to whom it belongs by right of inheritance,' but despite his Fabian credentials, Sharp did not believe in the socially transformative potential of folk material championed by Neal.<sup>4</sup> Both parties were ambitious for the movement, but ambitious too for their own interpretations, and it was inevitable that they could not continue to work together. The first hint of strain detected by Neal was unexpected, as she described in her autobiography: in November 1907, *Punch* magazine published a cartoon titled 'Merrie England Once More', celebrating the Espérance Club and sending good wishes for the Goupil Gallery conference to be held the next day.<sup>5</sup> Neal took the magazine to show Sharp, and reported that as he looked at it, it was as if a 'blind' had come down over his face.<sup>6</sup> Neal stated that Sharp then said that he would not attend the

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shared her frustration at this in a postcard to Clive Carey. 'Postcard from Mary Neal to Clive Carey, n.d. [Sep 1912?], CC/2/240, Clive Carey MS, VWML.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Mary Neal to Cecil Sharp, Stratford, 6 May 1909. Sharp Correspondence, Box 5, Folder A. VWML.

<sup>4</sup> Sharp, *Conclusions*, p. xi.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Partridge, 'Merrie England Once More', *Punch*, 13 November 1907, p. 347.

<sup>6</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, pp. 157-8.

conference and that it was 'too soon to begin a national movement'.<sup>7</sup> Neal and MacIlwaine were confused, but Sharp attended the next day, behaving in a manner that Neal called 'very obstructive'.<sup>8</sup> Neal's narrative should perhaps be taken with a pinch of salt, remembering that it appears in an autobiography which was written after their quarrel and coloured therefore by later events: the official report of the conference shows Sharp as gracious and complimentary towards Neal and her work.<sup>9</sup> After this, the disagreement developed in private over a number of years, before erupting into the public eye in a series of furious newspaper interviews and correspondence in April 1910. It dragged on over the course of that summer in an increasingly polarising manner until almost everyone involved in the folk revival had taken one side or another. By 1911, Sharp had set up an organisation of his own, The English Folk Dance Society.

Neal summarised her quarrel with Sharp as a technical or stylistic difference of opinion: 'Mr. Sharp wanted to make an exact canon for dancing and I wanted it to follow the traditional freedom of the old dancers'.<sup>10</sup> But bound up with this opposition between accuracy and freedom were also multiple other factors, including Sharp's developing insistence on the Morris as 'a ceremonial, spectacular and professional dance' and as the remnant of 'primitive ceremonies of a quasi-religious nature'.<sup>11</sup> While also advocating the educational use of the folk dance, Sharp's approach here was directly opposed to Neal's championing of it as a cheerful and educative form of recreation. Sharp, although he did not advocate a revival of priestly ceremony as Gardiner was later to do, would have the Morris taught as an Art, not as a recreation:

in placing folk-dances in the school we are introducing not merely a pleasant form of recreation, but an Art, that is, something which is at once beautiful,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> 'English Folk-Music in Dance and Song', p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 159.

<sup>11</sup> Cecil Sharp, *Folk Dancing in Schools*, EFDS, 3rd edtn., 1920 (1st edtn. 1912), p. 4. Sharp discussed the ceremonial applications of Morris in greater detail in Cecil J. Sharp and Herbert MacIlwaine, *The Morris Book, Part III* (London: Novello, 1910), pp. 7-12.

expressive and imaginative, and which demands careful and reverent handling.<sup>12</sup>

By careful handling, Sharp meant dissemination and interpretation through himself and his own trusted followers: Neal's methods and motivations were the antithesis of his own, beginning with their differing conceptions of the dance. The 'Merrie England' cartoon so horrified Sharp because it brought these differences into stark relief, celebrating Neal's pastoral aesthetic with frolicking maidens in frilly bonnets and beribboned young men dancing to a pipe and tabor played by a grinning Punch. For Sharp, Morris was a serious business, a survival not only of the culture of the English past but of the ceremonial dances of a higher-status, priest-like sect, or at least of a semi-professional dance performed by picked, highly-trained men. Sharp later moved away from the notion of Morris as a priestly ceremonial, and the abandonment of this idea and the absence of ritual in EFDS performances brought new opposition from Gardiner.

### **Traditional Authority**

Both Neal and Sharp valued the Morris as a survival of lost English heritage, but their revivals were differentiated by what they thought this lost heritage was: for Neal, this was a dance not of an artistic aristocracy, but of the 'young and happy'.<sup>13</sup> She wrote that 'the original folk dancers were amateur in the real sense of the word', that is, something done for the love of it, fitting perfectly with Neal's idea of the Morris as an expression of youthful joy in movement.<sup>14</sup> Sharp's serious approach was anathema:

if the learning and teaching of these dances is to be to either teacher or pupil an added burden, it had been better that these dances had never been re-discovered. On the contrary, there should be in these dances something which sets free the spirit, something which so adds to the joy of life, so energizes and vitalizes, that every other part of the school work will be more easily and better done.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Sharp, *Folk Dancing in Schools*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>13</sup> Neal, *Espérance Morris Book I*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 159.

<sup>15</sup> Neal, *Espérance Morris Book I*, p. xii.

Just as Kimmins believed strongly in the educational value of play, and in the right of the working classes to recreation and enjoyment, Neal believed that the educative value of folk dance lay in its ability to rejuvenate. She believed that in encouraging the practice of the Morris dance among young people she was reintroducing to the youth of the urban working classes of the early 20th century a form of working-class recreational dance, wedded with aspects of authenticity, tradition and heritage which provided spiritually-redemptive or socially-transformative benefits alongside those inherent in physical exercise. Sharp, advocating what he saw as a high art, ceremonial in nature and imbued with traces of a great lost culture, wished for a more professional revival. It was to be done as national duty toward a fragile art form in need of preservation, not as a duty towards disenfranchised youth as Neal would have it. Sharp wrote:

It is, moreover, of the first importance that the dances should be transferred from the folk as accurately as possible in their true forms; otherwise, their educative, no less than their artistic value will be seriously discounted. Indeed, rather than introduce a debased art into the School it would be wiser, to exclude it altogether.<sup>16</sup>

Sharp was of the opinion that Neal's Morris was a 'debased art', and wrote to the *Westminster Gazette* in May 1910 to complain of the 'radical defects' of her club's dancing, among which he numbered 'the bent knee, the absence of ankle-spring, and the lack of that "traditional dignity" which is the marked characteristic of all genuine Morris dancing', as well as 'the raising of the thighs and the moving of the legs violently up and down, after the manner of a high-stepping horse', an 'inelegant movement' for which 'there is no traditional authority whatever.'<sup>17</sup> The idea of 'traditional dignity' was in line with Sharp's overall conception of the character of the Morris, but he strayed onto shaky foundations when he wrote of 'traditional authority.' Sharp set himself up as an authority in matters of folk dance, helped of course by his

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<sup>16</sup> Sharp, *Folk Dancing in Schools*, p. 4

<sup>17</sup> Cecil Sharp, 'The Morris Dances at Brussels', correspondence in *The Westminster Gazette*, 12 May 1910, in Sharp Press Cuttings Book 5, p. 77. VWML. The Espérance Club had been performing in Brussels, having been invited to represent England in an exhibition.

previous publications in the field of folksong, including by the end of 1907 his manifesto *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions* and three instalments of *Folk Songs from Somerset*. The image of Sharp as expert authority was perpetuated by the Press, with flattering interviews conducted by friends at various newspapers. Most papers invoked Sharp as often as Morris was mentioned:

Mr Sharp has so closely identified himself with the music for Morris dances and the investigation of what may be called the legitimate form of the actual physical movements of the dance [...]. It is well [...] that there will be at least one centre of light and leading in the matter.<sup>18</sup>

With the support of the Press, Sharp was able to pontificate on the Espérance dance style. Gammon argues that Sharp thought of himself as 'playing the role of a musical Bishop Percy, whose *Reliques* had inspired the Romantic poets' (and whose gentrification irritated Marson).<sup>19</sup> Sharp asked: 'Who will do for our English ballads and songs what Scott and Burns did for the Scottish?', and stepped in to do the job himself.<sup>20</sup> John Francmanis notes that Sharp told publishers Novello that his editorial policy in the song collections had been based 'not so much on theory or argument as "feeling and temperament."<sup>21</sup> This would seem to go against Sharp's insistence upon accuracy, and better fit Neal's approach, based upon enjoyment and the free development of the dances. But Francmanis points out that these capacities of 'feeling and temperament' in fact went towards the creation of Sharp's 'expert' persona: because the field was so new, with so few working within it, Sharp's confidence in his pronouncements, his management of information, and the unwillingness of others to challenge him, allowed his interpretations to become accepted truth. But it was Neal, for all her talk of the 'spirit' of the dance, whose methods were based in fact, going to original sources, the traditional dancers, for her material, and arranging for them to teach her club themselves, rather than have the dances taught second-hand, mediated

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<sup>18</sup> 'Morris Dancing', *School Music Review*, October 1909. Sharp Press Cuttings Book 5, p. 57. VWML.

<sup>19</sup> Vic Gammon, 'Many Useful Lessons: Cecil Sharp, Education and the Folk Dance Revival 1899-1924', *Cultural and Social History*, 5, no.1 (2008), pp. 75-98 (p. 76).

<sup>20</sup> Sharp, *Conclusions*, p. 103.

<sup>21</sup> John Francmanis, 'National Music to National Redeemer: The Consolidation of a 'Folk-Song' Construct in Edwardian England', *Popular Music*, 21, no.1 (2002), pp. 1-25 (p. 11).

through herself. Sharp insisted that it was 'of the first importance that the dances should be transferred from the folk as accurately as possible in their true forms', but never sought to facilitate such a direct transferral.<sup>22</sup>

### **An unconditional inheritance**

Both parties saw in the Morris something 'higher' than its status as mere dance. For Sharp it was lost national art, something that ought to be preserved with reverence, but for Neal the opposite was true. Just as Marson wrote of the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven being so deeply respected that they were not used, when to do so would open a 'starting-place for great ventures and endeavours,' the only 'true and only worthy loyalty to the past', so Neal believed that Morris' real value lay in the social uses it could present.<sup>23</sup> Neal was concerned lest Morris become 'safely imprisoned in the archives of learned societies or between the covers of collectors' books.'<sup>24</sup> If it was not 'in use', engaged in for enjoyment by those to whom it belonged, Morris, or indeed any other cultural product, was pointless, and had perhaps reached its endangered status because it had deserved to do so. Both Neal and Sharp spoke of folksong and dance in terms of an 'inheritance', but only Neal as an inheritance freely given: once handed over by her traditional dancer contacts, it belonged to the new generation, themselves now traditional dancers free to do with the dance what they would, because they were now part of the re-established historical continuity which was one of the Morris' main appeals. As Neal wrote, her young dancers were now its 'present interpreters.'<sup>25</sup> Neal's point about the development of folk-art is an interesting one: it is the same argument of evolutionary development through the oral tradition that Sharp so stridently championed in respect to folksong, indeed the concept wherein the very value of folksong lay, according to his *Conclusions*. This process of evolution through oral tradition, in Sharp's view, meant that only the best material survived, and songs whose tunes were not especially good, or whose words no longer offered meaning, were discarded.<sup>26</sup> As Gammon points out, Sharp had placed great significance upon the

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<sup>22</sup> Sharp, *Folk Dancing in Schools*, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Marson, *God's Co-operative*, pp. 123-4.

<sup>24</sup> Neal, *Set to Music*, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Neal, 'The Morris Dance Step'.

<sup>26</sup> Sharp, *Conclusions*, p. x, p. 31.



factors of 'variation and selection' with regards to the songs, but when it came to the Morris, 'he seemed to think there was an absolutely right way to do each dance,' and a single, correct style for the Morris as a whole.<sup>27</sup> In contrast with Sharp, Neal wished for the Morris to develop in this way, arbitrated by the tastes or needs of its present performers.

Perhaps Sharp's disapproval of the future development of the Morris by its new performers was to do with who the performers themselves were. The innumerable generations Sharp believed to have slowly, almost passively crafted folksong were rural, 'peasants' who lived in villages insulated from the bustle of the London streets and the myriad influences of other types of music and other cultures in the urban environment. Sharp had collected the songs from the elderly remnants of this rural peasantry, at a point which he thought to be the end of the process of the songs' evolution. The dances, on the other hand, had been passed to a new generation of working-class users, and if Neal had her way, were about to undergo an active process of new development. This development was not to be undertaken by a nameless, faceless crowd of bucolic peasantry, but by 'Cockneys, born and bred', as they were called by the *Times*, or 'common children, from mean streets', as Macer-Wright wrote.<sup>28</sup> Sharp was concerned for the future of Morris in the hands of these new innovators. Stefan Szczelkun reminds us that Sharp 'romanticised' this idea of the 'common people', and wrote in criticism of his colleagues who 'conflated' the idea of this 'common people' with the 'modern masses' and "confound the common language of the illiterate with the dialect of the unlettered, and refuse to distinguish between the instinctive music of the common people and the debased street-music of the vulgar."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Szczelkun believes that Sharp disliked Neal's Morris because it was 'too close to the qualities of

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<sup>27</sup> Gammon 'Useful Lessons', p. 91.

<sup>28</sup> Press notice from *The Times*, *Espérance Morris Book II*, p. 50; Macer-Wright, p. xv. Harker calls Sharp's hypothesis of evolution and selection through oral tradition a 'systematic de-humanizing and de-individualizing of the process', ascribing agency to the material at the expense of the singers themselves. Harker, *Fakesong*, pp. 88-9. Neal undoubtedly saw some kind of 'spirit' or force within the songs and dances, but her approach was much more firmly rooted in the experience of the individuals who performed them, both the young members of her club and the 'traditional dancers' who taught them.

<sup>29</sup> Stefan Szczelkun, *The Conspiracy of Good Taste: William Morris, Cecil Sharp, Clough-Williams Ellis and the repression of working class culture in the 20th century* (London: Working Press, 1993), p. 50.

actual working class culture.<sup>30</sup> Neal also romanticised the 'common people', writing of one of her club girls as an 'unconscious child of nature', but she did see the urban working-class youths of the Espérance club as, if not actually 'the folk', then the nearest possible inheritors; and of course with this, the rightful custodians of the Morris.<sup>31</sup> When Sharp eventually managed to bring together his own revival Morris demonstration side, he took his dancers from an exclusively middle-class milieu: the first men's side which made a public debut in early 1912 and continued until the outbreak of war was made up of musician George Jerrard Wilkinson; antiquarian Perceval Lucas (the brother of E.V. Lucas, who had shed tears of rapture at the first Espérance performance); R.J. Tiddy, lecturer in English and Classical Literature at Oxford; George Butterworth, emerging composer; and Douglas Kennedy, who had trained as a scientist before becoming drawn into the folk movement.<sup>32</sup> The final two dancers were James Paterson and A. Claud Wright: men from outside of the social network of musical friends who made up the rest of the side, they had been invited to join after impressing Sharp with their dancing during folk dance classes at the Chelsea Polytechnic.<sup>33</sup> All were widely considered to be excellent dancers; 'athletic and graceful', reported Helen Kennedy.<sup>34</sup> Judge's discussion of the 1913 May Day Revels at the Globe Theatre points out the way in which Neal attempted to show her Espérance side favourably by dancing alongside a traditional male side from Bampton in the Cotswolds: the Bampton men danced in the manner they usually performed on Whit Monday, and were followed by Neal's team, so as to show 'both the difference and the similitude between the traditional dancers and those whom they have taught.'<sup>35</sup> Judge writes that in showing her dancers in direct comparison with the authentic dancers of Bampton, she could also invite comparison with Sharp's genteel team, pinpointing

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Mary Neal to Clive Carey, 2 May 1913. CC/2/243, Clive Carey MS. VWML.

<sup>32</sup> Helen Kennedy, 'Early Days', *E.F.D.S. News*, 9 (May 1925), pp. 277-283; repr. in *American Morris News*, 28, no.3 (2008)

<<http://www.americanmorrisnews.org/tonybarrandv28n3reprintsfromEDSSpart2.html>> [accessed 7th August 2014].

<sup>33</sup> James C. Brickwedde, 'A. Claud Wright: Cecil Sharp's Forgotten Dancer', *Folk Music Journal*, 6, no.1 (1990), pp. 4-36 (p. 10).

<sup>34</sup> Kennedy, 'Early Days'.

<sup>35</sup> Judge, 'Mary Neal', p. 573. Judge quotes from the *Observer*, 27 April 1913, p. 10.

'what she saw as the inability of "the average young lady or gentleman to get near to the spirit of the dance", and on the other hand the ease with which her own company, "working lads and lasses from town and country" (the country being represented by dancers from Thaxted), could do this.<sup>36</sup> Neal's insistence on ownership of the dance for its working-class inheritors became ever more strident. She declared that 'This movement originated with the people, and if any who are not of the 'folk' want to practise it, they must reverently learn from the people.'<sup>37</sup> The opposing imaginings of the purpose of Morris gave rise to equally opposite conceptions of the form the Morris should take in the present and future. Neal saw the missing links of continuity re-forged with the handing on of the dances to her working-class youths. She viewed them as worthy custodians who were not only justified in developing the dances to suit their tastes but in doing so actively participating in and improving the dances and adding to their value as folk culture. Sharp, who emphatically did not see these urban dwelling, and mostly female, youths, suffused with the songs of the music hall and the public house, as rightful and suitable heirs to the keepers of this nationally important treasure trove of folk culture, instead aimed for an established canon, technique and style of Morris. For Sharp, Morris could only be of use to the nation in an accurately preserved form, not in ever-changing flux. It was an inspiring artefact, not a dynamic medium.

### **Pedantry**

Sharp's Morris would be made up of dances collected from people and places approved of by Sharp as genuine (the 'decadent' dances of Abingdon, Oxfordshire and the 'faked' corpus of Ilmington, Warwickshire would find no place, yet Sharp found room for the Bidford dances, whose revival forms had certainly been influenced by the eccentric D'Arcy Ferris).<sup>38</sup> The precise steps and technique would likewise be monitored and

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> 'Americans Learning English Folk Music' An Interview in "The Musical Herald," repr. in *The Espérance Morris Book, Part II*, p. 49.

<sup>38</sup> Sharp denigrated the dances of Ilmington and Abingdon, both traditions Neal had been investigating and whose village teams had performed alongside the Espérance club dancers: 'English Folk-Dances', *Morning Post*, 10 May 1910. Sharp Press Cuttings Book 5, p. 78. VWML. A programme for an Espérance performance demonstrates that the club dancers shared the bill with teams from Ilmington and Abingdon: *Order Of The Revels* [Programme]. CC/3/17, Clive Carey MS, VWML. For discussion of Ferris' revival of the Bidford Morris, see Judge, 'D'Arcy Ferris and the Bidford Morris'.

subject to his approval. Aesthetically, Sharp's Morris would be epitomised by restrained masculine vigour, as he set out in criticism of the freer Espérance style and its feminine dancers:

we have noticed in the would-be Morris dancer a tendency to be over-strenuous, to adopt [...] even a hoydenish manner of execution. These are utterly alien to the true spirit of the dance; for although it is characterised by forcefulness, strength, and even a certain abandonment, it is at the same time and always an exposition of high spirits under perfect control. When he is dancing, the true Morris-man is serious of countenance, yet gay of heart; vigorous, yet restrained; a strong man rejoicing in his strength, yet graceful, controlled, and perfectly dignified.<sup>39</sup>

This idea of a correct, canonical Morris formed another significant aspect to the disagreement between Neal and Sharp. They argued over the seemingly most minor technical details of performance, with this part of their quarrel by far the most public in terms of press coverage. The furore around the correct technique for the performance of the Morris lead to further crystallization of their separate positions, and the development of two very distinct brands of Morris. 'Hoydenish', boisterous feminine fun for social regeneration was set against serious masculine vigour in high art. Neal described her own method:

When we discovered a dance we believed to be genuine we invited the dancer to London to teach the dance himself, as we thought that this was the best way in which to ensure that not only the steps but the spirit was given to the learners. Altogether we had about thirty morris and sword dancers up to town.<sup>40</sup>

Neal, despite her feeling that the 'establishment of an exact canon' was an 'absurd' venture, still endeavoured to propagate only 'genuine' dances, talking at the Goupil conference on the subject of the 'purity' of folk dance and song and insisting that if a society were formed, 'we should not allow anyone to use our name unless they taught

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<sup>39</sup> Sharp and MacIlwaine, *The Morris Book, Part II*, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 149.

really Folk-Music'.<sup>41</sup> This idea of 'genuine' Morris dances was tempered, however, by Neal's observations on how the dances were actually performed by the traditional dancers she had seen: 'no two sides of dancers did a particular dance in precisely the same way. No two men in the side did the step in the same way, and no one danced it in exactly the same way on two separate occasions'.<sup>42</sup> What was 'genuine' or 'really Folk-Music' for Neal, was not something that was dependant on precise steps, but upon who the dancers were and the reasons for their dances; this concept, again, of the dance's spirit, and the social value it held for its users: 'Folk-art, if it is genuine, is an organic thing, and must grow and develop as the years pass by, and the dance of to-day will change to-morrow if it still expresses the genuine emotion of to-morrow'.<sup>43</sup> Sharp's insistence on a set-in-stone technique and a single correct step appeared to Neal as pedantry when it seemed so clear to her that the value of the dance lay not in its technicalities:

I am only afraid of the hindering touch of the pedant, of the professional dance and music teacher. The movement must be kept clear of all pedantry and of everything *précieux*. These dances must from time to time be learnt direct from the peasant, and be handed on by the simple-minded, the musically unlettered, the young and the happy.<sup>44</sup>

Sharp was riled by this statement, recalling it in an interview in May 1910. When asked what the results of Neal's 'somewhat original' practice had been, Sharp replied that her lack of 'any special scientific knowledge of the subject' and refusal of 'expert guidance' has meant "that hundreds, perhaps thousands, of children and adults have been taught to dance the Morris in ways not sanctioned by tradition."<sup>45</sup> The implication was that Sharp was the expert whose guidance was needed; who, as demonstrated by his communications with Novello, was in possession not only of the 'scientific' approach needed but also an expert intuition. Sharp had created a personal brand and maintained

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 159; 'English Folk-Music in Dance and Song', p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 155.

<sup>43</sup> Neal, 'Folk-Art', p. 221.

<sup>44</sup> Neal, *Espérance Morris Book I*, p. 5

<sup>45</sup> 'The Revival of English Folk-Dances: Mr Cecil Sharp's Views', *The Morning Post*, 3 May 1910. Sharp Press Cuttings Book 5, p. 76. VWML.

his brand in a highly professional manner, making use of his links to both the musical and educational establishments. He also deftly managed his image in the Press, making sure that his views were heard loudly and clearly: in an interview with the *Morning Post*, Sharp recalled the help of that newspaper over an early controversy to do with folksong, and stated that memory of the part played by the newspaper then now "emboldens me to hope that in the present difficulty you will again lend your powerful assistance to keep the movement for the revival of our English folk-dances on right - that is, on traditional - lines".<sup>46</sup>

### Philanthropy

If Sharp was 'the expert', what was Neal? *The Clarion* called her a 'fairy godmother, who with her magic wand of devotion and love has turned drab to bright and dull to gay'.<sup>47</sup> Constance Lytton wrote:

One feels she does it all for her own fun, *not* for the good of her soul, and to join in and really appreciate the lives of those she befriends rather than to "save" them. She is in all ways an absolutely sound, honest, un-posing creature.<sup>48</sup>

Even Sharp's ally and biographer A.H. Fox-Strangways complimented her abilities: 'Miss Neal was a philanthropist in the best sense; she planned quickly and worked with energy [...]. She was not a musician, and did not herself dance; but she had a gift for organization'.<sup>49</sup> Neal did not think too highly of expertise anyway: she wrote that 'it seems as unreasonable to talk about an expert in Morris dances as to talk about an expert in making people happy'.<sup>50</sup> She was a philanthropist, but we should not see her activities as confined to 'do-gooding', as Boyes notes, as to do so would be to ignore the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Georgia Pearce, 'Music Notes', *The Clarion*, 6 December 1907. Sharp Press Cuttings Book 4, p. 78. VWML.

<sup>48</sup> Constance Lytton, *Letters*, Betty Balfour (ed.) (London: Heinemann, 1925), p. 136; quoted in Roy Judge, 'Mary Neal', p. 579.

<sup>49</sup> A.H. Fox-Strangways and Maud Karpeles, *Cecil Sharp* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1933), p. 69.

<sup>50</sup> 'The Revival of English Folk-Dances: Miss Mary Neal's Views', *The Morning Post*, 6 May 1910. Sharp Press Cuttings Book 5, pp. 77-8. VWML.

'stated political objectives' and 'ideology' behind her work, an aspect of her vision for Morris that would come to be another bone of contention between herself and Sharp.<sup>51</sup>

Sharp, keen to keep his own expert credentials in the public mind, took offence at Neal's talking to the press, particularly as he thought that she was straying from her own brand as cheerful organiser and encroaching on his as serious expert. He wrote as much in a series of letters to her. On 7 March 1909, Sharp insisted that Neal confine herself to "teaching the dances and helping to arrange [...] and giving others help in organising", and worried that her interviews 'give to your words and actions an authority which they would otherwise not possess, and place in your hands a weapon which, for the lack of the necessary knowledge cannot be expected to be used wisely or well.'<sup>52</sup> He pressed his point on 14 March: if Neal was going to 'pose as an expert and an authority' she must not expect his support.<sup>53</sup> If she wanted his help, she 'must be very much more guarded in what you say in the newspapers and you must be content "to spread the knowledge of the music, teach the dances etc" and nothing else.'<sup>54</sup>

Neal did not ask Sharp to support her, but expanded her own 'philanthropist' role while succeeding, for a time, in using Sharp's expertise against him. An interviewer in May 1910 asked Neal if there was "some controversy going on, or [...] some difference of principle between you?"<sup>55</sup> Despite her denial, it is very clear in Neal's answer that it was a conflict of personal brands:

This is not a personal matter between Mr. Sharp and myself [...] It is merely an example of a deeply-rooted, age-long controversy which is always going on. It may be described as the difference between the form and the life, the bookman and the workman, between the pedant and those in touch with actual life itself. I am not characterising Mr. Sharp as a pedant or anything else, but only speaking of the principle. [...] I recognise no expert in Morris dancing but the traditional dancer himself, and I recognise no expert teachers of Morris dancing but those

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<sup>51</sup> Boyes, *Imagined Village*, p. 85.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Cecil Sharp to Mary Neal, 7 March 1909. Sharp Correspondence, Box 5, Folder A. VWML.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Cecil Sharp to Mary Neal, 14 March 1909. Sharp Correspondence, Box 5, Folder A. VWML.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> 'The Revival of English Folk Dances: Miss Mary Neal's Views'.

who have been taught by the traditional dancer.[...] I gather Mr Sharp defines an expert in a totally different sense, the chief qualification in his view being a very thorough knowledge of the technique of music and dancing.<sup>56</sup>

Neal wrote in her autobiography that 'Mr. Sharp was a professional music teacher and could never shake off the atmosphere of the class room, and gradually repudiated all his original acceptance of our girls' dancing and teaching'.<sup>57</sup> He did this publically, writing to the press to correct any mention of himself in association with Neal or her Club, arguing that the Club's aims were really 'questions for the expert' and that 'it is to be hoped that the promoters will [...] allow their enthusiasm to be guided by those who possess the requisite [...] technical knowledge'.<sup>58</sup> Yet, as we can see from her interview with the *Morning Post*, Neal was not only undeterred by her supposed lack of technical expertise but in fact revelled in it, for it allowed her dancers to highlight the differences between Morris and other forms of dance. By attempting to treat Morris in the same manner as other dance forms, Sharp risked disguising what to Neal and other social reformers were its most vital qualities:

whereas the classic and the ballroom dance need careful training and technical skill, the folk-dance is a natural expression of joy and well-being, and needs no special training either in dancer or teacher. I like to hear it said, "We will show you a folk-dance," and not "We will teach you a one," because this is really what the teaching should be.<sup>59</sup>

Neal was a social worker first and foremost, and made use of folksong and dance only because she felt that it embodied concepts relevant to her social work, and because it was both enjoyable and of a difficulty level suitable for her club members. Reason discussed discipline in boys' clubs:

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 159.

<sup>58</sup> Cecil Sharp, 'A Guild of Morris Dancers', correspondence to *The Morning Post*, 1 April 1910. Sharp Press Cuttings Book 5, p. 70. VWML.

<sup>59</sup> Neal, 'Folk-Art', p. 221.



A goody-goody club, with many rules, is predestined to failure, while one of a more rough-and-tumble order gives just the material to be worked upon. Of course there will be no drink and no gambling, nor will foul language be allowed to pass unchallenged - I mean really foul, not merely ornamental language.<sup>60</sup>

A rigid adherence to the Sharp's rules of Morris would be no use to Neal in her social work. It is important to recognise that although the club is now known mainly for its role in the active revival of Morris dancing, it was at the time primarily a social club for young seamstresses in the sweated trade, with its own co-operative fashion house, 'Maison Espérance' founded in 1897, and a holiday home at Littlehampton, the 'Green Lady Hostel,' opened in 1900. The wider social work context of Neal's club is now overlooked as it is for Morris that the club has been remembered. Nevertheless, the fact that Neal wanted the Morris to have some kind of socially redemptive or empowering effect on its dancers and its audiences was so widely known at the time, especially in opposition to the rigorous precision demanded by Sharp, that Vaughan Williams was able to attend a fancy dress party dressed as Neal, holding a placard stating 'Power before Accuracy', and have his jest understood.<sup>61</sup> Neal got to the heart of this difference in a piece written for *The Observer* in 1911, in which she wrote that the aesthetic differences between her Morris and that of Sharp were the surface appearance of what the two believed Morris could mean and what purpose it could serve in the present day and into the future. Neal reduced all previous distinctions to do with technique, aesthetics and the identities of the performers to a single, and to her an imperative, question, that of whether Morris could be of social use:

Which interpretation [...] we prefer, [...] depends on what we believe this revival [...] will ultimately stand for. Is it to be a real expression of the life of the people, a setting free of the best aspirations and ideals of those who toil for daily bread? Is it to bring back to them some dignity, the self-possession, and the joy which is their birthright, and, above all, is it to be possible to say to any

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<sup>60</sup> Reason, p. 76.

<sup>61</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *RVW: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 150.

boy or girl, as they leave their work, "Come and learn dances and songs, for which you need as training only your youth and love of life? Or is this movement to be only an accomplishment for those who can afford to spend years in the attainment of physical culture? Is it to be a subject for lectures merely? Is it to become so technical that only the learned and the leisured will dare to take part in it?"<sup>62</sup>

Sharp, on the other hand, put his opinion across rather more bluntly: 'To us the Morris, whatever its derivation, is simply an art-form to be preserved and valued solely for its intrinsic merits'.<sup>63</sup> Sharp wrote that folksong appealed to 'specialists in many different branches of knowledge', but that there was 'plenty of room for workers in all these spheres of learning without jostlings or rivalries'.<sup>64</sup> But by the time his attention had shifted to Morris, this earlier opinion had been entirely reversed. Fox-Strangways in his biography wrote that 'the temptations to get side-tracked were many', including thoughts of 'dress-reform' or 'maintaining health'.<sup>65</sup> According to Fox-Strangways, by far the worst kind of side-tracking of the art of Morris was the one practiced by Neal: 'against all these Sharp was on his guard, but perhaps most of all he feared the philanthropist'.<sup>66</sup> It is important to realise that the coalescence of Sharp's public persona as an expert and authority on technical matters in many ways aided Neal, as it allowed her to adopt an opposing position which helped define her cause: she was not a 'pedant' like Sharp, because it was not the moves of the dance that mattered, but the meaning. To be accused of philanthropy was not an insult to the seriousness of her endeavours, because the social good, and not the preservation of cultural artefacts, was the foundation of her work. As she wrote to Carey in December 1912, her social work was her priority, and the Morris important only as a means towards that work:

Taking it all round the last year has been quite the best I have ever had, in spite of everything. Even if I gave up an official Guild, I should have my 4,000

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<sup>62</sup> Mary Neal, 'The National Revival of the Folk Dance: no. III - Present Day Interpretations of the Folk Dance', *Observer*, 3 December 1911, p. 20.

<sup>63</sup> Sharp, *Folk Dancing in Schools*, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Sharp, *Conclusions*, p. x.

<sup>65</sup> Fox-Strangways, p. 92.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

addresses and other assets with which to [...] help a general movement. [...] Thank goodness I am not in any way dependent on the folk-music, except as my contribution to what I think they would want. If it does not want my work anymore on the same lines, there is plenty else to do. But even the hostility has brought me some very staunch friends and some very dear people into my life, that is worth a lot, so we won't worry about it anymore, but go ahead the best way we can.<sup>67</sup>

The strong definition of her own position developed through the conflict with Sharp allowed Neal to forge new networks, and lent strength to her social work through the publicity generated. Without the Morris, she would still be left with the apparatus with which to carry on her work.

### **Seriousness or laughter**

It is clear from his own words and the recollections of his biographer that Sharp wished to resist any attempt to subvert the pure artistic nature of Morris for political or social ends. As Daniel Walkowitz writes, 'Sharp's cantankerous nature and anxious personal strivings' when combined with 'the political and moral passion he invested in folk song and dance', made him 'a force to be reckoned with.'<sup>68</sup> To give Sharp his due, he did, as Walkowitz suggests, attach to folksong and dance some moral imperative. He was not interested in it only for financial gain or self-promotion (though his status as authority was clearly something he cherished) or to shore up bourgeois hegemony as Harker suggests, but was doing what he believed to be a good thing: he saw folksong and dance as a beautiful cultural heritage and its accurate preservation as good for the nation at large.<sup>69</sup> This of course meant that he was committed to its static preservation and its status as art form. But Neal and her supporters did not wish for Morris to be regarded as an art form if that meant that it lost its potential for social change. In response to the interview in which Sharp alleged that 'hundreds, perhaps thousands' had been 'taught to dance the Morris in ways not sanctioned by tradition', Carey drafted a

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<sup>67</sup> Letter from Mary Neal to Clive Carey, 24 December 1912. CC/2/238, Clive Carey MS. VWML.

<sup>68</sup> Daniel Walkowitz, *City Folk: English Country Dance and the Politics of the Folk in Modern America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), p. 74.

<sup>69</sup> Harker, *Fakesong*, p. xii.

letter, presumably intended for the same newspaper as Sharp's interview, *The Morning Post*. He too was reluctant to refer to Morris as art:

Miss Neal, as far as I know, has never claimed for her Espérance Club the dignity of an archaeological society; she simply claimed to have introduced dancing as a living pastime [the word 'art' has been crossed out and replaced with 'pastime'] among working boys and girls.<sup>70</sup>

Neal wrote of an 'art which is living and life-giving' but only because its inspiration came from 'a sense of common unity and a sense of citizenship.'<sup>71</sup> Her detractors were wrong to accuse her of reducing the Morris to a 'plaything to be discarded when we are tired of it': Neal clearly saw some higher element to the dance alongside its value in play and recreation.<sup>72</sup> She was also committed to an accurate revival through periodic revision with traditional dancers, and also declared her intention that the dance was kept 'pure.' Her definition of a 'pure' tradition was somewhat different to Sharp's supporters' visions, though: to Neal it meant that the future development of the dance should be influenced only by its rightful owners, and preferably only the young. Sharp and his supporters believed almost the opposite, with Sharp admitting as valuable and genuine those folksongs and dances that had not been influenced by contemporary working-class culture. Sharp and his allies' notion of purity was also an aesthetic one: his men's display team wore neat and minimalist white flannels, a marked contrast to the ribbons, bonnets, flounces and ruffles of the Espérance Club.

The idea that Neal's pastoral aesthetic was damaging to the seriousness of Morris dated back to the appearance of the 'Merrie England' cartoon in *Punch* in November 1907, but was still current at the end of 1911, as this disgruntled correspondent with *New Age* demonstrated:

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<sup>70</sup> Clive Carey, 'Draft letter, presumably to a newspaper, written by Clive Carey, re defending Mary Neal and her work with the Esperence Club [sic], in response to criticism from Cecil Sharp'. CC/3/46, Clive Carey MS, VWML.

<sup>71</sup> Neal, 'The Theatre Of My Dreams' CC/2/270.

<sup>72</sup> Fox-Strangways, p. 91.

Someone should be severely reprimanded for the dancing of the Espérance Guild [...] Someone with more enthusiasm than intelligence taught these children to dance. [...] someone, as I say, should be severely reprimanded. The dancing was as far removed from the pure tradition as the music of the restaurant is from folk-song, while the pretty "scheme of colours" [...] would have disgraced a chocolate box. [...] for goodness' sake let us keep these beautiful traditional things free from trashy sentiment.<sup>73</sup>

Of course, the aesthetics of Neal's Morris were decidedly quaint, and the bonnets and kerchiefs sentimental recreations of an imagined English idyll. The unnamed author of this small extract managed to condense the many issues Neal's detractors found with her work: not only the dress and style of the performance but the difference between the 'enthusiasm' of the philanthropist and the 'intelligence' of the expert, and the idea that yoking together 'beautiful traditional things' like folksong and dance with 'trashy sentiment' such as social work and the enriching of the lives of slum children was so damaging to the pure art of Morris that Neal ought to be 'severely reprimanded.' Vaughan Williams wrote against this idea of music as being 'on a plane by itself, a thing detached from its surroundings, a mere sensation to be enjoyed by the epicure', but for Sharp and his supporters, the value of Morris lay in its preservation as pure art, untainted by the worldly concerns that Neal hoped to use the dance to combat.<sup>74</sup> The second musical director of the Espérance Club, Herbert MacIlwaine, resigned in 1908 on account of Neal's involvement in Suffragism (though this was by no means a new development: Neal took the minutes at the inaugural meeting of the WSPU in 1903).<sup>75</sup> MacIlwaine remained involved in Morris, co-authoring the further volumes of the *Morris Book* with Sharp, working on an art free from the political entanglements of either Suffragism or social work.

If Sharp was trying to resist the hijacking of Morris for social good, then Neal was trying to resist its framing as high art at the expense of its transformative potential, in the same way that Marson wrote that more good could be had in playful silhouettes

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<sup>73</sup> Untitled cutting from *New Age*, 21 Dec 1911. Sharp Press Cuttings Book 5, p. 95. VWML.

<sup>74</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'Who wants the English Composer?', *Royal College of Music Magazine*, 9, no.1 (1912), pp. 11-15; repr. in Manning (ed.), pp. 39-42 (p. 40, p. 42).

<sup>75</sup> Judge, 'Mary Neal', p. 558.

than in "the big bow-wow" vein'.<sup>76</sup> Neal was so determined not to allow the Morris revival to become divorced from the agenda for social change that she had originally invested it with, that she answered when asked in an interview about the growth of the revival that "unless it is of civic value it is not worth my while to give my life to it".<sup>77</sup>

### **Control of the movement**

Neal was aware of the harm that could be done to the humanitarian potential of the revival through in-fighting: 'I am now more than ever sure that this folk music has got some wonderful life-giving force in it for the "healing of the nations", and the one thing that will stop it is selfishness, jealousy and self-seeking.'<sup>78</sup> Her concern was not misplaced: it is impossible to deny that some of Sharp's actions were rooted not in aesthetic preference, opposition to political ends, or any other concern for the presentation of the Morris, but in a 'self-seeking' bid for control of the movement as a whole, and 'jealousy' spawned from any success met with in leadership bids from his rivals. His biographer stated this fact plainly, writing that Sharp 'realized that satisfactory results would not be obtained unless first-hand instruction were given by himself and he had direct control over his teachers.'<sup>79</sup> Sharp wanted to lead the movement, to be acknowledged as the prime expert in the field. It is no coincidence that his disagreement with Marson, itself unclear in cause, came at a similar stage in the revival of folksong. A collaboration respectful and gracious at first, leading to the publication of a few volumes: in the folksong revival, the first 3 books of the *Folk-Songs from Somerset* series; with Morris, the publication of volume 1 of *The Morris Book* with dancing notation from the movements of Florrie Warren. Once Sharp had increased his own expertise and made his own contacts, it was in his interest to go it alone. This not only consolidated his position at the forefront of the revival through the increased visibility of his own name, but also by directly cutting out the rivals he had newly created from his one-time collaborators. Neal remembered that at the time of his first drawing away from her, immediately prior to the conference in November 1907, Sharp was also 'having a serious dispute with the Folk Song Society,' yet again falling

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<sup>76</sup> Marson, *Silhouettes*, p. vi.

<sup>77</sup> 'Americans Learning English Folk Music'.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from Mary Neal to Clive Carey, 3 May 1913. CC/2/244, Clive Carey MS, VWML.

<sup>79</sup> Fox-Strangways, p. 78.

out with one-time collaborators and allies.<sup>80</sup> Still further, 'He said he wanted our new Society to have such a strict constitution that it would be possible to control it in a way impossible with the simple constitution of the Folk Song Society'.<sup>81</sup> Of the society set up at the conference, Neal writes that it was disbanded after the committee was unable to come to any decisions. Neal wrote that she then started a 'small association' with some friends, 'with the idea of getting the movement outside the Esperance Girls' Club. From that day began a bitter attack by Mr. Sharp on the work we were trying to do'.<sup>82</sup> It was as Sharp would later warn: if Neal confined herself to her club and to activities suited to her philanthropist status then he would support her; she could not expect the same if she ventured into his own territory by looking to foster a larger movement. Fox-Strangways wrote that one of Sharp's issues with Neal was that she was not wholly committed to the wider folk revival 'in the broad sense in which he conceived it' but instead to her club.<sup>83</sup> This reading of the situation by Sharp's biographer is diametrically opposite to Sharp's actual behaviour: it was her attempt to spread the revival as she saw it beyond the Espérance Club which drew his ire. As Judge surmises, the earlier period of 'peaceful co-operation' between Neal and Sharp was possible only because 'Sharp himself had no sense of responsibility in the matter, his chief concern still being the folksong movement'.<sup>84</sup> Once he had a stake in the future development of a potential nationwide movement, he was unable to countenance working towards a revival on any but his own lines. Sharp and his supporters resorted to some distinctly underhand tactics in order to thwart the expansion of Neal's revival. An unsigned letter in the Carey MS, written in October 1910, states that the writer 'must speak openly' to report that 'Cecil Sharp is doing some very underhand work here and trying all that lies in his power to injure the Espérance Club'.<sup>85</sup> The writer appears to have been involved in running youth clubs, and reported that a colleague (Alice Maitland Roy) had written to Sharp for advice as she wished to begin teaching a class for children connected to her church. The reply she received from Sharp was 'curt infact almost insulting and he referred her to buy some of his instruction books, as she was in such a fog about the

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<sup>80</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 158.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Fox-Strangways, p. 77.

<sup>84</sup> Judge, 'Mary Neal', p. 553.

<sup>85</sup> 'Unsigned copy of a letter to [Miss Jones], 16 Oct 1910, CC/2/322, Clive Carey MS, VWML.

steps'.<sup>86</sup> Sharp's disapproval of the use of dance for social work meant he was unlikely to react kindly to such a request for help, but the letter reports further instances of Sharp and his allies' attempts to halt the spread of the *Espérance* methods: The Victoria Settlement in Liverpool had been performing as taught by Florrie Warren for some time, but a friend of Sharp, Miss Jack, had begun to introduce Sharp-style Morris, 'saying that the *Espérance* was entirely wrong'.<sup>87</sup> Jack was also sending out her own teachers all over the city, and the letter writer worried that this spread of Sharp's style would 'absolutely ruin the ordinary beauty of the Morris Dance in a very short period' and 'make us look like so many wooden dolls and then the whole beauty of the dancing would be spoilt'.<sup>88</sup> The repetition of the fear that the beauty of the dancing would be ruined by Sharp's more regimented style is noteworthy: the writer concluded by saying that they felt that Sharp's supporters were turning the dance into a school drill, 'and you know there is not any beauty in a drill, and it will not be much good anybody doing it as a dance after that'.<sup>89</sup> This letter as a whole described the disagreements in Liverpool in a manner similar to those in London, as a battle for control of the Morris movement and its future. The writer appealed to its recipient as 'a staunch upholder of Miss Neal and her good work in London' and asked if they ought to 'acquaint Miss Neal with the facts of the case and ask her advice, as [...] I do not intend to give in a little'.<sup>90</sup> Neal herself also wrote that she would not give in, writing to Carey upon being warned in a letter from that Archibald Flower intended to ask her to work in an organisational capacity alongside Sharp as artistic director at Stratford: 'I am certainly not going to give Mr Sharp control of my work artistically or otherwise, and organise for him for a national movement representing us all effectively'.<sup>91</sup> Neal was staunchly determined not to end up playing a secretarial role in a movement controlled artistically by Sharp.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Letter from Mary Neal to Clive Carey [Dec 1912?], CC/2/283, Clive Carey MS, VWML. Neal enclosed the warning letter (CC/2/284, Clive Carey MS). The expected letter from Flower to Neal, exhorting her to put aside her differences with Sharp and asking to meet with a view to working together, is dated 24 December 1912 (CC/2/239).



Sharp was equally determined to keep artistic control in his own hands. He even went as far in his efforts to maintain dominance as to criticize the performance of small children: Lilian Jordan, who seems to have been unaware of the deep extent of the rift between Neal and Sharp, wrote to Neal detailing her confusion at having been attacked by Sharp when she thought that, as a Morris revivalist, he would approve.<sup>92</sup> Jordan wrote that Sharp was 'invited to attend - not to adjudicate - for the display was not Competitive - but to say a few nice things about the good of such revivals etc.', and that her team of '12 dancers, (boys & girls) a fiddler and a jester' danced exactly as instructed by *The Espérance Morris Book*.<sup>93</sup> The dancing 'was a great success' and Jordan was 'complimented on all sides', until she spoke to Sharp:

I was introduced to Mr C. Sharp [...] & was very surprised to hear that the dance was all "wrong" - according to his ideas.

I will tabulate his remarks & hope to have your opinions on this important matter.

1. The sexes never danced together.
2. The jester was out of place.
3. The music "Country Gardens" was not genuine, - not correct - etc.

In fact the dance was entirely misleading - etc- He wrote to one gentleman that mine & other dancers were "dancing mistresses' fakes"<sup>94</sup>

Jordan ended her letter with a plea for Neal's opinions on the matter as the committee she served on were at a loss as to how to proceed, and warned that 'I daresay you will hear of other dancers he condemned'.<sup>95</sup> Sharp seemed intent on halting the spread of Neal's version of the revival.

## **Turf war**

America was another frontier ready to be conquered by the expansion of the folk revival. Neal travelled to New York and Boston, taking Florrie Warren with her, during

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<sup>92</sup> Letter from Lilian Jordan to Mary Neal, 20 Oct 1912. CC/2/94, Clive Carey MS, VWML.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

the winter of 1910-11, 'partly as an emissary for the Stratford Theatre and partly to take the *Espérance* message.'<sup>96</sup> Success in America would provide a significant expansion in the reach and influence of Neal's brand of revival.<sup>97</sup> The outcome of this trip was therefore also of vital interest to Sharp. Neal and Warren arrived after an arduous crossing, and almost as soon as they landed found that most of their engagements had been cancelled due to a 'pro-Sharp intrigue' of rumours stating that Neal had been 'thrown over' by educational authorities in England.<sup>98</sup> That Sharp wished to veto control of an American movement by any rival is clear, reinforced by his later thwarting of another who attempted to break into America from 1913-14, a member of his original display team, A. Claud Wright. Sharp's alarm at Wright's success and the subsequent cutting off of Wright from the inner sanctum of the EFDS is documented by Walkowitz, who writes that the withdrawal of support from England and pressure to enlist in early 1915 caused Wright to give up his work in America, allowing Sharp to step seamlessly into the role and benefit greatly from the solid groundwork already laid by Wright.<sup>99</sup> By this stage, controlling the expansion of the movement and the terms and style in which the material was disseminated was vitally important to Sharp. But Sharp's concern for his own recognition as the movement's leader and his awareness of the possibility of usurpation were evident several years before at the Goupil conference in 1907. Neal argued that the establishment of a society was necessary for her to be able to expand her work on a more secure footing: the crux of Neal's speech at the conference was her desire to take folk dance into schools in order to spread the movement. She was ready and able to do so, stating that she could 'supply teachers & set the whole thing going', but felt that without some kind of unified folk dance society, she did not have the authority needed: 'It is not enough for me to go simply as the Hon. Secretary of a Girls' Club: I must have some sort of standing'.<sup>100</sup> Here was an early hint

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<sup>96</sup> Judge, 'Mary Neal', p. 566.

<sup>97</sup> Bearman argues that it was this ill-timed trip to America which eventually cost Neal the victory in Britain: according to Bearman, she left for America exactly when she should have been furthering her cause with Archibald Flower to retain her position in the Stratford Festivals, as Sharp's gaining of her position there was a decisive moment in his eventual victory. Bearman, 'English Folk Movement', p. 76.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. Neal talks about the cancellation of her engagements and her hard work in regaining them in *As A Tale*, p. 160.

<sup>99</sup> Walkowitz, pp. 94-99. See also Brickwedde.

<sup>100</sup> 'English Folk-Music in Dance and Song', p. 2.

of leadership aspiration from Neal. Sharp responded in his address in a light-hearted manner:

I have only 1 grievance against the Esperance Club & it is this: Before Miss Neal called upon me, I was flourishing in the role of prophet - I was prophesying in the Daily Press & the columns of the "Morning Post" as to what Folk-Song could do, & I received the pleasure & the emoluments attached to that position; then the Esperance Club proved me correct, & ruined me as a prophet & I have had to retire.<sup>101</sup>

But words spoken in jest held a grain of truth, and Sharp smarted at the encroachments of others. That the disagreement between Sharp and Neal was founded largely upon artistic difference and upon the practical uses of Morris cannot be denied, but this aspect of control cannot be ignored. This brings us back again to Grace Kimmins, and the relationship between her work and Sharp's which has previously been unexplored in considering this question of control. Kimmins had worked at the West London Mission, where it is unlikely that she would not have known Neal; she was definitely a friend of Pethick, who recalled that 'there was something in the very audacity of her conceptions that attracted me and we drew together in sympathy'.<sup>102</sup> Kimmins had many ideas about the healing nature of folk dance which were similar to those of Neal. She wrote that the 'real question involved is ethical':

it reaches down to the very foundations of morality, it is illuminated by history; the public education of a great democratic people has other aims to fulfil than mere literary culture, or extension of scientific knowledge; it must prepare for future citizenship.<sup>103</sup>

This was a clear refutation, in 1910 and in the thick of the disagreement over the aesthetics and social uses of Morris, of Sharp's views: Kimmins insisted that the national dances in her book were a form of 'public education' of greater social worth as

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>102</sup> Pethick-Lawrence, pp. 86-7.

<sup>103</sup> Kimmins, *National Dances*, p. 1.

preparation for 'future citizenship' than the pure art or 'literary culture' that Sharp hoped to imbue his revival with. Kimmins later wrote that 'ethics and aesthetics are twin sisters,' and while Sharp of course believed that the Morris contained some kind of higher moral value, Kimmins meant and applied this statement to her work in the much more direct manner she shared with Neal, her fellow social worker.<sup>104</sup> Yet Sharp, despite his vehement protests that Morris should not be sullied by any attempt to force it into social usefulness, did not condemn the work of Kimmins.

Sharp knew Kimmins' husband, Dr. C.W. Kimmins, in his official role as 'chief inspector of the education department of the London County Council' from 1904-23, during the period in which Sharp was attempting to formalise the teaching of folk and Morris dance in schools.<sup>105</sup> With such a professional link, it is unimaginable that Sharp could not have been aware of Kimmins' interest in folksong and dance and her published work on the subject in connection with her Guilds from 1907 onward. Sharp not only knew of this work but had actually seen it: he was in the audience of the first Bermondsey Festival in 1897, where Kimmins' interpretations of folk dance formed part of the programme.<sup>106</sup> Evidence of Sharp's acquaintance with not only the existence but the style and the educational theories behind Kimmins' work with folksong and dances exists also in his own Press Cuttings Books: pages 92 to 100 of Sharp's 3rd book, covering 1906, are filled with reports of May Day pageants held by Kimmins' Guilds. A cutting from *Daily Chronicle* on 14 May reports 'Morris-dances' 'done beautifully' as well as mentioning the singing of folksongs which proved to be 'the same old Somerset folk-songs that Mr Cecil Sharp has collected[...] and which the factory-girls of Cumberland Market [the Espérance Club] sang with wonderful spirit at Queen's Hall the other day.'<sup>107</sup> Sharp was well aware of this connection between his own work and that of Kimmins in the public mind, having kept a cutting from *Gentlewoman* in which 'The Oracle' gives tips for a successful fete or garden party: one idea being learning some folk dances, she recommends getting in touch with Neal or Kimmins or

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<sup>104</sup> Kimmins, *Heritage Craft Schools and Hospitals*, p. 123.

<sup>105</sup> Judge, 'Cecil Sharp', p. 195.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Report on the Guild of Play/Guild of the Brave Poor Things May Day Pageant, *Daily Chronicle*, 14 May 1906. Sharp Press Cuttings Book 3, p. 94.VWML. Other reports are from *Daily News*, *Morning Post*, *Morning Advertiser*, *The Standard* and *The Telegraph*, all 14 May 1906.

acquiring either Sharp or Kimmins' books.<sup>108</sup> Sharp was not only acquainted with Kimmins' work in 'his' field, but actively kept an eye on its progress, pasting cuttings into his personal books, mostly reserved for his own press appearances and those of his main rival Neal. He is even known to have shared the stage with Kimmins' performers, having 'a friendly Guild of Play' to demonstrate traditional children's games at a series of lectures in February 1909.<sup>109</sup>

Sharp, then, had plenty of opportunity to assess the performances of folksong and dance given by Kimmins' Guilds. He would have seen that Kimmins' aesthetic was even more quaint than Neal's, with newspaper reports describing 'old English costumes [...] and here and there a Kate Greenaway mob-cap'.<sup>110</sup> Kimmins went even beyond mob-caps, and ventured into more abstract territory, including in her choreography of 'folk' dances children dressed as roses, shamrocks, thistles and leeks to represent the British nations, or the figure of Father Time as a master of ceremonies; as well as 'children dressed as orpyne plants, or little midsummer men', and 'children dressed as goose-herds and goose-girls [...] driving certain small children dressed as geese'.<sup>111</sup> Even if Sharp took no issue with figurative representations of the nations or the geese and their herds, it is impossible to imagine the same man who was so very offended by the frolicking lads and lasses of the *Punch* cartoon was able to remain unmoved in the face of Kimmins' 'cabbage dance':

Enter certain boy children dressed as cabbages, with the large leaves drawn over their heads and hiding their faces.

These make their obeisance to girl children, duly blind-folded, who in their turn chose a cabbage for a partner.

[...] during the dance the cabbage boy withdraws the leaves from his face and makes himself known to his partner.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Oracle, 'Answers to Questions', *Gentlewoman*, 27 August 1908. Sharp Press Cuttings Book 5, p. 3. VWML.

<sup>109</sup> Judge, 'Mary Neal', p. 557.

<sup>110</sup> Report on the Guild of Play/Guild of the Brave Poor Things May Day Pageant, *Daily Chronicle*, 14 May 1906.

<sup>111</sup> The dance of national flora can be found in Kimmins, *Festival and Dance*, p. 18; as can the Orpyne Men, p. 24; and the geese, p. 28. Father Time acts as MC in *Masque*, p. 6.

<sup>112</sup> Kimmins, *Festival and Dance*, p. 28.

And yet Sharp remained unmoved, at least publically, passing no comment on even the worst excesses of Kimmins' imaginative costuming and choreography. Sharp turned a blind eye to all of this while castigating Neal and the Espérance Club's 'Merrie England' aesthetic and dismissing their dancing as "dancing mistresses' fakes".<sup>113</sup>

Aesthetics and choreography, the main fronts upon which Sharp attacked Neal, did not provoke a disagreement between Sharp and Kimmins, despite Kimmins' taking both to far higher excesses than Neal. As well as sharing the 'Merrie England' aesthetic with Neal, Kimmins shared many of the same social values and philanthropic aims. Despite advocating folk dance as educative structured play, Kimmins like Neal placed it at a higher status as a carrier of national tradition and able to express a lost, valuable Englishness. She wrote in *National Dances* that 'pure dancing, true to its message, is hard to find, and when found is invariably the possession of hunted, exiled, or oppressed nations'.<sup>114</sup> But she was very clear that her pageantry, songs and dances should be regarded foremost as play, the very name of her Guild. She described its purpose as the provision of "vigorous happy dances for recreative purposes on educational lines."<sup>115</sup> This is not to say that because it was play, the material was trivial or unimportant. Like Neal, Kimmins believed in the redemptive power of recreation and its importance in forming future citizens: 'Play counts for morals, for it is in our play that we choose things according to their character, and by choosing we *make* our character'.<sup>116</sup> Kimmins also wrote about the 'purpose' of folk dance, a not entirely surprising move given that the book in question was published in 1910, the height of Sharp and Neal's public quarrel on the subject, under the guise of discussing Russian folk dances:

They prove [...] that folk dancing is not meant to entertain and amuse people only, nor is it intended to satisfy the tastes of those who crave for novelty; it is a

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<sup>113</sup> Letter from Lilian Jordan, CC/2/94.

<sup>114</sup> Kimmins, *National Dances*, p. 2.

<sup>115</sup> Kevin J. Brehony, 'A "Socially Civilising Influence"? Play and the Urban "Degenerate"', *Paedagogica Historica*, 39, no.1 (2003), pp. 87-106 (p. 97).

<sup>116</sup> Kimmins, *National Dances*, p. 6.

real outlet on the part of the people of national affection and feeling, and belongs to the nation.<sup>117</sup>

This can be read as a tentative expression of support for Sharp, in that the dances were meant not just for mere entertainment and, as Sharp's supporters feared, a briefly popular novelty; yet it could also be read as suggestive of support for Neal's view, positioning folk dance as the 'outlet' for the expression of 'the people' themselves, to whom the dance should continue to belong. Kimmins touched very briefly on the controversy surrounding the purpose of the dance revival here, but her relationship with the two more vociferous revivalists remains ambiguous. Kimmins was friends with Pethick, co-founder of the *Espérance Club*; yet Sharp's coterie also had its links to Kimmins. Maud Karpeles and her sister Helen, eventually the wife of Douglas Kennedy, future director of the EFDS, had together run a branch of the Guild of Play at Mansfield House. Boyes reports that it was in searching for new material for their Guild branch that the sisters first encountered folksong and dance.<sup>118</sup> Despite links to both sides, and her cautious engagement with debate over the purpose of folk dance, Kimmins remained ultimately aloof from public discussion and from the wider-aiming movements of Sharp and Neal. *National Dances* contains several advertisements for books on Morris, folk dance, folksong and traditional games, but although the book was published in 1910 at the peak of public interest in Sharp and Neal, and their names must surely have been the first recalled by any mention of folk dance or song, none of these advertisements offer any publications by either party.<sup>119</sup> Kimmins did not engage with the public debate, focussing instead upon the expansion of her Guilds and upon the development of her schools. Her approach was completely at odds with that of Sharp, and her published work and public performances made sure these differences were sufficiently exposed. But Sharp did not protest precisely because her aims were so closely linked to the workings of her Guilds: Kimmins concerned herself with the running of her own clubs and not with the wider folk revival, as Sharp had warned Neal

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>118</sup> Boyes, 'The lady that is with you', pp. 182-3.

<sup>119</sup> Kimmins, *National Dances*, p. 83. It is understandable that a book published by Curwen would not advertise a publication by rival house Novello (as Sharp's books were), but less clear why Neal's books, also produced by Curwen, are absent.

to do. Unlike Neal, Kimmins did not attempt to foster a national movement or position herself as the leader of a revival; instead she succeeded in leading a nationwide movement for the education of disabled children and advocating educative play as a social work strategy. That Kimmins' interaction with the folk revival was not as in-depth as Neal's was acknowledged at the Goupil conference in 1907, with the Guild of Play given credit for having worked with folk dance and song before the advent of Neal or Sharp, yet recognised as being undeveloped in comparison with Espérance.<sup>120</sup>

That Sharp ignored both the social work application of folk dance by Kimmins and her saccharine aesthetic while strongly disputing the use of Morris by Neal and castigating her 'Merrie England' style does not add up unless taken alongside a knowledge of Sharp's desire for control of the movement. Kimmins was not a threat to his role as expert, and Sharp could afford to be magnanimous in his treatment of her. But it was different with Neal. Judge surmises that Sharp's eventual victory was by no means a certainty, with Neal at the time holding a very strong position with 'friendly contacts with many traditional dancers; [...] the use of the restored Crosby Hall [...] and [...] Carey as a highly capable musical director and collector.'<sup>121</sup> Neal was a serious threat to Sharp's ambition for an artistic movement with himself at the helm. That control of the movement was the main root of his disagreement with Neal is demonstrated indirectly in Sharp's own writing. Sharp wrote to a fellow song collector about the imperishable beauty of folksong:

it is very easy to be too touchy about the vulgarisation of things like folk-songs which one loves. [...] If anything good is to be made popular, many things will happen which will shock the sensitive feelings of the elect. This is inevitable and must be accepted. I accept it in this case because I believe so sincerely in the innate beauty and purity of folk-music that I am sure it cannot really be contaminated.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> 'English Folk-Music in Dance and Song', p. 5.

<sup>121</sup> Roy Judge, 'Neal, Mary Clara Sophia (1860–1944)', 2006, in *ODNB Online* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40485>> [accessed 3 Sept 2014].

<sup>122</sup> Fox-Strangways, p. 91.



In this private communication with a colleague, shared publicly only by Fox-Strangways after Sharp's death, Sharp undermined a major basis of his disapproval of Neal. Sharp's hand-wringing about the damage being done to the art of Morris through Neal's 'vulgarisation' appears as a tactic in his battle for control when viewed alongside statements such as this proclaiming belief in the imperishable 'beauty and purity' of folksong no matter what its treatment.

### **Idealism defeated?**

Sharp and his brand of artistic revival triumphed. He had more contacts, and a professional status, both within the musical and educational establishments. The revival was his one focus, and he was fully committed. For Neal, folksong and dance was a facet, albeit a large one, of a wider philanthropic and political strategy. Sharp was and is still widely regarded as the leader of the folk revival, but in other ways Neal, or at least her vision of the dance as a recreational activity rather than a drawing room performance, also won out. As Boyes points out, Sharp's victory means that it is routinely forgotten that he was not in fact the initiator of the revival of Morris which still endures today.<sup>123</sup> Yet while Boyes asserts that Neal's concept of revival was 'rapidly rendered invisible', the fact is that her notion that Morris could change society for the better endured into the interwar period.<sup>124</sup> Neal's idea of the revived dance as a part of everyday life, performed for enjoyment and fellowship rather than as a dutiful preservation of art lived on in the Thaxted team, and was through them enshrined in the Morris Ring, itself the biggest influence on revived practice in the second half of the twentieth century, as Chapter Seven discusses. Even in the face of her defeat, it was realised by some contemporaries that Neal had achieved a victory in encouraging participation: a *Morning Post* testimonial said she 'has been the life and soul of the revival', and that without her 'practical energy and enterprise', the revival 'might have meant little more than an addition to the vast accumulation of forgotten [...] musical literature - the dust-heaps of silenced sounds in which the historian and technical expert rummage.'<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Boyes, *Imagined Village*, p. 85.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> *Morning Post* testimonial in *The Espérance Morris Book*, p. 65.

The outbreak of war effectively removed Neal from the field (the Espérance club folded because the boys went to war, the girls were 'scattered', and it was dangerous for the children to go out in the evenings because of air raids).<sup>126</sup> Neal began other philanthropic work, first at the new branch of Toynbee Hall in Poplar and then for the war effort at the Pensions Office.<sup>127</sup> Suffering from neuritis as a result of her proximity to the Silvertown munitions factory explosion in 1917, Neal moved to Sussex meaning to take a year to recuperate, yet found herself the guardian of two small boys within a few weeks, one of whom was the son of her former friend and later adversary MacIlwaine, with whom she had been reconciled on his deathbed and made a promise to care for his son if he became orphaned.<sup>128</sup> Neal then spent 12 years as a Justice of the Peace, appointed by the Labour Party, specialising in Juvenile Court cases.<sup>129</sup> Neal continued to work towards her political and social goals, the same aims behind her involvement in the folk revival, but she now worked in a different medium. Yet she had still set in motion, along with Marson, Noel, and Kimmins, a branch and a view of the folk revival which saw in folksong and dance a socially transformative power, both in moral or spiritual and in practical terms.

It is fitting that Neal's path through the folk revival so closely resembled that of Marson, for as well as their similar disagreements with Sharp, both of their approaches finally came down to fun and happiness, and a recognition of the beauty and hidden qualities in people as individuals. Neal wrote that the positive effects of the folk revival were only ever questioned by those who were 'afraid of happiness'.<sup>130</sup> These people missed the point through their seriousness, as Marson had complained of in *Village Silhouettes*. It was Marson's discovery of the individuals behind the folksongs which formed the basis of that book. Neal and Kimmins too realised this fact. Like Marson, Kimmins expressed this sentiment not in theoretical work, but in a piece of semi-fiction, *Polly of Parker's Rents*:

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<sup>126</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 170.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171, p. 174.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184, p. 186, p. 194.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>130</sup> Neal, 'Folk-Art', p. 224.

There are beautiful things in the slums, as everywhere else in God's world; there are men and women and little children in the close pent courts and alleys with brave and gentle hearts, capable of immense possibilities.<sup>131</sup>

Marson believed that if only the middle classes could understand the lives of the working classes, at first through their culture but moving on to an understanding of their views and needs, then it would 'follow that all the things which do or can protect the disinherited will be their delight'.<sup>132</sup> Neal wrote of life in St. Pancras in the same way that Kimmins wrote of Bermondsey, in that human nature was the same in the slum as in the drawing room:

there is the same capacity for love, for suffering, and for service, the same reaching after patience and fortitude, and all generous impulses; it is only externals that bar the way to human lives and hearts.<sup>133</sup>

If people lived more closely with one another, if those higher in 'worldly class' could be brought to understand, then it would be possible to reach beyond these 'externals': 'once we have reached the real human life underneath, there will be no need to raise the cry for equality; nothing but a perfect equality will be possible'.<sup>134</sup> As had Marson before them and Noel alongside them, Kimmins and Neal both believed in the transformative potential of folksong and dance in bringing about a better society. This belief set Neal at odds with Sharp, a quarrel which led to her eventual departure from the movement, but far from preventing her from achieving these aims, and as other commentators have missed, her beliefs were underpinned by her faith in the folk revival, and the lessons she learned through her involvement allowed her to continue her work in the social cause for the rest of her life.

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<sup>131</sup> Kimmins, *Polly*, p. vi.

<sup>132</sup> Marson, *God's Co-operative*, pp. 106-7.

<sup>133</sup> Neal, *Pretty Maid*, p. 8.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter Five: Rolf Gardiner and the Morris as a ritual of renewal

### A hopeful generation

Rolf Gardiner wrote retrospectively that as a young man entering Cambridge University in 1921 he had felt 'powerfully the need to assume responsibility for what was going to happen with my generation in the world.'<sup>1</sup> This was a responsibility he continued to feel, and regularly wrote of, for the rest of his life, involved as he was in campaigns and projects spanning agriculture, folk dance, choral singing, forestry, international youth movements, work camps, and regional politics, from his youth until his death in 1971. These interests would seem at first to be self-contained personal hobbies, but for Gardiner they were interlocking facets in a strategy which aimed to refashion and reinvigorate British, and indeed Northern European, society and culture. Along with the other revivalists previously examined, Gardiner was convinced of the transformative power of folk material, in particular dance, which was 'a living art form, a great instrument of health & purification, a communal dynamic.'<sup>2</sup> He exulted after his first tour of English dancers to Germany in 1922 in the 'possibilities inherent in the English dance tradition' and wrote of his certain expectation of spectacular results: 'All that is necessary now is conviction and the right people. The future is ours!'<sup>3</sup> This chapter examines Gardiner's conviction of the potential of folksong and dance as a continuation of such beliefs into the interwar period. His involvement in the revival also demonstrates that belief in the power of folk material to drive social change was no longer a preserve of the political Left, and allows for contrast and comparison with the motivations and actions of the other revivalists.

Gardiner's beliefs in the transformative potential of folksong and dance and their value to contemporary society were ardent and shared frequently, but also highly complex and frequently contradictory. On the one hand, Gardiner in his unpublished

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<sup>1</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'D.H. Lawrence and Youth Movements of the 'Twenties' in Best (ed.), pp. 13-18 (p. 14). The piece was written in 1956 as a contribution to Edward Nehls' *D.H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957-9).

<sup>2</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'The English Folk Dance Tradition'. Gardiner MS A3/2/2. Cambridge University Library, Cambridge. p. 28. Published in Germany as *The English Folk Dance Tradition: An Essay* (Dresden: Neue Schule Hellerau, 1923).

<sup>3</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'English Folk Dancers in Germany'. Gardiner MS A3/2/1(a), p. 1; p. 6. CUL.

autobiography insisted that all of his myriad activities were highly political, 'in a wide sense of the word', due to his having 'dreamed dreams and seen visions.'<sup>4</sup> The dancing of folk dances, especially the Morris, was a central aspect of these political 'visions', a belief in the potentials of folk material that he shared with Marson, Noel, Neal and Kimmins. Yet the values Gardiner ascribed to folk material were radically different to those celebrated by these earlier revivalists. In stark contrast to Marson and Noel, he heaped scorn upon 'Kingdoms of Heaven on Earth.'<sup>5</sup> In opposition to the social work applications pioneered by Neal and Kimmins, Gardiner despised the use of folk dances as 'harmless recreation or sport, as opium for the masses or with the rather priggish intention of elevating the lower classes,' as they were to him ritualistic, magically charged forms.<sup>6</sup> Gardiner was stridently critical of the EFDS, despite having learned his Morris EFDS-style during his time at Cambridge.<sup>7</sup> Gardiner's relentless criticism of the Society and the resentment of its leaders towards this outspoken young member came to a head a number of times, most notably in 1922 over the Society's concern at Gardiner's overseas Morris tour; and in 1923 with Gardiner's issuing of a list of 'Constructive Considerations' for changes to the Society's operations, and his publications of these suggestions in both his own journal *Youth* and in *The Challenge*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'North Sea and Baltic: An autobiographical record of the younger generation in 1926-32, Volume I.' Gardiner MS A2/10/3(a), 1:v, p. 5; p. 9. CUL, Cambridge. Note also that Gardiner, wearing his mantle of generation leadership, claimed for his own autobiography the status of a record of his whole generation. The manuscript is in two volumes, A2/10/3(a) and A2/10/3(b). Each volume is divided into chapters and further subdivided into sections. I have given chapter numbers in Arabic numerals and section numbers in Roman numerals, followed by page numbers.

<sup>5</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'Youth and Europe', extract from *Youth*, 2, no.2 (1923) in Best (ed.), pp. 19-21 (p. 20).

<sup>6</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'Reflections on Music and Statecraft', from *North Sea and Baltic*, (Spring 1934) in Best (ed.), pp. 95-100 (p. 99).

<sup>7</sup> Gardiner, 'A Brief Account', p. 75.

<sup>8</sup> The opposition to the German tour stemmed from doubts about the quality of Gardiner and his colleagues' dancing, with Sharp concerned that their substandard performance would present English folk dancing unfavourably: Gardiner, 'A Brief Account', p. 76. Gardiner's list of demands can be found in Rolf Gardiner, 'The English Folk Dance: Some Constructive Considerations', Gardiner MS A3/2/3, CUL. This was submitted to the Society in July 1923, and appeared in *The Challenge* shortly after on 6 July 1923, generating opprobrium from members of the Society, who were angered by Gardiner's public airing of these criticisms, as well as appearing in the Summer 1923 issue of his own journal *Youth*. Gardiner wrote a follow-up article, appearing in *Youth* in October 1923, defending his suggestions and discussing the Society's response to them.

Gardiner's objections to the EFDS were substantially shared with Neal, despite his disapproval of her recreational approach to Morris and her insistence upon its suitability for children. Gardiner, as did the other revivalists examined in this piece, had a strong belief in the potential of revived folksong and dance to transform the society in which he lived. As Boyes notes, 'his reconfiguring of the "meaning" of customs [...] divided the Revival movement internally from the 1920s into the 1980s and still clouds public responses to English dance', saddling the movement with connotations of reactionary or conservative politics and with notions of quasi-religious origins.<sup>9</sup> But his beliefs, practices, and interactions with other revivalists are of interest in that they show that expressions of the transformative potential of folksong and dance, whether originating in the left or the right wing, continued to be made and developed in contrast with and in opposition to the now-official folk movement organised by the EFDS(S).<sup>10</sup>

Like Neal, Gardiner found the style of dancing and the contexts in which Morris was performed by the EFDS to be 'highly self conscious', rooted in 'words and formulae' rather than 'a creative expression of the spirit'.<sup>11</sup> Most importantly, in Gardiner's eyes, the dancers of the Society had 'mistaken the apparatus for the functioning'.<sup>12</sup> The apparatus, that is the dances, were safely collected and revived, performed all over England by various groups, of which the EFDS was the most significant. The function, both for Gardiner and those he criticised, was social good or cultural regeneration. But Gardiner felt that the Society mistakenly believed that the performance of the dances, 'abstracted from all significant contexts and made ends in themselves', was enough.<sup>13</sup> Attempts to use folk dance as the basis for reforms rooted in 'weekending or children's holidays' were also not enough for Gardiner: these were themselves outward apparatus, not the inner functioning he was searching for.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Boyes, "Potencies", pp. 65-6.

<sup>10</sup> Boyes also finds this to be the case, noting that the Woodcraft Folk organization offered a socialist alternative for the practice of folk dance than that provided by the EFDSS in the 1930s. *Imagined Village*, pp. 169-70.

<sup>11</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'The English Folk Dance Society', manuscript article for *The Challenge*, Gardiner MS A3/2/4, pp. 3-4. CUL.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Gardiner, 'Music and Statecraft', p. 99.

<sup>14</sup> Rolf Gardiner, *North Sea and Baltic: An autobiographical record of the younger generation in 1926-32*, Volume II. Gardiner MS A2/10/3(b), CUL. 8:iii, p. 11.

### Outer signs and inner reality

For Gardiner the inner functioning absent from the dancing of EFDS members was a quasi-religious, spiritual regeneration; a ceremonial mystery which to perform without ritual intent was an abuse of the dance itself.<sup>15</sup> Gardiner outlined his position in the correspondence generated by the publication of his 'constructive considerations'.

Winifred Shuldham Shaw, later the force behind the building of Cecil Sharp House, had responded to the article with correspondence printed in *The Challenge* on 10 August 1923.<sup>16</sup> Gardiner responded:

Folk Dance is a mere colour in the rainbow of an entirely new attitude to life; it is a single weapon in the hands of those who are fighting to establish a new, happier and healthier community within the disintegrating chaos of modern society; it is an expression of the new wordless religion which is throbbing in the earth to-day. To serve that impulse is my humble duty, and before it people who are terrified by the word "revolution," whether it be in art, ethics or social organisation, are like the poor sapless leaves driven in the autumn wind.<sup>17</sup>

Gardiner's insistence upon folk dance as a weapon of communal health and happiness with which to fight against the dreary chaos of the outside world recalls the words of Neal as she recounted her discovery of Morris just as she was longing for 'a weapon which would conquer the dirt and the dreariness.'<sup>18</sup> Where Gardiner went further was in his espousal of the 'new wordless religion' of which Morris was but one form of expression, and his presentation of himself as a servant compelled by its irresistible impulse. The dance itself was but one colour in a whole spectrum of expressions of this mystic urge, and this status links it to all of Gardiner's weapons for revolution: work camps, rural reconstruction, cross-cultural encounters, seasonal festivity. Gardiner

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<sup>15</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'Postscript 1938' in *North Sea and Baltic*, High Summer 1938, pp. 106-7 (p. 106). GRQ35 VWML.

<sup>16</sup> Winifred Shuldham Shaw, 'Mr. Rolf Gardiner and the E.F.D.S', *The Challenge*, 10 August 1923. MS Gardiner A/5/1. CUL.

<sup>17</sup> Rolf Gardiner, correspondence to *The Challenge*, 17 August 1923. MS Gardiner A/5/1. CUL.

<sup>18</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, pp. 137-8.

implied, in his above correspondence and in his voluminous published output, that those who were 'profoundly sceptical of mixing up the Morris with other things' were weak or spiritually cowardly, preferring correct performance or nostalgic sentiment to the powerful meanings he himself attached to the form.<sup>19</sup>

Gardiner's views on another organisation, the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift, of which he was at first an optimistic member were strikingly similar.<sup>20</sup> But Gardiner broke from the Kibbo Kift in 1925, writing to its leader John Hargrave:

the Kibbo Kift and the conceptions which you have implanted in it are closed, as it were, in an air-tight steel box of dialectic. They have no living roots in the earth of England, no contact with her historical inheritance. [...] The Althing encampment was detached from the earth [...] not in organic harmony with its soil, its trees, its historic environment.<sup>21</sup>

Gardiner believed that like the EFDS, Hargrave's Kibbo Kift was more concerned with outer spectacle than with inner meaning, and was founded on theories rather than instinctive feeling. He accused Hargrave's group of performing, not *believing* or *being*, of 'sect-theatricality', 'too forced, and too cold.'<sup>22</sup> Like the use of folk material as part of such outward reforms as recreational activities for slum children, the ritual forms of the Kibbo Kift were in Gardiner's eyes used merely to deliver 'certain pieces of quite mechanical propaganda: credit-reform, World-unity, etc.'<sup>23</sup> Gardiner summed up the differences between himself and Hargrave in writing that 'History and landscape were for me deeply intertwined. To Hargrave, historic landscape meant just sentiment.'<sup>24</sup> Hargrave used such forms as pegs upon which to hang his social and political ideas; for Gardiner, the forms, be they folk dance or the fertile English soil from which such culture emerged, were not vehicles for propaganda but quite literally in and of themselves contained political and social power. Frank Trentmann frames folklore in

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<sup>19</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'The Travelling Morrice', p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Membership of the Kibbo Kift was another characteristic he shared with both Neal and her colleague Pethick-Lawrence.

<sup>21</sup> Gardiner, *North Sea and Baltic* (autobiography), Vol. 1, 1:vii, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Gardiner, *World Without End*, p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Gardiner, *North Sea and Baltic* (autobiography), Vol. 1, 1:vii, p. 9.



the 1930s as a 'secular religion, preaching a liturgy of wholeness to create a new culture, in which unconsciousness and community would take the place of rationality and individualism.'<sup>25</sup> Trentmann's assessment of folklore in the interwar period applies most particularly to Gardiner. The suggestion of worship is strong in Gardiner's writings on the subject and in his linkage of folklore with priestly ritual and the agricultural calendar, but it is Trentmann's suggestion of unconsciousness which is especially apt. For all that Gardiner complained of others' yoking of Morris to 'causes' or using it as a vehicle for social or political propaganda, he himself dearly wished to use folk dance as 'a political act of the younger generation.'<sup>26</sup> But Gardiner believed that such acts must be unconscious, if not hidden and secret influences: 'We have got to be dangerous and political, without telling anybody so!', as he wrote to friends Ruth and James Pennyman.<sup>27</sup> Gardiner's politics were at root non-rational, mystic and organicist. His objections to the EFDS were also objections to public societies who wore their politics outwardly and even democracy itself, which privileged outward transparency and consensus over true power:

*Societies and movements are no good to England. They lead into the same old dreary blind alley. What we require is an organism. The art of politics [is] not a sensational affair. It is rather akin to husbandry, the art of being in league with the forces of time. It means starting with a ring of experience and power and extending that experience and power in concentric circles.*<sup>28</sup>

What Gardiner required was not committees and protocol but this 'ring of experience and power.' He most definitely believed in 'mixing the morris up with other things', but only if done by himself and on his terms.<sup>29</sup> Gardiner was elitist, and as Matthew Simons

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<sup>25</sup> Frank Trentmann, 'Civilization and its Discontents: English Neo-Romanticism and the Transformation of Anti-Modernism in Twentieth Century Western Culture', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 24 (1994) pp. 583-625 (p. 600).

<sup>26</sup> Gardiner, 'A Brief Account', p. 77.

<sup>27</sup> Letter to the Pennymans, summer 1929. Quoted in Gardiner, *North Sea and Baltic* (autobiography), Vol. 2, 8:iii, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Gardiner, *World Without End*, p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Gardiner, 'The Travelling Morrice', p. 11.

has pointed out, 'a self-confessed egotist.'<sup>30</sup> His idea that his generation, and especially an elite group among them, occupied a 'key post in the array of generations' and were fitted to take up the mantle of leadership in a decaying world always had himself at the centre, forming along with initiated companions a nucleus of power.<sup>31</sup> They would gain their leadership through proof of strength and lead through intuitive example, rather than bureaucracy.

Gardiner's politics were to the right of the folk movement as a whole, and vast tracts of the political landscape separate him from the figures so far examined, from the socialists Marson, Kimmins, and Neal, also a suffragette, to the communist Noel. Gardiner's social and political views and interests converged into a worldview that became understandably worrying to a society on the eve of war in 1939, and has remained a source of contention for those studying folklore, youth movements or rural regeneration ever since. As Richard Griffiths argues:

Gardiner presents us with the picture of a fairly typical 'fellow traveller of the Right' of a certain kind. His monetarism, his belief in 'blood and soil', his cult of youth, his desire for national regeneration, his mistrust of aliens and usury - all these things, if taken individually, did not necessarily take him onto dangerous ground. When taken together with his overwhelming love of Germany, they could gel into almost a caricature of the 'blood-and-soil' fanatic.<sup>32</sup>

Certainly, as Griffiths points out, MI5 and MI6 were deeply concerned; convinced, in fact, that all of his gatherings, from singing schools to work camps, were used by Gardiner to spread Nazi propaganda. The interception by MI5 of all post addressed to him was authorised on 30 August 1939, and on 10 February 1944, Gardiner was placed on MI5's Suspect List, meaning that he was earmarked for immediate imprisonment in

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<sup>30</sup> Matthew Simons, 'Understanding "Rolfery": Rolf Gardiner and the Travelling Morrice, A Study of a Patriotic Young Man caught between Eccentricity and Obstinacy' (unpublished dissertation, De Montfort University, 2014), p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Gardiner, *England Herself*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Griffiths, 'The Dangers of Definition: Post-Facto Opinions on Rolf Gardiner's Attitudes towards Nazi Germany' in Jefferies and Tyldesley (eds.), pp. 137-49 (pp. 143-4).

the event of a German invasion.<sup>33</sup> The question as to whether or not Gardiner can rightly be labelled a Nazi has generated significant debate. Even if he escapes the label 'Nazi' or 'fascist' upon technicalities of definition, his politics get short shrift from Richard Griffiths and Dan Stone. Griffiths concludes that Gardiner's patriotism won out once war was declared, but his views and activities were nevertheless 'fascistic', and Stone asserts that this eventual rejection of Nazism did not mean the rejection of Gardiner's views, only the realisation that the Nazis had betrayed the ideas upon which he believed the Third Reich to be founded and that they were not going to bring about the revolution he had envisioned.<sup>34</sup> David Fowler, on the other hand, argues that Gardiner is 'best seen as a counter-cultural figure in inter-war England rather than as a British Nazi.'<sup>35</sup> Whether or not Gardiner was a Nazi, or a fascist in any official sense is not in the purview of this work. But Gardiner's politics, just as with Neal, Kimmins, Noel, and Marson, were deeply entwined with his beliefs on and use of folk material. These links and their cultural context are what this thesis seeks to explore. Matthew Jefferies and Mike Tyldesley state that Gardiner felt 'an eschatological sense of living in a twilight age.'<sup>36</sup> This is certainly borne out in his writing:

The age of darkness is upon us. This is the winter of our discontent and the approaching winter of Western Civilisation. And it will be cold...

People will [...] try and stoke the furnaces of Civilisation with every conceivable fuel, Leagues of Nations, Communism, Pacifism. But it won't burn. Not to give real warmth. The central fires have gone out, quite out. End, *Ende*, *Finis!*<sup>37</sup>

Democratic bureaucracy would not save Western Civilisation, but a return to the soil would. Perhaps folklore would provide the fire Gardiner wished to stoke.

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<sup>33</sup> Griffiths, p. 143; p. 148. Griffiths' sources are MI5 documents PRO KV2/2245 and PRO KV2/2245, The National Archives, London.

<sup>34</sup> Griffiths, p. 149; Dan Stone, 'Rolf Gardiner: An Honorary Nazi?' in Jefferies and Tyldesley (eds.), pp. 151-68 (pp. 160-61).

<sup>35</sup> David Fowler, 'Rolf Gardiner: Pioneer of British Youth Culture, 1920-39' in Jefferies and Tyldesley (eds.), pp. 17-46 (p. 20).

<sup>36</sup> Matthew Jefferies and Mike Tyldesley, 'Introduction' in Jefferies and Tyldesley (eds.), pp. 1-16 (p. 13).

<sup>37</sup> Gardiner, 'Youth and Europe', p. 19.

### Unifying activity

In the same manner as others whose involvement in the revival was linked with their political and social beliefs, Gardiner saw in folksong and dance a vital expression of the value of community, as well as the potential to build communities. Gardiner, along with them and others such as Vaughan Williams, saw folk arts as essentially communal arts forging links between those who practiced them, as well as maintaining links with a shared past:

folk art stemmed from the need of rural communities - or of fraternities of work or venture like miners [...] - to replenish their courage or life-energy from the elemental sources of Nature [...] it was local celebration of settled people belonging to a place [...] everybody took part in an activity of 'do it yourself' and 'do it together'.<sup>38</sup>

Gardiner's addition of the 'life-energy' and the 'elemental sources of Nature' was all his own, but his definition of folk arts written in 1967 was otherwise identical to the accepted wisdom of folk revivalists in the 1930s, put forward most persuasively by Vaughan Williams, who wrote that folk music is 'an art which grows straight out of the needs of a people and for which a fitting and perfect form, albeit on a small scale, has been found by those people.'<sup>39</sup> In his insistence that 'All the truly creative spirits of this country are doing their best to sow the seeds of a new period of common culture', Gardiner shared a central concern with of all four of the other figures at the centre of this work: namely, that at the heart of any effort to bring about positive social change was a need for community and fellow feeling.<sup>40</sup> Like them, he saw folksong and dance as a basis for a common culture which would act as a tie to bind together strong communities. Zimring suggests that increased value was placed on the idea of community in the interwar period in 'response to intensified feelings of fragmentation and isolation' after the First World War.<sup>41</sup> Gardiner certainly experienced the society in

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<sup>38</sup> 'Community arts in a mechanised England', p. 1. Gardiner MS C/3/2. CUL.

<sup>39</sup> Vaughan Williams, 'National Music', p. 22.

<sup>40</sup> Rolf Gardiner, correspondence to *Oxford Fortnightly Review*, 26 May 1922. Gardiner MS A/5/1. CUL.

<sup>41</sup> Zimring, p. 129.

which he lived in the early 1920s as 'a civilisation burnt out, hollow and futile,' and the extreme emphasis he placed upon communion between like-minded individuals was presented by him in a manner which supports Zimring's proposition.<sup>42</sup> Gardiner believed strongly in community as an antidote to this fragmentation, and also in the ability of folk forms to aid this venture, describing his work as 'a patterned campaign to help people come alive in musical forms of collectivity.'<sup>43</sup> As Zimring notes, dancing together built links between individuals in a literal fashion, forging communities with every time that 'individuals came together in groups to participate in a sociable pastime deeply rooted in tradition. First came the dancing bodies; conviviality and newfound coherence would naturally follow.'<sup>44</sup> This idea of establishing coherence and unity through moving together was at the centre of what Gardiner called his 'wordless religion', and directly related to his strong dislike of the 'by the book' EFDS method of dance. Gardiner wrote that a valuable lesson learned on a Morris tour was that '*opinions divide men: activity unites them*'.<sup>45</sup> Gardiner was tapping into a social phenomenon which has been explored by McNeill, 'muscular bonding', whereby 'prolonged and rhythmic muscular movement' performed in groups and in time produces a 'euphoric fellow feeling'.<sup>46</sup> The focus is again upon wordless interaction as a basis for group bonding: McNeill argues that 'keeping together in time arouses warm emotions of collective solidarity and erases personal frustrations' in a way words alone cannot, insisting as Gardiner himself did that 'ideals are not enough. Feelings matter too, and feelings are inseparable from their gestural and muscular expression'.<sup>47</sup>

In order to keep together in time, heightened awareness of one's fellow dancers was necessary. An awareness of others and one's relationship to them was very important to others who encouraged community building through dance as a socialist ideal, for example Noel and Neal, and it was likewise important to Gardiner. Gardiner's focus, however, was somewhat different. Where Neal was convinced of the benefits of group recreation because of the potential for sharing joy and happiness, and baulked at the strict regulation of the EFDS, Gardiner relished Morris dancing as 'a cleansing

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<sup>42</sup> Gardiner, 'Youth and Europe', p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> Gardiner, *North Sea and Baltic* (autobiography), Vol. 2., 8:ix, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Zimring, p. 136.

<sup>45</sup> Gardiner, 'The Travelling Morrice', p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> McNeill, pp. 2-3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

discipline.<sup>48</sup> It would at first seem counterintuitive that Gardiner, himself a critic of the structured approach of the EFDS, would place such emphasis on discipline. The difference is that the discipline involved in dancing in the EFDS manner was a discipline of technique, aimed purely at the correct execution of physical movements. The discipline exalted in by Gardiner was of a spiritual rather than technical nature, encouraging 'the subordination of the individual to the group' as the primary objective.<sup>49</sup> Of course, to the observer, the two performances might look the same: a group dancers who had 'sought, imagined, sensed' this primal subsuming of the self into the group 'till a thread of vivifying fire passes around the ring and gives the dance intensity and flow' as Gardiner demanded could still present a technically perfect performance.<sup>50</sup> The significance, as with much of Gardiner's thought and practice, is entirely internal, a driving force hidden from public view. McNeill describes muscular bonding through keeping together in time as forging group loyalty on a 'thoroughly subrational level', indentifying such practice as a central pillar of Hitler's construction of authority in the Third Reich through the exploitation of such 'emotional responses'.<sup>51</sup> According to McNeill, 'Hitler's belief that shared blood was the only community that mattered prepared him to take seriously the muscular, subverbal level of human interaction. Blood [...] manifested itself more in actions and feeling than in words and reasoning.'<sup>52</sup> While Gardiner's links to the Nazi Party remain a matter of speculation, there is no doubt that he shared some of their ideology, including an emphasis on the 'subverbal level of human interaction'; and a blood-and-soil focus on autochthonous communities.

### **The nucleus**

The idea of community was at the centre of Gardiner's thought and formed the basis of all of his practical work. In this way he recalled the other folklorists, all of whom saw as the primary attraction of folk material its communal qualities. Gardiner's prophecy

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<sup>48</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'Postscript 1938', extract from 'Postscript 1938' in *North Sea and Baltic*, High Summer 1938 (New Series No. 4, Springhead) in Best (ed.), pp. 57-9 (p. 59).

<sup>49</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'Homage to North Skelton', extract from *Wessex: Letters from Springhead*, Christmas 1959 (No 2, Fourth Series, Springhead) in Best (ed.), pp. 37-47 (p. 40).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> McNeill, p. 149.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

that 'The clue to a renewal [...] can only come by a new and active power of communion' would not look out of place in the writing of any one of them.<sup>53</sup> Gardiner wrote that he meant 'not the communism of a sect, but the communion of ordinary men and women in work and art', and yet with Gardiner such simplicity was always too good to be true.<sup>54</sup> This statement was immediately followed with a caveat: 'But one needs a starting point, a nucleus.'<sup>55</sup> For all his words about the communion of ordinary people, Gardiner's true interest was upon forming an elite, a strongly-bonded community held together with deep spiritual bonds created through shared work and art. This elite would form the nucleus Gardiner was looking for, a cell of those who were deeply committed enough to his ideas to become leaders. Influence would spread outward from this inner group, quietly transforming society without stirring speeches or populist posturing. The revolution was to be wordless and hidden. Gardiner admired organisations who styled themselves as an opposition to mainstream society. In an article written in 1923, he explained German Youth Movements for English readers, describing members of the Wandervogel as 'romantic' rebels, turning their backs upon a fallen civilisation typified by the suffocating figure of the Father, and forging instead a new society of which they were fledgling leaders:<sup>56</sup>

the son is winning, crushing the father, by positive spiritual superiority. He is [...] disgusted with the weakness of the father, [...] so he repudiates and rejects them. [...] He changes his dress, habits, morals. He goes out into the woods and

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<sup>53</sup> Gardiner, *World Without End*, p. 35.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> The Wandervogel ['wandering bird'] was an umbrella of independent youth organisations, which, together with many other groups over a period of time from the 1890s onwards formed The German Youth Movement. The Movement, and the individual organisations within it, were not affiliated with any political party or ideology in particular: members were just as likely to belong to German resistance movements as the Nazi Party, though all youth organisations except the Hitler Youth were banned in 1933. All the groups were founded upon the notion of living one's ideals and shared a sense of romanticism and sacrifice for belief, so it is not surprising that members participated in politics on either side. Their aim was the regeneration of society: the Wandervogel wished to go back to nature to rediscover a spirit of adventure and upright self-responsibility that they felt had been lost in post-WWI Germany. See Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: a history of the German Youth Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 1962).

forgets the town. He quits the home and finds satisfaction in a relationship of his own inner choice, in the Blutbundenschaft ['blood-fellowship'] of the purposive group. He [...] revives the dance forms of his own soil, the songs, the dramas, the rituals. And out of the tradition of the folk, of the soil, he fashions new forms, new instruments of joy and fulfilment.<sup>57</sup>

Gardiner was impressed by the Wandervogel and sought to apply their methods to his own regenerative work. Describing membership of a Morris team as a 'Blutbruderschaft' ['blood-brotherhood'], Gardiner intended folk dance to function as part of the training and discipline of his chosen elite, the blood-bonded fellowship he tasked with the regeneration of society.<sup>58</sup>

Expressing similar beliefs to the other revivalists in the potential for transformative social change that they believed to be inherent in folksong and dance, Gardiner wrote in 1943 that 'raised on this structure of the 'cultural activity' he undertook 'were certain spiritual and political aspirations.'<sup>59</sup> Like them, Gardiner felt that this would involve 'the unfolding of a new order of human society', but his vision was emphatically elitist, with the coming of the new order depending upon 'the contribution of small exemplary bodies rather than on mass movements.'<sup>60</sup> Gardiner continued to be convinced of the eventual breakdown of modern civilisation, echoing fin-de-siècle concerns four decades into the new century: 'though shattering events might cause widespread breakdowns and dislocation on our over-complicated and urban civilization, small units, in themselves biologically sound, might survive', their leaders 'nursed at the breast of real nature and in contact with the primal tasks of existence.'<sup>61</sup> Gardiner had previously tasked such an elite with aiding England to 'return to herself' after such an apocalypse by keeping traditional knowledge alive: acting as 'guardians who keep her mysteries intact', this select few 'must bear the vials of tradition through a barren and dry land where no water is.'<sup>62</sup> Continuity with the past had been a vital concept for others such as Marson and Neal, but they had emphasised

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<sup>57</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'German Youth Movements', *Youth*, March 1923. Gardiner MS A/5/1. CUL.

<sup>58</sup> Gardiner, *The English Folk Dance Tradition*, p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> Gardiner, *England Herself*, p. 63.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Gardiner, 'A Brief Account', p. 70.



the need for adaptation and had intended for the impetus of their movements to lie in the hands of the populace at large, not a spiritual elect. Such mass-movement and mass-society ideas were anathema to Gardiner, and his focus was instead upon small, covert, organic societies who would 'exert power in the lanes and hamlets of England' with 'authority [...] as anonymous as the seasons.'<sup>63</sup>

Gardiner discussed the idea of founding a centre for the training of an elite with D.H. Lawrence. He fiercely admired Lawrence, writing of him as 'the torch bearer, the torch leader of my youth. He went ahead exploring the dark, dispelling the limits of our shabby, exhausted vision of things.'<sup>64</sup> Gardiner chose Lawrence as a spiritual adviser: 'I instinctively trusted Lawrence. I accepted his veracity without reservation. I was prepared to follow him into the dark, the unknown.'<sup>65</sup> Lawrence and Gardiner exchanged letters during the 1920s, and Gardiner proudly reproduced in his autobiography a letter he received from Lawrence in October 1926, musing on the possibility of founding such a centre:

I think, one day, I shall take a place in the country, somewhere, where perhaps one or two other men might like to settle [...], and we might possibly slowly evolve a new rhythm of life: learn to make the creative pauses, and learn to dance and to sing together, without stunting, and perhaps also publish some little fighting periodical, keeping fully alert and alive to the world, living a different life in the midst of it, not merely apart.<sup>66</sup>

By December 1926, Lawrence was encouraging Gardiner to take on the challenge of founding the centre:

you are doing the right thing, with hikes and dances and songs. But somehow it needs a central clue, or it will fizzle away [...] We'll have to establish some spot on earth, that will be the fissure into the underworld, [...]

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<sup>63</sup> Gardiner, *World Without End*, p. 38.

<sup>64</sup> Gardiner, 'D.H Lawrence', p. 14.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Letter from D.H. Lawrence, 11 October 1926. Quoted in North Sea and Baltic (autobiography), Vol.1, 2:v, pp. 15-16.

where one can always come to [...] unless there is a headquarters, there will be no continuing.<sup>67</sup>

Gardiner did go on to found the centre, near Fontmell Magna in Dorset, in two stages, acquiring Gore Farm from his uncle Balfour Gardiner in November 1927 and purchasing the Springhead Estate in September 1933. Lawrence in the first letter struck exactly the note that Gardiner wished for, in writing that were he to found a centre, he would wish to live 'a different life in the midst of' the outer world, 'not merely apart.' Gardiner and his chosen colleagues would not live completely aloof from the world that they were trying to change: they wished to regenerate society as a whole, not merely to live their own lives differently. And yet because of his beliefs in the elite and in natural leadership, Gardiner's chosen few would of necessity have to operate at a certain remove from the everyday lives around them, 'a centre of silence, and a heart of darkness', as Lawrence wrote.<sup>68</sup> Gardiner wrote that they aimed 'to work within a framework acceptable to ordinary people: we were not to be a foreign body, a sect planted upon the old order. We wished to help revivify that old order from within, remoulding it but not affronting it.'<sup>69</sup> This approach echoes that taken by Noel and his Catholic Crusade, another body of elite believers who wished to influence the wider community by integrating their values from within. Noel wrote of the society he wished to build as both apart and within, and the gradual spread of influence: 'The kingdom of heaven, a kingdom not "of" this world, but "in" this world, is thrust like leaven into the ages, until every avenue of human activity is leavened.'<sup>70</sup> While both groups were very much concerned with the transformation of society at large, their methods involved a certain level of aloofness from that society. They were to engage with and try to build a shared community, but their own position was always to be that of leaders: cultural shifts and social change would take their cues from the elite group.

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<sup>67</sup> Letter from D.H. Lawrence, 3 December 1926. Quoted in *North Sea and Baltic* (autobiography), Vol.1, 2:v, p.16.

<sup>68</sup> D.H. Lawrence, 3rd December 1926.

<sup>69</sup> Gardiner, *England Herself*, pp. 63-4.

<sup>70</sup> Conrad Noel, *Socialism in Church History* (London: Frank Palmer, 1910), p. 8.

### Aristocracy and peasantry

A process of osmosis was highly attractive to Gardiner, who believed that 'great movements in history begin not with administrative reforms but with some new impulse of the soul', particularly of youthful souls, as the young were the elite of their time, holders of the 'vital message of each successive generation [...] in a ferment seeking expression.'<sup>71</sup> As David Matless states, organicists 'set themselves against visions of a planned future', and this antipathy extended to 'planned' (or even democratic) leadership: 'if society emerged from the soil, then authority was to be similarly grounded.'<sup>72</sup> Gardiner outlined a striking view of leadership in an article titled 'What shall we do to be saved?':

We shall refrain from seeking solutions by discussions and debate, and avoid preoccupation with theories and precepts. We shall choose leaders and acknowledge their authority, but only when we are inwardly convinced that they are stronger than ourselves, that their stronger magic defeats our weaker magic, and that we are prepared to offer a life and death obedience and loyalty to their leadership.<sup>73</sup>

Gardiner was twenty-one years old when he wrote this piece, and expressed himself in strident tones. But while his mode of expression became more subtle with the passing of decades, his opinions on natural authority and dislike for bureaucracy remained unmodified. Writing in his early forties in 1943, Gardiner decried both Russian communism and American democracy as unnatural '*en masse*' political forms alien to the European spirit, and insisted upon innate leadership deriving from kinship with place in the manner described by Matless:

island, estuary, fjord, river and mountain-valley folk, we are essentially local communities, families, clans. Our innate urge is towards aristocracy, and our appropriate form of government is constitutional kingship. What we want is quality in everything, and this is an aristocratic attribute. But the age of suburbia

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<sup>71</sup> Gardiner, *England Herself*, p. 32.

<sup>72</sup> David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), p. 118.

<sup>73</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'What shall we do to be saved?', *The Outlook*, Spring 1924, pp. 65-6 (p. 66).

and technocracy has smothered this, and we are in danger of accepting a wholly inappropriate *en masse* form of social organization and the values of the "common man."<sup>74</sup>

With a degree of irony, it must be noted that 'the values of the "common man" were exactly what the other figures were espousing through their adoption of folksong and dance, and some of these virtues were what they saw as the specific transformative agents they wished to inject into a society they felt was seriously lacking in communal values. Gardiner too wished to apply lessons learned from folk material to his vision for social change, but the values he saw in the same material were diametrically opposite, at least in terms of democracy and elitism. For Gardiner, using folklore to further a model of society based around an organic monarchy of the soil was not contradictory, for folk forms were in themselves elite, the Morris dance a ritual of the rural aristocracy, performed by the best men of a community.

The values of the middle classes were equally, if not more, abhorrent to Gardiner. His own background was upper middle-class: he was the son of Egyptologist Sir Alan Henderson Gardiner and Hedwig von Rosen, the daughter of the King's Counsellor for Hungary.<sup>75</sup> Alan Gardiner's lifelong devotion to study (he held only one brief paid position in his lifetime), as well as the musical career of his brother Balfour, were possible due to the wealth of Rolf's grandfather, the director of a textile firm.<sup>76</sup> Rolf's own ambitious projects also relied very much upon this inherited manufacturing wealth, and yet he did all he could to distance himself from middle-class mores and considered himself a specimen of his newly-devised organic aristocracy. If he admired the physical vitality or the 'flamey' nature of the working classes it was because their presence in a social structure inspired by 'Saxon and Elizabethan royalism' was integral to his worldview.<sup>77</sup> A robust peasantry led by and loyal to an aristocratic elite was his

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<sup>74</sup> Gardiner, *England Herself*, p. 166.

<sup>75</sup> R. S. Simpson, 'Gardiner, Sir Alan Henderson', 2009, in *ODNB Online* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33322>> [accessed 29 Jan 2016].

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Gardiner presented the miners of North Skelton as an ideal of the working classes. He wrote that he perceived that they shared his dislike of middle-class bureaucratic leadership, longing instead for the days of the aristocratic ironmasters who were their true leaders. North Sea and Baltic (autobiography), Vol 2., 8:2, pp. 5-6. He sets out the 'intuitive roots' of his social policies in *England Herself*, p. 63.

aim, and this left no room for 'bureaucratic government [...] composed of men of essentially clerkly disposition, middle-class minds *par excellence*.'<sup>78</sup> Gardiner insisted on the incompatibility of bureaucracy with the society he wished to create, primarily because the prime characteristic of his natural aristocracy was independence, the opposite of the 'clerky' middle-class system of democracy shackled by 'petty codes or subserviencies.'<sup>79</sup> Assertions that 'Leaders are born not made' and 'Cultural leadership, or natural aristocracy, is unaccountable in its origins' lead us back again to Gardiner's *blut und boden* leanings.<sup>80</sup> Yet while he argued in 1932 that fascism and the 'inchoate forms of National Socialism in Germany' were, along with communism, 'genuine local expressions of a seething dissatisfaction with democracy' and 'the clamour of men for their natural birthright of splendour, pride, glory, and leadership', Gardiner found all of these forms ultimately unsatisfactory because they were, in his opinion, inherently middle-class in both outlook and expression.<sup>81</sup> According to Gardiner, these very middle-class rebels were the source of their own dissatisfaction:

The democracy of the middle-classes annulled the mystery of power without which men cannot be men, stripped of which they feel deeply humiliated, like a cock despoiled of his plumage; all three rebellions were insurrections of a wronged middle-class, of a deeply hurt male pride longing to reassert the mystery of power, glamour, and lordship the sense of glory which [...] the bourgeois ideals of the nineteenth century have progressively destroyed.<sup>82</sup>

This would not work, however, because the movements' middle-classness meant that there 'was something hideously common, vulgar, mean in their expression. They are not aristocratic, nor are they popular in the sense of peasant rebellions.'<sup>83</sup> The vulgar middle classes could never be leaders: they lacked a vital spark, present in the upper classes and in the 'peasantry' but not with them. The flower of England's youthful elite had

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<sup>78</sup> Gardiner, *England Herself*, p. 168.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Gardiner, *World Without End*, p. 34.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

fallen in France and Belgium.<sup>84</sup> The older generation left behind clung terrified to the pre-1914 world, appearing as 'pathetic' ciphers of 'posthumous England'.<sup>85</sup> Like his hero Lawrence, Gardiner believed that the key to revitalising English life lay with the working classes, particularly in tightly-knit communities who shared their work and their social lives together, for example the Cleveland miners whose 'genuine togetherness' and 'comradely intercourse in work, and recreation with its power of tapping the unseen forces of life' Gardiner wished to encourage in society at large.<sup>86</sup> For Gardiner such sturdy examples of the English working classes were the raw material with which to craft his new society, but without leaders, the model for whom was the country squire or local ironmaster, directly involved in the daily functioning and leadership of their communities, the vision could not become reality.<sup>87</sup> Gardiner wanted aristocratic leaders and hale, hearty peasant followers; and between the elite and the masses there was no room for the bureaucracy, or indeed the democracy, of the middle classes.

### **Irrational magic and the local soil**

Gardiner's revolt against middle-class democratic values was itself a rebellion against rationality. Organicism required 'subordination' to a force greater than human reason, the 'larger organic authority, the authority of the Natural Order, which is based in rhythmic laws'.<sup>88</sup> This was necessary because the very forces which sustained life and its cycles - fertility, germination, growth, decay - emanated from this great power, and not from 'the cleverness of the human brain'.<sup>89</sup> If there was 'a law governing our earth-existence which subdues all terrestrial energies to the theme of its will' in 'mysterious processes', then equally magical processes were necessary to human systems of society and governance.<sup>90</sup> Morris was for Gardiner one of the methods whereby earthly forces could be tapped for use: as Trentmann writes, 'to dance the Morris Dance was to

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<sup>84</sup> Gardiner, *England Herself*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>85</sup> Gardiner, *World Without End*, p. 31.

<sup>86</sup> Gardiner, *North Sea and Baltic* (autobiography), Vol 2., 8:2, p. 5; Gardiner, 'North Skelton', p. 46.

<sup>87</sup> Gardiner bemoans the replacement of involved leadership with managerial absenteeism in *North Sea and Baltic* (autobiography), Vol 2., 8:2, pp. 5-6.

<sup>88</sup> Gardiner, *England Herself*, p. 15.

<sup>89</sup> Gardiner, 'North Skelton', p. 45.

<sup>90</sup> Gardiner, 'The English Folk Dance Tradition', p. 2.

discard rationality and to transcend the artificial separation between body and mind.<sup>91</sup> Gardiner himself wrote of this descent into spiritual irrationality in subordination to subterranean forces at the beginning of a Morris dance:

We [...] feel this in the *once to yourself* [...] at the beginning of the dance. [...] this secret of being gathered in humility in the edge of performance, of winning confidence through a conscious surrender of self-will. It is to become aware of the *Divine Availability*, of a reservoir of power and magic far beyond one's puny talents.<sup>92</sup>

For Gardiner the transformative potential inherent in folksong and dance was entirely literal, as he believed that its practice generated energy drawn from a great reserve of mystical power to be used 'for further living, for work as a group or in our own personal sphere.'<sup>93</sup> It is no coincidence that to learn to surrender to and to make use of this earthly magic was referred to by Gardiner as 'replanting' oneself in the 'universe.'<sup>94</sup> Access to this mystical power depended on being rooted in the soil and in locality. Authority emerged from soil because so too did culture, out of the 'interplay between art and environment, the communing of music or dance with *genius loci*.'<sup>95</sup> Zimring sees a relationship between folk dance and 'the tendency to seek redemption and recovery in the power of locality' in interwar Britain, because dancing could help to restore a 'muscle memory of place', bringing about 'wholeness' through identification with locality.<sup>96</sup> Music, care for the local soil, and political authority were intrinsically linked for Gardiner, who wrote an article explaining the similitude of music and statecraft as forms which 'embrace people in a condition of significant collective activity' requiring 'supreme obedience' to larger forms and to cycles of renewal.<sup>97</sup> This

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<sup>91</sup> Trentmann, 'Civilization', p. 600.

<sup>92</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'A Birthday Speech', extract from 'The Fifth of November Was Truly Not Forgotten' in *The Springhead Ring News Sheet*, Winter Solstice 1962 (No. 56) in Best (ed.), pp. 249-53 (p. 251).

<sup>93</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'On the Functions of a Rural University', from *North Sea and Baltic*, September 1933, in Best (ed.), pp. 88-94 (p. 88).

<sup>94</sup> Gardiner, *England Herself*, p. 15.

<sup>95</sup> Gardiner, 'Birthday Speech', p. 252.

<sup>96</sup> Zimring, p. 133.

<sup>97</sup> Gardiner, 'Music and Statecraft', pp. 95-6.

was again a surrender to irrationality: Matless writes that organicists expected beauty to 'emerge unselfconsciously' by 'a functionalism not of design but of rooted "husbandry."<sup>98</sup> Husbandry involved not reason and rules, but a steady yet authoritative direction of what was already emerging from the soil: it was according to Matless a type of headship or masculine care for a feminine earth, expressing leadership not by conquering but by marrying.<sup>99</sup> The ritual arts by which this process was sustained were therefore inherently masculine arts, and so for women to dance the Morris was against the very order of (super)nature: Morris was 'the masculine ritual of soil fertility and local tradition.'<sup>100</sup> The restoration of masculine dance could reverse the emasculation of politics by middle-class democratic values, healing the 'deeply hurt male pride' so that those 'insurrections of a wronged middle-class'; fascism, communism and Nazism, would no longer be necessary and a truly powerful movement of husbandlike, aristocratic and authoritative statesmanship could emerge.<sup>101</sup>

True statesmanship and political power were not to be rational and democratic, but irrational and autocratic, derived from a mastery of nature and rooted in the local soil. Governance was to be 'akin to husbandry', and to become 'the art of controlling growth, of being in league with the forces of time', necessitating 'reverence and faith.'<sup>102</sup> As this required the kind of 'replanting' in the universe and the soil that access to reserves of earthly power also needed, husband-like statesmanship had a local focus:

If we are to be husbandmen in politics we must begin humbly with our immediate *polis*: the region. We must focus the interest of the people of the region not upon the capitals of political decision but upon their own immediate country. In other words we must actively start minding our own business again, making ourselves responsible for the state of affairs in which we live [...]. We must love our region in its very limitations, just as we love the limitations of

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<sup>98</sup> Matless, p. 106.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Gardiner, 'Postscript 1938', p. 57.

<sup>101</sup> Gardiner, *World Without End*, p. 34.

<sup>102</sup> Gardiner, 'Rural University', p. 93.



form in a dance or a madrigal. Only in this way shall we attain to mastery of ourselves and our own affairs.<sup>103</sup>

Gardiner worked covertly with his band of spiritual elites, 'anonymous people [...] solicitous for the smaller units of society', to help society and culture to replant their roots and draw sustenance from the local soil.<sup>104</sup> But he also interacted with established forms to obtain '*we-government*' not '*they-government*', and was elected to the Dorset County Council in 1937 and appointed High Sherriff of Dorset in 1967.<sup>105</sup> The existing apparatus of institutions were available to be made use of, but it was preferable for their actions to be taken and decisions to be made with feeling and belief, not with reason and rules. Organisations had to be local, taking their impetus for that feeling and belief from their deep-rootedness in the local soil. This presented Gardiner with another reason to dislike the EFDS: they were a national organisation, but for Gardiner, what was needed was 'not branches of centralized societies and movements, but *local roots*. For music like history arises from the soil and not from the office.'<sup>106</sup>

### **Priestly dancers**

It is no wonder that, with their centralized structure and rational basis in technical ability, Gardiner was so averse to what he saw as the middle-class, hide-bound workings of the EFDS. Their estimation of a dancer's worth was based on a logical progression through a series of examinations in order to obtain certificates of proficiency, as opposed to the 'kingly presence', 'winning power of evocation and command' and the 'heart-kindling leadership' he so admired in certain dancers of his generation.<sup>107</sup> The similarities between Gardiner's lament that 'grammatical skill was triumphing over the spirit of the dance' and Neal's fear of 'the hindering touch of the

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp. 93-4.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>105</sup> Gardiner, *England Herself*, pp. 166-7; Richard Moore-Colyer, 'Rolf Gardiner, Farming and the English Landscape', in Jefferies and Tyldesley (eds), pp. 95-120 (p. 104); Frank Trentmann, 'Gardiner, (Henry) Rolf', 2009, in *ODNB Online* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/59314>> [accessed 3 Feb 2016].

<sup>106</sup> Gardiner, *England Herself*, p. 146,

<sup>107</sup> Gardiner described Arthur Heffer in the first two quotations, and Thaxted dancer Alec Hunter in the third. 'The Travelling Morrice', p. 9; p. 11.

pedant' have not gone unnoticed.<sup>108</sup> While Neal at first saw Morris and folksong as valuable for their potential use as recreation for young people with an added appeal of national cultural heritage, her views did change over time. In the interwar period in particular, she became increasingly convinced, with the aid of correspondence with Gardiner, of 'white magic' possibilities.<sup>109</sup> She expressed guilt in her 1939 autobiography that she had 'quite innocently [...] broken the law of a cosmic ritual' by putting 'women into a masculine rhythm', in contrast to her previously outspoken defence of the right of her *Espérance* girls to ownership of the Morris dance.<sup>110</sup> Bearman discusses the intellectual debts between Neal and Gardiner, going so far as to suggest that it was in fact Neal, as the older and more experienced, who influenced Gardiner through their joint interest in the Kibbo Kift, rather than the other way around.<sup>111</sup> Yet Gardiner, despite sharing Neal's emphasis on spirit over technical accuracy, did not agree with her stance on Morris as recreational activity and educational exercise, and at no point did he advocate the teaching of Morris to children, itself the entire basis of Neal's involvement in the folk revival. Gardiner wrote dismissively of such ventures as being not transformative expressions of social community, but 'an isolated pastime cultivated mainly by middle-aged spinsters and school-children.'<sup>112</sup> Bearman positions Gardiner as the 'Sorcerer's Apprentice' to Neal but it is highly unlikely that Gardiner, notwithstanding his deep opposition to women's dancing, would have accepted the authority of a woman in matters spiritual, especially a middle-aged suffragist who stood outside what was for him the natural social order: 'If we are men, we shall be creators, fighters, husbands and fathers first, and all other things afterwards: if we are women, we shall be wives and mothers and home-makers first, and all other things afterwards.'<sup>113</sup> Neal, despite fostering two young boys for a time, ultimately focused her energies outward into society, not into the home. It was important to Gardiner's worldview that men and women occupied their correct places in the natural order he had conceived of: when he held work camps at Springhead they

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 10; Neal, *Espérance Morris Book I*, p. 5.

<sup>109</sup> Letter from Mary Neal to Rolf Gardiner, 27 August [1923?]. MS Gardiner C/3/1/26. CUL.

<sup>110</sup> Neal, *As A Tale*, p. 68.

<sup>111</sup> Bearman, 'Sorcerer's Apprentice', p. 26.

<sup>112</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'Seven Years at Springhead', extract from *North Sea and Baltic*, Midwinter 1940-41 (New Series No. 7, Springhead) in Best (ed.), pp. 143-52 (pp. 150-51).

<sup>113</sup> Gardiner, 'What shall we do to be saved?', p. 66.

were for men, and women who did attend 'were kept very much in their place!'<sup>114</sup> Neal was not a woman to be kept in her place, and not one whose authority or example Gardiner would have accepted.

If Morris was to be a weapon in the spiritual arsenal of the new elite, then that elite was not to be the EFDS. So many of them were, according to Gardiner, too feminine: 'wimbly young men of the suburbs' who could not provide the 'erect carriage, masculine grace and splendid arm-movements' which 'evinced an Attic power' in Heffer, with whom these others were compared.<sup>115</sup> The EFDS, and the middle classes whom it typified, were not to be Gardiner's elite. Yet cultural activities, in particular dance and song, were inseparable from economic and social activities.<sup>116</sup> In his efforts towards rural regeneration, Gardiner sought to reinstate the lost 'sacramental element' of farming whose extinction had rendered the farmer a 'mere producer'.<sup>117</sup> He believed that a 'flicker' of that 'sacramental attitude' persisted still in folksong and dance, and that such music could 'save the land, the soil and our souls'.<sup>118</sup> Gardiner saw dance and song as manifestations of a deeper music which was a 'fundamental habit of rhythmic labour and refreshment', in a way similar to Neal's description of a balanced life of work, recreation, and sociability as being 'set to music'.<sup>119</sup> In light of Gardiner's beliefs in the inseparability of work and art, it was natural that he should see the leaders of work as spiritual leaders also. The elite who were to lead a community must also perform its sacramental arts, and hence Gardiner looked to his fellow Morris dancers in the hopes of bringing together his elite. The EFDS did not fulfil his needs, and in their swift rejection of his suggestions for improvement had laid down clear a clear refusal to turn towards Gardiner's purposes: Stanley Kennedy North, brother-in-law of Sharp's eventual successor as EFDS director, wrote in the correspondence columns of *The Challenge* that the EFDS had a 'definite purpose' which they had 'very largely achieved', but that 'what Mr. Gardiner wants is something outside their range, and they are the last people to prevent him from going out and winning for himself his own goal,

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<sup>114</sup> Gardiner, 'Talk to the Radionic Association November 1965' in Best (ed.), pp. 1-12 (p. 8).

<sup>115</sup> Gardiner, 'The Travelling Morrice', p. 9.

<sup>116</sup> Gardiner, 'North Skelton', p. 46.

<sup>117</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'Music, Noise and the Land', extract from *Wessex: Letters from Springhead*, Christmas 1951 (Third Series, No. 3, Springhead) in Best (ed.), pp. 206-7 (p. 207).

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.; Neal, 'Set to Music', p. 2.

but he cannot expect them to play linesmen to his game.<sup>120</sup> Gardiner needed players for his game, and instead he attempted to form his own bodies, firstly leading a group of dancers to Germany in 1922, and endeavouring to galvanise the Cambridge Morris Men into taking up his cause.

The tour saw a group of 16 dancers perform in towns including Cologne and Frankfurt. The immediate aims were to foster a new understanding and communion between fellow Northern Europeans after the catastrophe of war in a cultural exchange: 'a greeting in our most joyous symbols'.<sup>121</sup> But it also allowed Gardiner a valuable chance to hone his ideas about the political and social implications of folk dance; and to make a first attempt at putting these into practice, far away from the constricting setting of the EFDS and where he was a leader and not merely a member of a class. As Gardiner put it in his write-up of the journey:

One called for a small group of expert dancers, who would give up their holiday to experimental work, having journeyed into a new and stimulating environment, where they would not be distracted by old associations, & where they could explore at their leisure, by discussion, experiment, and the experience of cooperative effort, the possibilities inherent in the English dance tradition.<sup>122</sup>

Away from the stifling atmosphere of middle-class England and the looming presence of the older generation, Gardiner could finally begin to test the mettle of his new elite. And he was pleased with the results, the tour being well-received by the German hosts and an invitation to return extended.<sup>123</sup> After such resounding success, Gardiner also hoped to gain ground at home. He wrote in *Youth* following the rejection of his proposals for the reform that if the EFDS continued on its present course, 'maybe the more virile forces at Oxford and Cambridge will get the upper-hand'.<sup>124</sup> Gardiner

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<sup>120</sup> Mr Kennedy North, correspondence in *The Challenge*. This cutting is undated, but can be presumed to be from the next issue after Gardiner's piece on the 17th, therefore the 24th. Correspondence on this topic had been running from 10 August 1923. MS Gardiner/ A/5/1. CUL.

<sup>121</sup> Gardiner, 'English Folk Dancers in Germany', pp. 5-6.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>124</sup> Gardiner, 'Constructive Considerations', p. 4.

sought to enable this by reacquainting his Cambridge colleagues (called the 'Travelling Morrice' when away from home) with what he believed to be the spiritual roots of Morris, by dancing upon the hallowed ground of the Cotswolds and 'seeking out the remaining old dancers' in order to rediscover the 'motive behind the movement'.<sup>125</sup> He also wished to assess if these more masculine 'virile forces' could be the raw material of his new elite. Seeking out older dancers in the Cotswolds became another way for Gardiner to 'heal' the rift between the past leaders and the younger generation, a blessing and handing-on of spiritual leadership: Gardiner wrote that these men 'were stirred to watch young men of athletic prowess dancing the strenuous steps of their own stalwart youth'.<sup>126</sup> In his emulation of the 'traditional dancers' of the Cotswolds, the dancing in lanes and on village greens, and the technique which was not that of 'rubber-shod amateurs in the Chelsea Polytechnic, but the knowledge of leather-sheathed feet that had beaten the ground of the English earth,' Gardiner hoped to rekindle the waning flame of their mystical leadership within the hearts of his own elite: 'those tours were instruments of a sense of direction and purpose which I wanted to find and instil in my half-hearted contemporaries'.<sup>127</sup> He even ascribed to them such a practice of elitism as he wished to make the basis of his own team selection:

We have torn away the dance from its ritual position and have popularised it. But the Morris and Sword dance [...] are essentially selective magic dances which only a peculiarly fitted and trained elite is capable of executing. It is ridiculous to suppose that *any* man is fit to dance the Morris; the old "traditional" folk knew this well enough in making [...] their training of

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<sup>125</sup> Gardiner, 'The Travelling Morrice', p. 10.

<sup>126</sup> Gardiner, *North Sea and Baltic* (autobiography), Vol. 1, 1:v, pp. 7-8. Simons argues that such identification of themselves with the old men they 'assumed to be the remnants of the "folk" was a 'peculiar form of patronage and impersonation', in that the tours allowed them to escape into a rural idyll and free themselves, to an extent, from the stifling atmosphere of their middle-class surroundings by acting the part of the folk for a while, before returning to the creature comforts of Cambridge - they wished to act, not live as, 'the folk'. Simons, p. 29.

<sup>127</sup> Gardiner, 'The Travelling Morrice', pp. 10-11.

dancers an initiation. It is time that we should begin to restrict and discriminate and to reserve the Morris for a true function.<sup>128</sup>

The first tour to the Cotswolds in 1924 certainly demonstrated exclusivity: Simons reports that a student attending the University on a scholarship, Arthur Peck, a tailor's son, was excluded from the tour as he was not of the right background.<sup>129</sup> Such elitism is the polar opposite of Neal and Kimmins' use of folk dance to encourage self-worth and community belonging in slum children. But Gardiner's view of these 'magic' dances as the purview of a 'peculiarly fitted' elite meant that to him they were part of a cyclical or self-fulfilling process: not only were these dances *for* the elite, but the dancing of them was itself *constitutive* of the elite. Dancing the Morris forged the raw recruits into a '*Blutbruderschaft*' in an experience akin to 'going through a cleansing fire, when the whole six of you' become 'mysteriously linked to your neighbours.'<sup>130</sup> The lessons learned and the spiritual power available to the dancer were part of what forged him into a member of the elite, but he must have some necessary elite qualities before being allowed initiation to begin with. Again, as Simons writes, 'Gardiner claimed that popularisation of indigenous culture was synonymous with "dilution", shrouding his anti-democratic prejudices in mysticism and quasi-anthropological ideology.'<sup>131</sup> Excluding women, children, or even 'lower-quality' males such as Peck was imperative, if Gardiner and his elite were to reverse the cultural and social decadence that had set in following the Great War.

### **Authority undermined**

Gardiner felt himself, despite his youthful age, to be amply ready to be the type of leader he idolised. The trouble was that the followers he needed were not forthcoming. The Cambridge dancers he had hoped would join him in putting into practice his organic vision for society were interested only in dancing and socialising, enjoying their tours but prone to relapsing into 'Cambridge scepticism' when faced with the

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<sup>128</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'Summer Tour in Germany, 1928' in *North Sea and Baltic*, High Summer 1938, p. 101. GRQ35, VWML.

<sup>129</sup> Simons, p. 30.

<sup>130</sup> Gardiner, *The English Folk Dance Tradition*, p. 14; p. 18.

<sup>131</sup> Simons, p. 11.

spiritual implications Gardiner attached to their hobby.<sup>132</sup> Their failure to follow his lead is a crucial element in the development of both the Morris revival and in the progression of Gardiner's own efforts at cultural regeneration.

The first aspect, Gardiner's role in the unfolding story of the Morris in the early twentieth century, has been hotly debated, and remains contentious, largely due to Gardiner's political allegiances. Boyes asserts that 'Gardiner's concept of traditional performance as the function of select *Männerbünde* which had to be restored to twentieth-century culture has its ultimate embodiment in The Morris Ring', founded in 1934 to bring together men's Morris teams.<sup>133</sup> Claims such as this have in turn been refuted by Bearman and Simons, with both asserting that Boyes' assessment assigns to Gardiner far more influence than he possessed. Bearman is keen to remind readers that Boyes' assertions of Gardiner's status as the driving force behind the Morris Ring had been previously rebutted by none other than the first Bagman (secretary and record-keeper) of the Morris Ring, Walter Abson.<sup>134</sup> He also asserts that Gardiner had no influence upon EFDSS policy, a statement hard to dispute given Gardiner's turbulent history with the group and his less-than-tactful exchanges with senior members both in the Press and in private correspondence.<sup>135</sup> Simons also cites Gardiner's 'imprudence and arrogance' as factors which severely limited his influence, as his behaviour so often led to the burning of bridges and left him with very few allies, not only within the EFDSS, but also within the Travelling Morrice, who, as Simons writes, 'patronized' his outspoken behaviour but did not share his particular enthusiasms.<sup>136</sup>

It is undeniable that Gardiner was highly outspoken in character, and prone to sharing his thoughts on any and all subjects. His writing was also similarly verbose and high-flown. Such tendencies undoubtedly undermined the authoritative persona he attempted to project, especially when aired in public forums such as newspapers. Aside from the disastrous move of publishing his 'Constructive Considerations' for the EFDS and in doing so humiliating the senior members of the Society, his other interactions with the Press left him open to ridicule. One editor who was happy to oblige was

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<sup>132</sup> Gardiner, *North Sea and Baltic* (autobiography), Vol. 1, 2:v, p. 18.

<sup>133</sup> Boyes, "Potencies", pp. 79-80. Boyes had introduced the topic of Gardiner's potential involvement in the founding of the Morris Ring in *Imagined Village*, pp. 154-9.

<sup>134</sup> Bearman, 'Sorcerer's Apprentice', p. 17.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28-9.

<sup>136</sup> Simons, p. 33; p. 35.

Edward Sackville-West, editor of the *Oxford Fortnightly Review*. The paper had previously published some disparaging remarks about folksong and dance, and Gardiner felt compelled to respond with a letter defending the EFDS, appearing in the issue of 26 May, 1922 (the year before his own breach with the Society). He began in his usual arch manner by calling out 'unkindness' of the remarks 'against persons of unimpeachable sincerity and eagerness' and assuming the mantle of defender: 'As I am, so to speak, *au-dessus de la mêlée* in the matter, I think it my duty to reveal the extraordinary un-truth and speciosity of your statements.'<sup>137</sup> Gardiner went on to describe the members of the Society as 'highly complex, self-conscious intellectualised organisms' who enjoyed a dance which 'throbs in its loveliness', in opposition to such cultural refuse as the 'Trix Sisters', emblems of a modern culture which was a 'waste of slum and smoke and slovenly foulessness [sic]'.<sup>138</sup> Sackville-West was unable to resist appending an Editor's Note to the letter in print:

Our correspondent's letter reminds us of a certain old villager who, when asked [...] if he enjoyed the amateur dramatic entertainment which had been provided by 'the gentry' [...] replied, 'Yes, yes I enj'yed it very much - almost as much as ye did y'selves.' After all, if Mr. Gardiner and the other 'highly complex, self-conscious intellectualised organisms', are enjoying themselves, [...] then we have certainly no cause of complaint. After all no one forces us to go and see their uncouth footings. They might even do the thing in complete private (for of what satisfaction can the vulgar plaudits of an audience to be 'persons of unimpeachable sincerity and eagerness?').<sup>139</sup>

Gardiner's writing in the movement's own publications was equally discordant. Writing in response to discussion regarding mixed-sex Morris sides, he singled out Major Francis Fryer, a veteran dancer and the instigator of a number of revival sides:

Whatever species of dyspeptic 'cannibal' has been seducing the mind of our good Francis Fryer with all this blarney about 'mixed Morris sides'? The

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<sup>137</sup> Gardiner, correspondence in *Oxford Fortnightly Review*, 26 May 1922.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.



Morris has surely suffered enough emasculation [...]. And yet here is our enthusiast handing over the remains on a platter of indeterminate sex. Fie!  
Francis Fryer.<sup>140</sup>

Gardiner again demonstrated his concern for the masculinity of what was to him a sacred dance with a ritual purpose: emasculation diminished its supernatural power. Gardiner continued his letter by characterising the dancers of the EFDSS as 'concave-chested bespectacled suburbans prancing over the school room floor', and predicted that in the hands of the Morris Ring, the dance would in contrast 'become itself again, the dance of men, sworn to manhood, fiery ecstasy, ale, magic and fertility!', despite the protestations of the majority-female EFDSS, whom Gardiner mimicked: 'A female voice at the Phoenix Theatre, July 27th, 1935, International Conference: "We do not like all this talk of magic; we do not want fertility!"<sup>141</sup> This demonstrates that the wider membership of the EFDS clearly rejected Gardiner's conception of the dance as magic ritual: as Boyes has pointed out, Sharp did believe that the Morris was a male, priestly dance in origin, but that it was in its revival form a wholesome and appropriate activity for women, as long as each side was comprised of one sex only.<sup>142</sup> Gardiner ended his letter with a final outburst aimed at both the earlier leaders of Sharp's revival and the contrariness of the movement's women:

the leaders of our revival should have had the moral courage to forbid women's Morris [...]. But time winnows all things and the men's dance will return to the men, an ever-new, evolving, fertile tradition.

Which is nothing if not complimentary to the ladies, bless them. They in their hearts want what we want more than anyone; look how they kindle at the show of any genuine touch of real manhood!<sup>143</sup>

If Gardiner's public writings were likely to turn-off readers from his point of view, then the letters and conversations he exchanged with other members of the movement in

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<sup>140</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'Mixed Morris Sides', correspondence to *English Dance and Song*, 12 June 1936, p. 27.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Boyes, "Potencies", p. 71.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

private can only have had a ruinous effect upon his reputation and influence within the various societies of which he was a member. It is difficult to ascribe a high status within the officialised movement to Gardiner, when his abrasive personality and quick temper appear to have made enemies of many of the inner circle of the EFDS(S). These personal difficulties are discussed in Appendix II, along with an account of the likely affair between Gardiner's mother and Stanley Kennedy North, a member of the inner circle who was related to the rest of that circle by both blood and marriage, and with whom Gardiner had also sparred in press correspondence. Gardiner was a fringe member of a society largely run by the extended family of a man who had wronged his family, and who were themselves sorely tried by his outspoken and querulous behaviour. His influence upon the policy and functioning of that organisation was therefore minimal.

### **Conflicting Accounts**

Aside from his abrasive personality, there was what Simons dubs his 'Rolfery' - his fanatical devotion to the plethora of implications and eccentricities he applied to all of his endeavours, not least Morris.<sup>144</sup> In his effort to apply these to events and developments in the folk movement, he often found his narratives, and perhaps even his entire perception of such events, vastly at odds with the way the same events were recorded by others. Gardiner was not 'normal enough about the facts to be their chronicler', as Douglas Kennedy wrote regarding their disagreement over Gardiner's reports of the first Travelling Morrice tour (see Appendix II).<sup>145</sup> In the case to which he referred, such an assertion is easily understood, for we are able to directly compare Gardiner's report with a report of the same tour made by Heffer.<sup>146</sup> Gardiner wrote of the venture as a sort of cross between a Bacchanalian feast and an adventure in 'roughing it': 'Bread and cheese was our ambrosia, ale our nectar: in fact never in England has that sterling fluid been pressed into more fitting occasion'; 'We cooked our breakfasts on wood-fires, and ate our suppers in pubs and back-yards. We drank the ales of old England, and sweated them out.'<sup>147</sup> Heffer's description of the refreshments

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<sup>144</sup> Simons, p. 4.

<sup>145</sup> Letter from Douglas Kennedy to Rolf Gardiner, 19 June 1929. MS Gardiner C/3/2. CUL.

<sup>146</sup> A. B. Heffer, 'The Tour of the Travelling Morrice', *E.F.D.S. News*, I (1925), pp. 247-60.

<sup>147</sup> Gardiner, 'A Brief Account', p.77; Gardiner, 'The Travelling Morrice', p. 10.

calls to mind a Famous Five romp, with 'buns and lemonade', teas given by Lady Sherborne, dinner at the Vicarage, 'libations of ginger beer', and plenty of sweets: 'Thomas hit upon the really brilliant idea of acid drops for crunching on the way. Acid drops became after this a staple food, and Thomas was automatically made chief acid dropper.'<sup>148</sup> It is difficult to imagine 'chief acid dropper' as an integral role in Gardiner's conception of the elite leadership to be forged by ventures such as the Travelling Morrice tour. The simplicity of the sleeping and transport arrangements were likewise overstated, as was the general physical exertion, in Gardiner's wish to convey the character-forming qualities of the tour:

The Cotswold tours [...] were an adventure into the unknown. They were that unheard of thing in post-war England: they were strenuous. We slept on the hard ground in diminutive tents; pedalled miles on pack-laden bicycles, danced on the road in the scorching sun of midday, and at sunset on greens and in market-places.<sup>149</sup>

Gardiner's heroic telling is undercut by the light-hearted tone of Heffer's report. Heffer described a large, comfortable tent occupied by six dancers, with another two in an annexe, in contrast to Gardiner's 'diminutive tents': Gardiner did sleep in 'a gin contraption of his own with wild Kibbo Kift signs on it, which was attached to the back of the large tent,' but his 'fresh air fiend' tastes were not shared by the others.<sup>150</sup> As to the miles covered on 'pack-laden bicycles':

the log master must record that without the assistance of the two motor-cyclists, Jim La Touche and George Cooke, and the unlimited carrying-power of their iron steeds, the problem of transport would have defied the ingenuity of the most hardened campaigner.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Heffer, p. 252; p. 254; p. 250; p. 257; p. 251.

<sup>149</sup> Gardiner, 'The Travelling Morrice', p. 10.

<sup>150</sup> Heffer, p. 250.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p. 249.

Luggage, rather than being laden onto the cycles, was carried on the motorbikes, and occasionally by car.<sup>152</sup> Gardiner himself also had to be carried by motorcycle after damaging his bicycle.<sup>153</sup> They even took the processional dancing in 'easy stages'.<sup>154</sup> By far the most important difference between the two reports is the explanation of the Travelling Morrice's reception by the locals. Gardiner's write-up implies that the new generation of dancers were received as the inheritors of elite tradition he wished them to be:

The welcomes we had whenever we went heartened us body and soul. Above all the characters and comments of the veteran dancers whom we met became memorable indeed. [...] These old men were touched to the quick of their souls by the Morris. It was by far the most important thing in their lives, and now they rejoiced in us, with a sort of wonder and deep approval.<sup>155</sup>

Gardiner's effusion cuts a clear contrast with the report by Heffer that the older residents had compared the Travelling Morrice unfavourably with another revival side who had recently visited, as they said from Burford, though Heffer considered that it was perhaps the side founded in Ascot-under-Wychwood by R.J. Tiddy before the war.<sup>156</sup>

It could be said that it is unprofitable to place more stock in Heffer's report than Gardiner's, in that they are both ultimately coloured by the perception of their individual writers. But Kennedy's damning verdict that Gardiner was not 'normal enough about the facts to be their chronicler' adds to the seeming disconnect between the serious and strenuous adventure described by Gardiner and the cheerful romp evoked in Heffer's report, and lends support to the notion that the latter telling is more likely to reflect the experience of the rest of the team as a whole. There is also the fact that each wrote with their audience in mind: Heffer's report was written for the EFDS newsletter, and therefore emphasised the help and welcome given by various friends

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, p. 250.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, p. 254.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, p. 249.

<sup>155</sup> Gardiner, 'The Travelling Morrice', p. 10.

<sup>156</sup> Heffer, p. 252.

and members, and framed the tour as the extension of a shared hobby. Gardiner's, on the other hand, was written for his own publications, and republished in the newsletter of his own organisation, The Springhead Ring, a group who shared his esoteric interests. And yet Gardiner repeated the material, in bulk and largely unchanged, in a speech he gave to the CMM in 1961 when he was the guest of honour at their annual dinner.<sup>157</sup> Gardiner was happy to present his version of events to them, in spite of the fact that the passing of years had made it clear that they did not share his organicist worldview. There is, of course, the likelihood that Gardiner's report was a true chronicle of the event as he himself perceived it: that the first tour to the Cotswolds was experienced by Gardiner as a spiritual pilgrimage to the inner sanctum of the rural England, 'an Arcadian England, a countryside still shimmering with traditional glory' which formed the heart of his quasi-religious worship of the English soil.<sup>158</sup> It is fair to say that, as Simons writes, that the tours themselves 'had never been characterized by Gardiner's mysticisms, and he remained an eccentric among the dancers.'<sup>159</sup>

Despite the attitude of the majority of the dancers, taking the tour as an enjoyable holiday, this pilgrimage to the heartland of Morris was a foundational experience for Gardiner. Coupled with the earlier tour to Germany, it cemented such tours as a central method in his work for social regeneration. Gardiner's interactions with the revival in the interwar period and beyond demonstrate that the belief in the transformative potential of the folk revival was no longer confined to its leftwing practitioners, yet remained wedded with the longing for community underpinning earlier work. The values he ascribed to material display its versatility: the movement could be coupled with rural regeneration, soil magic, and organicism as readily as with urban recreation, factory workers' political education, disability advocacy, or clerical communism. His case also shows that as with Neal, the failure of more vehemently politicised or transformative conceptions of revival to take hold does not necessarily mean a failure of wider aims: like Neal, Gardiner's involvement in the folk revival provided him with experience, material, and deeply meaningful inspiration with which to continue his regenerative work.

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<sup>157</sup> Gardiner, 'The Travelling Morrice', is the text of this speech.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>159</sup> Simons, p. 6.

## Chapter Six: Thaxted, The Morris Ring, and a synthesis of ideals

### The Morris Ring

Gardiner's role in the development of the Travelling Morrice was, despite the fact that the initial idea was his, greatly limited by the judicious planning of Heffer, who worked to curb Gardiner's influence in order to ensure that the dance and the enjoyment thereof remained the central purpose, rather than Gardiner's esoteric schemes.<sup>1</sup> Travelling Morrice tours continued, and so did Gardiner's interest and attendance, despite increasingly strong commitments to other projects, including work camps both in Britain and Germany; reciprocal visits between English and German choirs and performance groups; and the mammoth task of rural regeneration centred upon his estate in Dorset. Though his input lessened in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the shift in focus of the Morris revival he had worked for took hold, and by the first years of the 1930s, the locus of the Morris revival had shifted once again. This shift was not towards priestly ritual as was his prime intention, but it was a movement away from either young people's social recreation or the preservation and dissemination pioneered by the EFDS, towards a practice rooted in independent local teams, primarily those of the Oxford and Cambridge universities and the town of Thaxted. The young Thaxted team inaugurated by the Noels in 1911 with Espérance tuition had been reformed as a men's side following the Great War. It had also since 1927 become the custom for a Morris gathering to take place in Thaxted over a weekend in June, as a sympathetic Noel allowed dancing on the Sunday.<sup>2</sup> These weekends brought together similar men's clubs for dancing in the streets and in the Vicarage garden, as well as a service in the church. This chapter examines the aims and values of this new wave of activity in the Morris revival and their difference from the previous stages, as well as the effect of the legacies of earlier revivalists on this period of development. It also argues that it was the work and influence of other progressive individuals, rather than Gardiner, which came to be enshrined in the new forms of revival. The earliest revival, characterised by Neal's application of Morris as social work focused on improving the lives of young, working-class people. This movement came into direct competition with the more

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<sup>1</sup> Simons, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Abson, *The First Log Book*, transcript of the original document, published by The Morris Ring, 1991, p. 3.

scholarly revival headed by Sharp and his EFDS, whose members were middle-class adults. They wished to preserve and disseminate the tradition as collected by Sharp, and did so through a system of formalised tuition, examinations, and demonstrations. By the early 1930s, many of the men who had learned Morris through EFDS classes shared Gardiner's wish to do more with their knowledge than gain certificates and provide demonstrations. This had led to the formation of local sides such as that at Cambridge, and Thaxted, as a longstanding centre for Morris, had provided a model for the gathering of these teams together to dance and socialise. The result was the inauguration of the Morris Ring in Thaxted on 2 June 1934.<sup>3</sup>

The CMM were at the centre of the development of the new organisation. A detailed explanation is given by Peck in his brief history of the Morris Ring:

It had been the custom [...] to invite to their annual Morris and Feast some leading Morris dancer from elsewhere, and such guests [...] were made Honorary Members [...]. It soon became clear, however, that it was impossible [...] to honour in this way all whom it would wish, and [in November 1933] it was suggested that such dancers might be made Honorary Members without the usual procedure.<sup>4</sup>

This suggestion was not satisfactory, and so a new proposal took shape:

the [...] clubs to which these dancers belonged should be invited to join [...] in establishing an informal federation of Morris Clubs [...]. Five other Clubs were consulted, further discussion took place during the Cambridge Morris Men's week of dancing [...] in April 1934, and at the tenth annual Feast on April 14th the Squire, Joseph Needham, to whose initiative the plans for the Ring's foundation were largely due, declared the Ring instituted [...]. On June 2nd 1934, at the Thaxted week-end, representatives of five of the six Clubs approved a draft constitution.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur Peck, *Fifty Years of Morris Dancing, 1899-1949* (The Morris Ring, 1949)

<<http://www.themorrisring.org/50-years-booklet>> [accessed 16 November 2015].

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

The formation of the Morris Ring was a result of the coming of a new wave of the Morris revival. The Ring was indebted to the EFDS(S) and Sharp for their knowledge and tuition: at the first meeting and at every subsequent occasion since, a toast was and is given to 'the Immortal Memory of Cecil Sharp', in glad acknowledgment of this debt.<sup>6</sup> But like Gardiner, and like Neal, they wished to find a use for the dance as part of their lives, and emphasised the importance of learning directly from 'traditional' dancers: 'No writing can be a complete authority - the only sure way is to learn by example,' said Kenworthy Schofield in his speech upon assuming office as the second Squire of the Ring in 1938.<sup>7</sup> Yet these similarities do not place Gardiner at the centre of the Ring either as a founder or a source of policy. The real instigators were Cambridge Squire and renowned scientist Joseph Needham and Arthur Peck, whose discussions over the difficulty of honouring all of the men whom they wished to as honorary members of the CMM; and the need to for a network among independent clubs to facilitate contact and shared dancing, developed finally into a decision to create such an organisation.<sup>8</sup> Once this stage had been reached, the actual task of building the Morris Ring was taken on by Alec Hunter (a respected textile designer, and deeply involved in Morris in Letchworth, Cambridge and Thaxted) and Walter Abson, who were appointed by Needham to perform this task and took on the roles of the first Squire and Bagman of the Morris Ring.<sup>9</sup> It is clear that CMM were the prime force behind the creation of the Ring, and that they were inspired as much by their own experiences on the Travelling Morrice Tours, instigated by if not living up to the visions of Gardiner, as much as they were by the format at Thaxted. But Gardiner himself was out of the loop at this time, not only involved in a variety of work camps and musical tours, but having acquired Gore Farm, near Ashmore in Dorset in November 1927; married Marabel Hodgkin in September 1932; and enlarged his estate with the addition of Springhead, which he dedicated to the cause of rural revival in September 1933. Gardiner's papers

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<sup>6</sup> The toast, given at the inaugural meeting of the Morris Ring in October 1934, may be found in Hunter's report of that meeting, in Abson, pp. 6-8 (p. 7).

<sup>7</sup> Hunter, report of meeting at Wargrave, September 1936, in Abson, pp. 19-21 (p. 21).

<sup>8</sup> As well as Peck's account in *Fifty Years* and Abson's preface to *Log Book*, a second account by Peck, given as a speech at a Ring Meeting in 1966, is reproduced in *Log Book*, pp. 47-50.

<sup>9</sup> The other clubs involved in the Ring's foundation were written to for their approval of Needham's nominations, and all assented. Abson, p. 3.



contain a circular letter written in October 1934, many months after the event, by Peck giving notice of the formation of the Ring. The letter explained the development in depth as if to a recipient unacquainted with previous discussion:

As a result of a discussion last November among the resident members of the C.M.M., the suggestion was made that there should be some sort of association by means of which the various Morris Men's Clubs throughout the country could be kept in touch with one another, with a view to strengthening the cause of the Morris. Five other Clubs were therefore approached, [...] and these five Clubs and the Cambridge Morris Men have formed the beginning of THE MORRIS RING, which was formally instituted [...] last April.<sup>10</sup>

Boyes argues, however, that Gardiner's lack of presence at the foundation of the Ring does not mean that the organisation was not permeated with his influence:

Gardiner's concept of traditional performance as the function of select *Männerbünde* [...] has its ultimate embodiment in The Morris Ring [...] Gardiner did not need to be present in person at the start of The Morris Ring: following more than a decade of proselytizing, the concept of the *Männerbund* was embedded in fellow-dancers' consciousness and accepted as a rationale for their performance.<sup>11</sup>

It is true that masculinity and male bonding were central features of the Ring at its inception, and the wish to retain a men's club atmosphere has remained until the present day (members voted in 2011 to admit female musicians, but dancing continues to be reserved for men).<sup>12</sup> Some of his elitist thinking also persisted, remaining centred on the intimate group as the focus for the movement's spirit, as Peck wrote in 1949:

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<sup>10</sup> Letter from Arthur Peck, 20 October 1934. Gardiner MS, C/3/5. CUL.

<sup>11</sup> Boyes, "Potencies", pp. 79-80.

<sup>12</sup> The Morris Ring exists today as one of three organisations devoted to Morris in the UK. The earliest of the other two organisations, the Morris Federation, was founded in 1975 as the Women's Morris Federation. The newest organisation, Open Morris, was founded in 1979, in response to the fact that there was no organisation for mixed-gender sides, nor for all-male sides who did not wish to be a part of the MR. The WMF began to admit sides of any composition in 1982.

The value of [Ring Meetings] cannot be exaggerated [...]. Yet the size of them cannot grow beyond a certain limit without defeating their object, for the Morris cannot be danced in hordes or it will lose its character; and it is not in these large gatherings, valuable and inspiring as they are, but in the Clubs and in their regular meetings, that the true spirit of the Morris is to be found.<sup>13</sup>

Two Squires of the Ring also spoke on the centrality of the club spirit in their inaugural speeches. Douglas Kennedy upon taking office in 1938 echoed some of Gardiner's mysticism in speaking of the exaltation of the individual by his communion with others in a bonded group. He referred in this speech to the 'spirit which the Morris brings' as the 'unity of a small group which both exalts the men who comprise it and attunes them to each other, bringing that relationship with other men we so badly need at this present time.'<sup>14</sup> Hunter had also pinpointed the importance of club spirit in his first speech as Squire in 1936. But he conceived of it as embodying the opposite of Gardiner's elitism:

The squire opened the discussion by emphasising the all-importance of the club spirit [...] The Squire said that newcomers should be allowed to dance with the club, even if not very good, as it was in the club and not the class that Morris was learnt.<sup>15</sup>

Hunter's comments echoed those of traditional dancer William Kimber, who counselled the Morris Ring at the outset of their efforts, on 'the importance of turning no-one away.'<sup>16</sup> The very Constitution agreed upon by the Ring, despite Boyes' assertion that it was as imbued with Gardiner's influence as the organisation itself, would seem in fact to suggest that the Ring was dedicated to the growth of the movement, not its restriction to an initiated elite (though with the proviso that the expansion was limited to men):

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<sup>13</sup> Peck.

<sup>14</sup> Kennedy, Report of meeting at Stow on the Wold, 1938, in Abson, pp. 34-5 (p. 35).

<sup>15</sup> Hunter, report of inaugural meeting, Cecil Sharp House, 1934, in Abson, pp. 6-8 (p. 7).

<sup>16</sup> Hunter, report of inaugural meeting, p. 7.

1. The object of the Morris Ring shall be to encourage the dancing of the Morris and to preserve its traditions, to bring into contact all existing Morris Men's Clubs or sides, and to encourage the formation of others. The purpose of the Ring is not to replace or supersede the existing organisations, but to subserve them.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Ring and the Society**

The Morris Ring, an independent organisation created to perform a function the EFDSS was unable and unwilling to consider (the 'return' of Morris to the streets as a social activity for both performance and enjoyment, and the encouragement of the 'club' model), nevertheless endeavoured to retain both patronage and personnel links with the Society, beyond the acknowledgement of their debt to Sharp for his teachings and collections. The relationship between the two organisations appears to have been cordial and supportive, with Hunter emphasising the importance of keeping relations 'independent and harmonious'; while the EFDSS donated the use of Cecil Sharp House free of charge as a venue for the first Ring Meeting.<sup>18</sup> It is hard to imagine such cordiality characterising a relationship in which one party's ideology and motives were derived from Gardiner, who, even without his vehement dislike for the *modus operandi* of the EFDS(S), was not one to temper his opinions in the name of inter-organisational harmony. The mutually harmonious relationship was such that in 1938 the Squire of the Ring and Director of the EFDSS were one and the same person, Douglas Kennedy having been elected as the third Squire upon his second nomination for that position.<sup>19</sup> This was, however, not without a small measure of discomfort from some quarters. Upon Kennedy's first nomination in 1936, he was put forward alongside Kenworthy Schofield and Jack Putterill (son-in-law and curate of Noel).<sup>20</sup> Putterill appears to have been nominated against his own will by the CMM, and withdrew.<sup>21</sup> It seems that this occurred because the Cambridge side at least still shared some of Gardiner's mistrust for the Society, and wished to put forward a nominee from a side (Thaxted) more like

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<sup>17</sup> Abson, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Hunter, report of meeting at Wargrave, p. 20; Hunter, report of inaugural meeting, pp. 6-8.

<sup>19</sup> Hunter, report of meeting at Cecil Sharp House, February 1936, in Abson, pp. 14-16 (p. 14).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

themselves and not a Society man like the other two. This idea is certainly present in the testimony one of the CMM members, Jan Durrant, who put forward the opinion that Cambridge 'were not in favour of too strong an association between the Ring and the Society in the matter of officials.'<sup>22</sup> This view was shared by the representatives of several other clubs, and by Kennedy himself, who felt that he 'should not hold office in the Ring at this early stage of its existence.'<sup>23</sup> Schofield was therefore elected, with the meeting 'placing on record its assertion that he was chosen for [...] his own qualities, not because but rather in spite of his official connections with the Society.'<sup>24</sup> In the earlier stages of the Ring's development it is clear that Gardiner's views of the Society and his strong wish for an independent organisation based on 'doing' rather than 'performing' Morris persisted in several quarters, notably in his own side of Cambridge and also in Thaxted, with whom the Cambridge team had been closely allied. This does not, however, suggest that those who shared this view also shared Gardiner's elitist mysticism. Rather, it must be remembered that the Morris Ring was formed because there was enough impetus shared by members of various groups who wanted to practice the dance in a different manner to that provided for by the EFDSS. It was natural that Cambridge and Thaxted should be allied in these views, as they were two of the earliest clubs to make the transition from classroom and concert hall to street and lane in the interwar period, Thaxted having begun as a locally-tied team taught in Espérance style. Despite Boyes' accusations, the early aloofness of the Ring had more to do with ensuring the independence and the alternative performance contexts and styles they carved out for themselves could take root. The relationship between Ring and Society remained independent yet cordial, and once the Ring had become firmly established and its legacy did not require such fierce protection, the members were happy to elect Kennedy as Squire.

The critics of the Ring's involvement with Gardiner and his views also fail to take into account the fact that Gardiner himself often expressed the opinion that he had failed to interest his fellow dancers in his political and social causes. Having failed to initiate the Travelling Morrice dancers into his new elite, he refocused his efforts at such recruitment upon the group of singers and hikers who would become the nucleus

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

around whom the Springhead Ring was fashioned. He did not attempt to turn the Morris Ring to his purposes, having failed so completely to do so with his Cambridge colleagues:

The Travelling Morrice was Cambridge: a collection of quite outstanding young men - scientists like Kenworthy Schofield and C.H. Waddington, dons like Arthur Peck and Joseph Needham. For them it was a thrilling pastime. Politics or reformist idealism lay quite outside its scope. [...] I strove in vain to bring my contemporaries round to see folk dance as a point of departure for the restoration of rural England.<sup>25</sup>

Gardiner emphasised the fact that the men who made up the Travelling Morrice, and who would go on to take influential roles in the founding of the Morris Ring, were academics, predominantly scientists. As Neal had before him in her sallies against pedantry, he lamented the 'limitations of the academic mind,' beholden to the rationality and bureaucracy he despised.<sup>26</sup> Gardiner was deliberately reductive in his description of what Morris and other cultural endeavours meant to his fellows: it is preposterous to suggest that others beside himself, though they did not share his particular interpretations, did not see potentials for social or political change in cultural activity. In the case of Needham in particular, Gardiner's pronouncement that Morris was merely a 'pastime' devoid of 'politics or reformist idealism' lay far wide of the mark.

### **Return to Thaxted**

Thaxted remained a hotbed of activity aimed at social and political change, with which the Morris was intimately linked. Needham was a preeminent biochemist, already laying the foundations of his lauded career at Cambridge in the period of the Morris Ring's foundation. He was also a keen Morris dancer and musician, a member of the CMM. But his cultural activities were not, as Gardiner suggested, merely an enjoyable pastime to distract from the heavy work of his scientific research: he was deeply involved in the 'politics' and 'reformist idealism' Gardiner thought to be anathema to Needham and his fellow academics. Needham began to worship at Thaxted in 1927,

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<sup>25</sup> Gardiner, *North Sea and Baltic* (autobiography), Vol. 1, 1:vi, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Gardiner, *The English Folk Dance Tradition*, p.27.

directly inspired by the Anglo-Catholicism and socialism of Noel.<sup>27</sup> He did not join the Catholic Crusade, but was a key figure in the social and cultural life of the parish which was so closely intertwined with Noel's efforts to create a living, Christian, and socialist community.<sup>28</sup> According to Burns, Needham was an integral member of the Thaxted Movement, 'of vital importance in defining and securing the continuation of the tradition at key moments of crisis.'<sup>29</sup> Needham acted as a member of a trust set up to purchase the Thaxted advowson from its holder Harold Buxton in order to ensure the appointment of a successor who would carry on Noel's social, cultural and religious work, and also wrote a key document outlining the tenets of the 'Thaxted Tradition' for use in the selection process.<sup>30</sup> In later years, when Noel's successor Putterill had retired, Needham and his fellow old guard of the Thaxted movement felt that Putterill's successor Peter Elers, despite looking so promising at his appointment (with which Needham was again deeply involved), was not living up to the legacy he had inherited.<sup>31</sup> In order to continue that legacy, Needham himself took to the pulpit as a lay reader, delivering sermons as part of Elers' services from 1979 until 1984, sermons that Burns describes as 'overtly political and controversial in the tradition of Noel and Putterill' and full of references to their work, 'embedding the argument firmly within the Thaxted tradition.'<sup>32</sup> Burns lists some of Needham's sermon topics from the period: the thrill of the winter of discontent, the case for nuclear disarmament, criticism of Christian sexual ethics, all arguments put forward with the same underpinning of theology and history as previous used by Noel and Putterill to reinforce their socialism.<sup>33</sup> Morris was, as a vital part of the Thaxted tradition, a facet of Needham's own vision and practice for social and cultural transformation, and not merely the

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<sup>27</sup> Arthur Burns, 'A Song and Dance About Science and Religion: Joseph Needham and Thaxted', paper given at University of Cambridge, Modern Cultural History Seminar, 9 March 2011. Typescript, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 6; p. 7. Burns differentiates between the 'exclusively political' campaign of the Catholic Crusade and its members, and the wider 'Thaxted Tradition' encompassing the related artistic, social and cultural activities of the community carried on as an embodiment of Noel's brand of social Christianity and model for a new order of living.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp. 6-9.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

pleasing pastime Gardiner ascribed to Needham's involvement. The same was true for Alec Hunter. Hunter was also deeply involved with Noel's church, as a churchwarden and the leader of the PCC: he too was involved in efforts to ensure a suitable successor to Noel.<sup>34</sup> Hunter, an accomplished fabric designer, also made a set of vestments for Noel, ornamented with beautiful figures of Morris dancers and musicians in action among winding rose branches.<sup>35</sup>

Thaxted maintained a tradition of socialist politics, Anglo-Catholic liturgy and aesthetics, supported by a strong basis of communal cultural and social life which demonstrated these values. Retired Thaxted dancer and historian Mike Goatcher wrote in a letter to this author that 'What previous writers have forgotten is that these Morris weekends were for the teaching and dancing of Morris!', and not for any grandiose motive of planning the refashioning of society through quasi-political means, whether those of Gardiner or of Noel.<sup>36</sup> The dancing of the constituent teams of the Morris Ring, or even the earlier revival in Thaxted may have been for a majority of their members a sociable hobby, as demonstrated by a conversation between Goatcher and Conrad and Miriam Noel's granddaughter, Sylvia Heath:

I remember watching the country dance party, which takes place at the end of the Ring Meeting on Sunday afternoon. Sylvia Heath was watching and I said 'Wouldn't your grandmother be pleased to know it is still going on.' Her reply was 'You know, Granny wasn't the least interested in folk dancing' I was astonished, but then realised that she taught it to give the young people something to do.<sup>37</sup>

And yet, it was giving people, particularly the young 'something to do', as a community, that formed the basis of the transformative aims of many of those involved in the folk revival in the early twentieth century, including Neal and Kimmins but also

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<sup>34</sup> Burns, 'Beyond the "Red Vicar', pp. 116-17; Burns, 'A Song and Dance', p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> The vestment is now in the private collection of Dr Julian Litten. I am grateful to Arthur Burns for this information.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Mike Goatcher, 29 July 2015. Goatcher has been involved with Thaxted Morris Men for over 40 years, arriving early enough to have overlapped with Joseph Needham's ongoing attendance at Thaxted Church.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Mike Goatcher to the author, 15 August 2015.

Gardiner, who likewise wished to promote communal activity as a way of building what he believed to be a better form of society. Shared activity and group bonding were, particularly as expressed with social dance as explored by Zimring, pressing social and political concerns for many following the traumatic effects of the First World War.<sup>38</sup> Though the far-Left Noel and the far-Right Gardiner would have abhorred one another's politics (and Gardiner went as far as to suggest that Noel's allegiances were insincere<sup>39</sup>), they did share the view that the society in which they lived was fundamentally inadequate, riven with greed, corruption, and injustice. Both men felt that industrial system was ultimately destructive and that humanity needed to turn its back upon it in order to heal itself. And both shared a deeply-held belief that the key to such transformation lay as much in social and cultural activity and change as in the political. Despite Gardiner's patchy interactions with the Morris community in the later 1920s and early 1930s, he did attend the Thaxted Morris weekend in 1931 and, according to his autobiography, discussed such matters with Noel:

the meeting was not harmonious and the dancing in the streets had less glamour than on former occasions. I felt that the morris men's movement was not facing up to the challenge of the modern age, and that instead of contributing to a national change of heart, it was becoming just another escapist cult. Conrad Noel agreed with me, and we discussed the coming crisis with some intensity. I had a premonition of darkness ahead.<sup>40</sup>

Griffiths cautions that Gardiner's writing on this period, written later in life and with the Second World War figuring large in his hindsight, cannot be taken completely at face value, so common was the tendency among fellow-travellers to modulate, even subconsciously, their views in the post-war period.<sup>41</sup> Gardiner's premonition of impending darkness renders his reminiscences of this occasion suspect. Gardiner also states that the London Singkreis, a group from which members of his Springhead Ring were drawn, provided the music for the celebration of the Mass in Thaxted Church on

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<sup>38</sup> Zimring, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> Gardiner, *North Sea and Baltic* (autobiography), Vol. 2, 8:viii, p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Griffiths, p. 137.



the Sunday, but *The Essex Chronicle* reported the following weekend that the singing at the service was led by 'members of the London University Choir.'<sup>42</sup> Given the previously discussed differences between Gardiner's report of the first Travelling Morrice tour and that of Heffer, it is prudent to take Gardiner's report here with a similar pinch of salt. Goatcher also notes that music for this weekend had been provided by the Thaxted Folk Dance Orchestra, and a performance given by the Folk Players, both groups being offshoots of the Church Choir and the Church Orchestra and organised by Putterill.<sup>43</sup> These groups had performed the week before the Morris meeting at a Labour Party Rally held in Noel's vicarage garden.<sup>44</sup> The presence of these groups, and the play they performed (written-up also in the *Essex Chronicle*), are absent from Gardiner's somewhat dreary account.<sup>45</sup>

It is true that the Morris revival looked very different in the interwar period, centred on men's clubs and with its 'aura of hearty good fellowship in the outdoors.'<sup>46</sup> Perhaps Gardiner was correct, and Noel no longer recognised in the new configuration the potential for contribution to 'a national change of heart', so different as it was from the *Espérance* model encouraged by Miriam Noel in the 1910s. Yet he had not abandoned hope in the transformative religious and political potential of communal music and dance: both Noel and Putterill preached on music and dancing as regenerative public worship in their sermons at the morning and evening Sunday services respectively.<sup>47</sup> Even if Noel became disillusioned with the new stage in the Morris revival and its relation to his work in Thaxted (and the only suggestion that he did so is to be found in Gardiner's brief account of his 1931 visit to the Thaxted Morris weekend), such pessimism was not shared by those dancers who remained deeply committed to the Thaxted Movement. Putterill, Hunter, and Needham, all of them dancers and musicians, continued, expanded and fought hard to protect Noel's legacy; Putterill as curate and then vicar, Hunter as churchwarden, and Needham as lay preacher and valued advisor. The folk revival in the interwar period remained for many,

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<sup>42</sup> Gardiner, *North Sea and Baltic* (autobiography), Vol. 2, 8:viii, p. 20; 'Thaxted', *The Essex Chronicle*, Friday 12 June 1931, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from Mike Goatcher, 27 August 2015.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Essex Chronicle*, p. 7

<sup>46</sup> Boyes, *Imagined Village*, p. 161.

<sup>47</sup> *Essex Chronicle*, p. 7.

including Gardiner but also those who Gardiner believed to be uninterested in such things, a powerful tool for social, cultural, and political change, imbued with the potential to transform society through the forging of strong social bonds and the building of a shared relationship with a common cultural heritage, important then more than ever as a healing salve with which to mend the traumas and fragmentations caused by war and the global depression.

### **The most literal interpretation**

As were Marson, Noel, Neal, and Kimmins, Rolf Gardiner was attracted to the folk revival and the material it aimed to revive because he saw in it the potential to transform society in ways which he believed to be positive. Gardiner and these other revivalists shared not only this primary attraction to folksong and dance, but also identified within it largely similar virtues. Gardiner's influence on the development of the revival has been overstated by several scholars, while at the same time the stronger influence exerted by the others has been understated. Nevertheless, the interactions of Gardiner with the folk revival present an interesting example of how the same material could be viewed as society's salvation, and applied in ways aimed at facilitating such change, by those of vastly differing political allegiances and social outlooks.

Gardiner shared with his forebears in the revival a strong concern with the ways in which folk material, embodying the idea of 'tradition', could be used to propagate some of the characteristic virtues of the past in the present and future. Organicist Gardiner wrote that 'the true wealth of a people [...] lies in the interplay of its generations and their devotion to the same soil and its continuous culture.'<sup>48</sup> Gardiner here meant culture in both of its senses: the tending of soil, and the human cultural development which grew from such rootedness to place. Learning from, respecting and developing the culture of the past was vital to this model of an organically developing society, and shared with others including Neal and Kimmins in an emphasis on continuity and inheritance. Gardiner wrote:

We who love continuity [...] believe in growth and order [...]. Therefore we must continually replenish ourselves with the beauty and power of earlier

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<sup>48</sup> Gardiner, *England Herself*, p. 7.

visions and match them with the modern situations in which we find us. We have to marry the past and the future in ourselves.<sup>49</sup>

Gardiner strongly believed that the Morris and other folk dances could be of no positive social use unless they grew and adapted along with their users: Morris would be of no use as a mere recreation of the past, but 'the wise reformer endeavours to restore that which was of eternal value in the past, to introduce it into the new set of circumstances impoverished by its loss'.<sup>50</sup> In this he found himself, as Neal had done before him, at odds with the thought and methods of Sharp and his EFDS. Neal herself recognised that Gardiner's own fight to bring Morris into the interwar period as a participatory communal activity relevant to the present, rather than a demonstration of preserved art forms, was a rehashing of her own battle in the pre-war era:

I must adhere to my resolution not to take part publicly in your fight with the E.F.D.S. simply because it is my fight over again [...] this issue is now clear between youth, growth, life, joy & beauty and age, decay, pedantry and death.<sup>51</sup>

Alexandra Harris writes that Gardiner 'led the way in rejecting what he saw as a museumizing tendency in which decommissioned culture was neatly tagged and displayed to the bemused delight of onlookers'.<sup>52</sup> But Gardiner was not the first to object: Neal's own concerns in this area predate Gardiner's by over a decade; Marson's longer. Marson's writing on the active and adaptive role that churches could play in contemporary life, if they chose to evolve rather than fossilise, strongly echo his focus on folksong as the expression of a community, rather than a musical artefact, as well as foreshadowing Gardiner's own views on the value of the past.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Rolf Gardiner, 'The Springhead Ring', extract from *The Springhead Ring News Sheet*, Winter Solstice 1950 (No. 49), in Best (ed.), pp. 204-5 (p. 205).

<sup>50</sup> Gardiner, 'Postscript 1938', p. 58.

<sup>51</sup> Letter from Mary Neal to Rolf Gardiner, 19 September [1922]. Gardiner MS C3/1/25. CUL.

<sup>52</sup> Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination, from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), p. 185.

<sup>53</sup> Marson, *God's Co-operative*, pp. 123-4.

But more than anything else, what linked together all of these revivalists was their insistence that what would heal the society in which they lived was the building of strong communities, and that folksong and dance could play a vital role in shaping these. Gardiner demonstrated that such concerns were still on his mind nearly half a century after his first forays into political and social thought, writing as High Sheriff of Dorset on 'Community Arts in a Mechanised England' to coincide with National Folk Week in 1967.<sup>54</sup> In this piece, Gardiner emphasised the role of celebration and participation in creating and sustaining communities, citing its absence in the increasingly anonymous urban England:

The emptiness and purposelessness which so many people feel in the new towns, in city centres and shopping precincts, are due to a lack of real gaiety which could be nourished by [...] forms of social enjoyment provided, not by professional entertainers, or through watching television, but by everyone taking an active part according to his ability and talent. It is here that the example of folk tradition, drawn from our rich past, might help us. Some of these traditions could be grafted on to modern occasions, other must be newly invented.<sup>55</sup>

Gardiner's faith in the transformative potential of the folk revival and its material was something he shared with the other revivalists examined here, as were a number of the issues he wished to harness this potential in addressing. What he emphatically did not share with Noel, Marson, Neal, and Kimmins was their left-wing political allegiance, or their ideas about how and by whom certain aspects of the folk revival should be performed. Where they were inclusive, Gardiner was elitist, conceiving of Morris as a masculine rite, not recreation for slum children and 'cripples' (Kimmins), seamstresses (Neal), or youths employed at the local sweet factory (Noel). Gardiner remained deeply unconvinced by the worldviews and the visions of future society which motivated the others:

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<sup>54</sup> Gardiner, 'Community Arts'.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

Utopias, Kingdoms of Heaven on Earth, Progress, the Perfectability of Man, are gloomy, sickening thoughts, fungoid abstractions of the brain, ugly chimaerae, the only real kind of death, and fortunately impossible.<sup>56</sup>

As Griffiths notes, Gardiner's interests would now be regarded as 'potentially "fascistic": monetarism, anti-capitalism, anti-Semitism, authoritarianism, "blood and soil" agriculturalism, anti-democracy, admiration of Nazism.'<sup>57</sup> But as Griffiths further notes, another significant swathe of his interests, including his 'back-to-the land' principles, his concern for youth and for the future of society, his belief in folk tradition, could all be shared by many who were not spurred by them into the same political direction', and this is clearly the case with the folk revival.<sup>58</sup> Zimring goes so far as to acknowledge that the revival's 'desire to save civilization', so reliant as it was upon the social bonds of shared culture and heritage, could lead rightwards: Gardiner's 'extremism exhibits a possible tendency within revivalism, but does not stand for the whole.'<sup>59</sup>

In the end, it was Gardiner's tendency to extremism in all his interests, his inability to compromise, which proved his downfall in terms of involvement and influence in the folk revival. Simply put, he believed in many similar ideas to the other figures here examined, but interpreted them far more literally. Where Noel or Neal saw dancing in groups as depicting and therefore providing a model for the development of a healthy, happy community, and as helping to create that community through shared emotional response, Gardiner believed that to dance certain dances was a powerful ritual, 'employed to gain mastery over the living forces or potencies of the earth' in order to achieve the social effects he aimed for.<sup>60</sup> When Neal's work in the revival was behind her, and after increasing interest in the Kibbo Kift, Neal too came to believe in the literal powers of the dance (and perhaps as a much-needed explanation for the

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<sup>56</sup> Gardiner, 'Youth and Europe', p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> Griffiths, p. 149.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Zimring, p. 150.

<sup>60</sup> Gardiner, 'A Brief Account', p. 100.

painful breakdown of her own efforts, as Judge asserts), corresponding with Gardiner on the subject.<sup>61</sup>

What I would like to know from anyone who can tell me is:-

The inner history of the morris when it was (if ever) white magic [...] When (if ever) the dance degenerated into black magic and why [...]. If I had any part in either the black or white side what had Sharp and MacIlwaine to do with its past history and with me. Where any records are to be found which would help us to use the old tradition as a foundation for the new and revived dance. Whether, if I ever took part in the black side, I may now have any part in any new constructive work. [...] I can't shut my eyes to the possible significance of past happenings nor imagine that all I have suffered has no explanation.<sup>62</sup>

Even if Gardiner's belief in the transformative power of the folk revival and its songs and dances was of a more literal nature than the others, he shared the this belief itself with Noel, Neal, Marson, Kimmins and others who believed that folksong and dance could change society for the better. All of these people ascribed to folksong and dance values that were inherently good and positive, and believed in them at a fundamental level: this is what allowed them to believe that the folk revival could change the world. We can see then, not only how tempting it is for an individual not only to hang their political ideologies upon the movement, but to believe their politics to be intrinsic within the material itself, as political beliefs are themselves deeply held and subject to the same individual conviction of inherent rightness. The folk revival and the values each revivalist ascribed to it were equated by that person with their politics, as two interrelated deeply-held beliefs, and so the linkage of the folk revival with politics was dependent itself upon what each individual themselves held to be fundamentally right and good in their own worldview, communistic, socialistic, fascistic or otherwise. Gardiner's political alignment was divergent from those of the other revivalists to a significant degree, but like them, he believed that a worthwhile folk revival and its material 'must be capable of renewing, transforming and transfiguring us.'<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Judge, 'Mary Neal', p. 576.

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Mary Neal to Rolf Gardiner, August 27th [1923?].

<sup>63</sup> Gardiner, *North Sea and Baltic* (autobiography), Vol. 2, 8:ix, p. 33.

## Conclusion

Sidney Webb told the assembled members of the Fabian Society in 1901 that the English had become 'a new people', and had witnessed the 'birth' of a 'new England'.<sup>1</sup> Webb continued:

The England of this generation is changing because Englishmen have had revealed to them another new world of relationships, of which they were before unconscious. [...] We have become aware, almost in a flash, that we are not merely individuals, but members of a community, nay, citizens of the world.<sup>2</sup>

The English of the twentieth century were no longer content to be individualists, but were now "thinking in communities."<sup>3</sup> Such thinking in communities was at the heart of the involvement in the folk revival of the five figures at the centre of this thesis. They hoped that folksong and dance could reveal to them and their fellows a transformed society, and by far the most important way in which they believed that reviving folksong and dance could effect this change was its potential to build strong communities. For Marson folksong was one of a number of ways to highlight a rural communality already in existence, celebrating it as a social model by celebrating communal culture. For Noel, folk dance offered the a way to bring together the inhabitants of Thaxted in shared activity, as a precursor to or preparation for the Kingdom of Heaven, as well as an expression of the community of nationhood, itself contributing to an international community of individuality in harmony. For Neal and Kimmins, folk dance offered citizenship to dispossessed youths through the ownership of their cultural heritage, empowering them to build communities and to take their place in wider society. For Gardiner, communities were nothing less than the means by which society might be saved from impending collapse, and folk dance the means by which communities could be sustained and new members initiated.

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney Webb, 'Twentieth Century Politics', a lecture to the Fabian Society, November 8th, 1901, repr. in Sidney Webb, *The Basis and Policy of Socialism*, The Fabian Socialist Series, No. 4 (London: A. C. Fifield, 1908), pp. 75-95 (pp. 76-7).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

Romantic, sentimental, nostalgic: these words have been used to consign the folk revival and its participants to the dustbin of history as 'intellectual rubble' and 'conceptual lumber'.<sup>4</sup> The revivalists examined in this thesis could legitimately be described by any of these adjectives. But their sentimental urges had a definite purpose, that of social transformation, of which a newfound communality was the heart. Their nostalgia was used as a 'vehicle for the visionary' in which the celebration of heritage offered simultaneously the key to both a past utopia and the potential for its recreation as an improved future.<sup>5</sup> This thesis has rehabilitated their romantic turning towards the past as a progressive strategy for change, rather than a reactionary desire to maintain the status quo. It has argued that as much as these revivalists made use of the concepts of tradition and heritage, and made appeals to the past, they did so with a view to improving the present and more importantly, the future. The revival has also suffered from its strong association with nationalism, present through its own appeals to national identity and the elevation of the material to the status of national culture. Past scholarship has been antithetical towards the movement's affirmation of nationhood, either eschewing nationalism as a bourgeois construct designed to prevent working class solidarity from developing global consciousness, or approaching it with the distrust held by 'progressive, cosmopolitan' individuals apt to hold misgivings about its 'affinities with racism' and fear of difference.<sup>6</sup> But as Benedict Anderson points out, nations inspire love: 'the cultural products of nationalism - poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts - show this love very clearly [...] how truly rare is it to find *analogous* nationalist products expressing fear and loathing.'<sup>7</sup> This thesis has reframed the revival's love of nation as an appeal to nationalism as a common bond, and therefore as another aspect of certain revivalists' progressive strategies.

The examination of the folk revival as a progressive project and the assertions made on that front by this thesis have been possible due to my endeavour to re-contextualise both the movement itself and a number of its key participants. Vic Gammon warned that the 'aspirations of people in the past can easily seem ridiculous

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<sup>4</sup> Harker, *Fakesong*, p. xii.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel, p. 294.

<sup>6</sup> Harker, *Fakesong*, pp. xi-xii; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edn. (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 141-2.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, p. 142.



and naive from our vantage point', but that they must be taken seriously: 'the historian must cultivate empathy as well as critical engagement if she is to guard against contributing to the enormous condescension of posterity.'<sup>8</sup> By situating the work of Marson, Noel, Neal, Kimmins, and Gardiner in the folk movement alongside their other interests and their participation in other movements, I have enabled a deeper understanding of these aspirations, and in doing so, have built up a more detailed picture of why and how they made use of folk material and the concepts of folklore, heritage, and tradition. This approach has also facilitated a consideration of the intersection of progressive movements in the period more generally, as well as allowing me to examine the contributions of lesser-known revivalists. This thesis has also provided the first in-depth scholarly examination of Marson's activities in the folk revival and as a writer, and is likewise the first work to fully analyse Noel's role as a folk revivalist.

In summing up the findings of this thesis, it is useful to consider the words of Vaughan Williams on tradition:

It is true that tradition may harden into convention and I am entirely in sympathy with all artistic experimenters who break through mere convention. [...] Let the tree develop flowers and leaves undreamt of before, but if you pull it up by its roots it will die. Truly we cannot ignore the present and we must build for the future, but the present and future must stand firmly on the foundations of the past.<sup>9</sup>

All of the revivalists discussed in this thesis placed great value upon tradition, but each of them fought against 'mere convention' and the possibility that it could stifle their efforts to make the most of the transformative potential inherent in folksong and dance. What they valued in folksong and dance were the 'roots' and 'foundations' Vaughan Williams wrote of. Tradition, nationality, community: all of these were deep roots, sustaining the lives of individuals and allowing them to draw sustenance from a bed of

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<sup>8</sup> Vic Gammon [review], 'Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993)', *Albion*, 26, no.2 (1994), pp. 390-2 (p. 392).

<sup>9</sup> Vaughan Williams, 'National Music', pp. 59-60.

common good in order to flower to their best potential. In fostering a folk revival, these progressive individuals were attempting to strengthen these roots. To revive is to bring to life again. Charles Marson, Conrad Noel, Mary Neal, Grace Kimmins, and Rolf Gardiner were not only attempting to revive the practice of folksong and dance, but to breathe new life into society itself.

## Appendix I: The quarrel between Cecil Sharp and Charles Marson

By the time Sharp cited the Marsons' marital difficulties as the cause for a personal and professional break with Marson in late 1906, the Marsons' marriage had been unhappy for many years. It was also openly discussed with Marson's friends: this May 1906 letter to Stewart Headlam referred candidly to Marson's emotional state, while also giving the impression that the discussion was not a new one:

My domestic difficulties are Alpine. They grow. They blot out the Sun both from my soul and from the parish, and fret me frantic. I squeal like a vivisected guinea pig and dash about my hutch. How insuperable are such difficulties - particularly in a country vicarage.<sup>1</sup>

Even though the Marsons' marital tensions had been ongoing for a number of years, the year 1906 does seem to have been particularly difficult, precipitating both the severity of Marson's description in the letter to Headlam and the disagreement with Sharp. The break between Sharp and Marson was also accomplished through letters. Sharp's, according to Marson, was 'crammed to the muzzle with every insult he could imagine' and insisted that there was no 'roguery' of which he was not guilty, Marson reported in a letter to Bertha Clarke, an old friend.<sup>2</sup> Alas, the letters between the men themselves have not survived, one set destroyed by Sharp's staunch defender Maud Karpeles and the other likely at the hands of Chloe, if her anxiety to trace various other letters after Charles' death, and to prevent knowledge of their exact contents from coming to light or being discussed in Etherington's biography, is anything to go by. In an interview with Dave Bland in 1973, Karpeles confided that she had ordered the letters to be destroyed upon her death. This occurred in 1976. Karpeles indicated that she could not bear to destroy them herself during her lifetime, but that they must not fall into the wrong hands after her death.<sup>3</sup> Chloe's letters to Etherington on the subject of a potential

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Stewart Headlam, St Dunstan [19 May ] 1906. A/DFS1/16, Marson MS. SHC.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Bertha Clarke, 30 November 1906. A/DFS 1/20, Marson MS. SHC.

<sup>3</sup> Dave Bland, Interview with Maud Karpeles, Thursday 27 September 1973. 3 pages. Handwritten diary/notes re. the preparation of Dave Bland's work on Cecil Sharp's photographs of his singers. Dave Bland Collection, Box 5, Folder 12, VWML.

biography focus not, however on the letters between Sharp and Marson sent during their quarrel in 1906, but on letters leading up to the year 1898:

I am very anxious to collect Charlie's letters up to 1898 myself & I have an idea of getting his & Miss Pedder's great friend [...] Mr Archibald Constable, to edit the later letters, with my power of veto for any thing I wished left out. Mr Constable is a friend of Mrs H. Marson. But he is a man of immense judgement and delicacy. He might not wish to do it, but then I would ask you. [...] but I must have those later years in my full control, & in the hands of a friend [...] Please dear Frank, do understand how it makes my poor old heart bound with terror to think of ὁ Τύχων ['Hermes' or 'one who presents himself unsought'<sup>4</sup>] publishing agonising letters that would break my heart and injure Charlie's best real life.<sup>5</sup>

Marson had already fallen out irreparably with his brother-in-law Ronald Bayne, who was also one of Marson's oldest friends from his University days, this disagreement placed by Bayne at 25 years' in duration by the time of Marson's death.<sup>6</sup> This rift never healed, and though Sharp began to speak well of Marson again following the latter's death and appeared as a 'sincere mourner' at his funeral, this was not the case with Bayne.<sup>7</sup> Ronald's attitude did not even soften to take into account Chloe's mourning and evident wishes to preserve the reputation of her husband:

His death [...] makes me feel that I might have quarrelled with him more, instead of merely keeping quiescent. [...] I will not make up for it by any attempt to present his case, to explain his personality, to the world. Let those who can praise him whole heartedly do so. [...] I write quite frankly that you

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<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Sam Grinsell, Dr Richard Gibbons, and Prof. Murray Lark for their translations from the Greek. 'Hermes' could have been a private name for Sharp used by Etherington or Chloe, or potentially an epithet applied to a third person who could have been in possession of other letters, perhaps letters written to the 'other woman'.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Chloe to Etherington, 21 March 1914. A/DFS1/24, Marson MS. SHC.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Ronald Bayne to Chloe, 28 March 1914. A/DFS1/24, Marson MS. SHC.

<sup>7</sup> Etherington, p. 158.

may know just what I feel. I cannot pretend that I have no bitterness in me for what I consider your married life of unnecessary and cruel suffering.<sup>8</sup>

Karpeles suggested in 1973 that the cause of the strife was Marson's involvement with another woman. Despite the fact that she had never met Marson, she was in possession of the actual letters pertaining to the quarrel, and knew Chloe as she and Sharp were still in contact by letter at least up until 1909. Karpeles reported that Chloe found out about the 'other woman' because a letter from Marson to this woman became misplaced and was read by others, and that the woman was 'related to Chloe in some way'.<sup>9</sup> It is possible, however, that this 'relative' was not Chloe's but Charles', at least by marriage: his letters refer very warmly to Kitty Powys Marson, his dead brother's wife, who in later years he often visited at the home of her mother in Clevedon, and to whom two of his works, *Village Silhouettes* and *Super Flumina*, a book on fishing, were dedicated (Kitty and Charles often indulged in this hobby together: she is presumably the other half of the 'we' referred to in the fishing passages of *Village Silhouettes*)<sup>10</sup>. Kitty Powys Marson is also tentatively suggested as the 'other woman' by Marson's most recent biographer, David Sutcliffe.<sup>11</sup> This is in some measure corroborated by Chloe's concern in her letter to Etherington that Mr Constable was a friend of Mrs. H Marson, and her mitigation of this fact with the assurance that he was tactful and trustworthy. Though of course, if the affair was known to Chloe as Karpeles believed, would Marson truly have been so brazen as to dedicate two of his books, several years later, to her? It is far more likely that Kitty was just another of the many close female friends Marson seems to have been blessed with.

Regardless of the underlying cause, Marson and Sharp's quarrel was bitter and final. Marson, as he reported to Bertha Clarke, replied to Sharp to say that he would keep Sharp's letter 'and return it in a little, when he would be as much ashamed of it as I was for it. He must then withdraw.'<sup>12</sup> He only received 'another bomb to say it was quite

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<sup>8</sup> Letter from Ronald Bayne to Chloe, 28 March 1914. A/DFS1/24.

<sup>9</sup> Bland interview.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Marson, *Super Flumina: angling observations of a coarse fisherman* (London: John Lane, 1905); Marson, *Silhouettes*, pp. 77-84.

<sup>11</sup> Sutcliffe, p. 265.

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Bertha Clarke, 30 November 1906. A/DFS1/20.

deliberate.<sup>13</sup> Marson, again demonstrating behaviour not commensurate with that of a guilty man, then wrote to Sharp's wife, Constance, to ask if Sharp was perhaps unwell: 'She replied that he was very well and wrote what she thought to be excellent letters to me, that she had long held me to be a knave and so would not come here. In that they both agreed.'<sup>14</sup> Finally, Marson informed Bertha of two letters he had sent to Sharp in response:

I then replied to him that he was welcome to his opinion, but that for 17 years I had done my best to serve him with head, heart, voice pen wit and loyal trust, and asked why he had accepted my service if he thought so basely of me? I also sent a formal letter making over all my share in the Copy rights and said I would pay or help the 3rd series all I could, but must ask for my name in future to be withdrawn. He has neither thanked me nor replied.<sup>15</sup>

Sharp only replied to request a legal document confirming Marson's handing over of his interest in their joint works. Marson duly reported this development to Bertha in December 1906:

He has just written a note asking for 'a document of release', lest I should change my mind and claim a share [...]. I must go to a Solicitor, when I ever have any time and spend a guinea to fortify him against myself. [...] I have promised myself that he should have any and every profit out of the whole effort.<sup>16</sup>

Marson's biographer Etherington, who knew both men, posited that despite the suddenness of the fall-out over a domestic matter, such a break was inevitable, owing to the mismatch of their personalities:

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Typescript of letter to Bertha Clarke, 14 December 1906. A\DFS/1/22. Marson MS, SHC.

it is obvious that the partnership could not have continued. Sharp was a whole-time musician. Marson was a busy parish priest with a good many irons in the fire. Sharp was nervy, whilst Marson could be very irritating [...] Relations were strained over minor details such as the admission of proofs.<sup>17</sup>

Thus ended Marson's involvement in the folk revival, and the remainder of the *Folk-Songs from Somerset* books appeared without Marson's name.

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<sup>17</sup> Etherington, p. 158.

## **Appendix II: Gardiner's difficult relationship with the EFDS inner circle, and the possible affair between Stanley Kennedy North and Hedwig Gardiner**

Gardiner's relationships with those in charge of the EFDS were perennially strained, mostly due to Gardiner's very public criticisms of the Society. A letter from the man who had taught him Morris, Kenworthy Schofield, in 1924, shortly after Cecil Sharp's death and a year after Gardiner's outspoken criticism of the Society in his published suggestions for improvement, sheds new light both on the hurtful effects upon certain society members caused by Gardiner's actions, and the opinion he was held in after the fact. For example, Sharp and his right-hand woman Maud Karpeles were both deeply hurt by Gardiner's public and ruthless criticism of the Society, as well concerned at Gardiner's insistence on taking teams abroad despite his lack of knowledge of the dance.<sup>1</sup> According to the letter, Schofield had been adamant not to dance with Gardiner again until Gardiner had apologised to Sharp, and in the spring of that year, Gardiner told Schofield at a party that he had indeed made an apology to Sharp, in person.<sup>2</sup> The present letter was written in response to Gardiner having asked Schofield to join a prospective Travelling Morrice tour to Holland, an invitation Schofield was not keen to accept, largely due to the bad blood between Gardiner and members of the Society, and Schofield used his response to express his feelings on the matter. He castigated Gardiner for telling him that he had apologised when in fact he had 'made no effort to overcome your pride and admit that in the excitement of the moment your pen ran away with you and that you without meaning it had been exceedingly rude and ask [Sharp's] pardon.'<sup>3</sup> Schofield laid out the feelings of other EFDS members and his own in unflinching clarity: 'all those with whom I have discussed the matter condemn you'; 'it is the rudeness which sticks in me'; 'your impetuous action has not had one good result and [...] is still causing a good deal of unhappiness.'<sup>4</sup> Schofield advised Gardiner that if he wished to heal the breach, or at least prevent his remaining friends from losing their own standing within the Society by continuing to vouch for him, then he must

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Kenworthy Schofield to Rolf Gardiner, [June or July] 1924. MS Gardiner C3/1/19. CUL.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



apologise to Sharp's widow and to Maud Karpeles: 'You must bottle your pride & lick the dust, for even your most steadfast friend [sic] like Arthur are bound to admit that you have been exceedingly rude. Some say you have not the guts to do it.'<sup>5</sup> Such a letter from a senior member of the Society, and ending as it does with the exhortation not to 'add yet another to the list of idiocies' Gardiner had committed, hardly implies that Rolf Gardiner was an influential figure within the Establishment of the movement.<sup>6</sup>

Another letter from another senior member, Douglas Kennedy, lays bare the difficult nature of Gardiner's interactions with others, several years later in 1929. 'Barney' Heffer, the wife of Gardiner's friend Arthur, had told Kennedy that Gardiner wished to publish an account of both a tour to Germany and the Travelling Morrice tour to the Cotswolds in 1924, and Kennedy wrote to warn Gardiner that having read the drafts, he disagreed vehemently with Gardiner's version of events, particularly with regard to the Cotswolds tour:

I take exception to the bulk of it; partly on the grounds of inaccuracy and partly because I consider much of what you say unwise and unnecessary, and because its result will be to drag up old irritations which year by year were being thrust down deeper into the limbo of forgotten things.

As far as I am concerned, I should not forgive you if you publish these two preliminary chapters as they stand.<sup>7</sup>

Kennedy returned the drafts, drawing Gardiner's attention to his own pencilled annotations, in a letter two weeks later.<sup>8</sup> His verdict was damning: 'the whole thing is unbalanced because you still have a bee in your bonnet about the time of the first tour, and you are not really normal enough about the facts to be their chronicler.'<sup>9</sup> As an example, Kennedy drew particular attention to Gardiner's casting of himself and his Cambridge colleagues as successors to a group of dancers Gardiner dubbed the 'Oxford heroes', whose past excellence Gardiner wished for his own new band of elites to

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Douglas Kennedy to Rolf Gardiner, 7 June 1929. Gardiner MS C/3/2. CUL.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Douglas Kennedy to Rolf Gardiner, 19 June 1929. Gardiner MS C/3/2. CUL.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

emulate.<sup>10</sup> According to Gardiner their 'fame was like that of the ancient heroes to the younger blood which came under the spell of Cecil Sharp's influence in the years following the Armistice' and from them, 'the pride of the Morris seemed to pass over into the hands of the Cambridge tradition.'<sup>11</sup> The deaths of these august forebears had, until Gardiner and his colleagues took matters into their own hands, left the field clear for women to develop 'a preponderantly large say' in the affairs of the Society.<sup>12</sup> Gardiner wrote in his report that this fact gave rise to 'a private rage against that peculiar anomaly called "women's morris", not only in himself but in 'each of their hearts', the Cambridge men resenting 'having to learn masculine dances from feminine instructors.'<sup>13</sup> Ever the lover of arcane groupings, Gardiner insisted that this 'tacit conspiracy of their positions' drew the Cambridge men closer together.<sup>14</sup> Kennedy, however, dismissed Gardiner's reading of the situation, finding fault with his veneration of the 'Oxford heroes' in conjunction with his particular 'private rage':

I was amused at the place the Oxford Morris occupied. Oxford was well to the fore in Country Dancing in the early days but the Morris was poor, and it remained so until Barney's visit in 1922. If this Oxford Morris had any value then it was due to Barney, and your aspersions on the women instructors lose much of their sting.<sup>15</sup>

Those in charge of EFDS policy were not influenced by Gardiner, but were instead upset, irritated, or in the final case, amused by his difficult personality, short temper, and tendency towards conspiracy and mysticism.

There is another possibility that a personal matter may have coloured Gardiner's relationship with the upper-level membership of the EFDS. Gardiner exchanged letters in the Press resulting from his suggestions for change to the Society with Stanley Kennedy North, a dancer and the husband of Helen Kennedy, a member of the 'inner sanctum' of the Society, and through her the brother-in-law of Douglas Kennedy,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.; Gardiner, 'A Brief Account of the Travelling Morrice', p. 75.

<sup>11</sup> Gardiner, 'A Brief Account of the Travelling Morrice', p. 75.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Kennedy to Gardiner, 19 June 1929.

eventual successor of Sharp as Director and later Squire of the Morris Ring. Douglas Kennedy had himself married Helen Karpeles, a dancer and the sister of Maud Karpeles, Sharp's long-serving assistant and a researcher of folksong and dance in her own right. The 'in-group' of the Society was very much bonded by familial ties. It is highly likely that Gardiner's relationship with the inner circle of the Society was strained by a personal antipathy to Stanley Kennedy North, who seems to have indulged in an affair with Gardiner's mother, Hedwig. Stanley was, according to his grandson Richard D. North, something of a womaniser. Richard North writes of having spoken of his grandfather with Margaret Gardiner, Rolf's younger sister, a couple of years before her death in 2005. Margaret told him that Kennedy North had had an affair with their mother around Rolf's mid-teen years.<sup>16</sup> Margaret recalled:

My mother and Stanley didn't go away together, not exactly. He joined us on holiday quite often. Yes he was around a great deal. [...] The servants were in a sort of way in the know [...] The first floor was my father's study, and two drawing rooms [...]. And the next floor was my parent's bedroom - they had separate bedrooms after a while - and my younger brother and his nurse. And then, up a floor, was my elder brother [Rolf] and I and anyone who came to stay. When my brother was away at boarding school Stanley would use his room. And above that the school room which was really our sitting room, and there was a scene there once with Stanley and my father. [...] My father and Stanley didn't get on. They didn't have the same interests. But it wasn't difficult. There wasn't, 'this bloody man' and so on. Not until later on anyway.<sup>17</sup>

At least one argument did occur, though:

my father obviously didn't like him and at one point there was a scene. Stanley said something which annoyed my father very much and he lost his temper

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<sup>16</sup> Richard D. North, 'Stanley North (later Stanley Kennedy North) 1887-1942', 2008.

<[http://www.richarddnorth.com/archive/elders\\_bettors/stanley\\_kennedy\\_north.asp](http://www.richarddnorth.com/archive/elders_bettors/stanley_kennedy_north.asp)> [accessed 3rd October 2015].

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

which he very rarely did. And Father said in a very loud voice: 'Get out of my house.' And Stanley replied, 'Certainly Alan, I will get out of your house. Goodbye Margaret and goodbye Heddy'. And he bowed to us and left. I was horrified. I was so ashamed at my father losing his temper and thinking that Stanley might go for good and knowing how it would upset my mother.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the fact that Rolf was away at boarding school (West Downs, followed by Rugby and then Bedales), it is likely that he knew of such goings-on at home, given that Margaret, herself '11 or 12 or 13', so clearly knew and remembered so many details about Stanley: 'I adored Stanley. He was gorgeous [...] He was wonderful and he was a sort of symbol of emancipation, of freedom of speech, and learning a few swear words.'<sup>19</sup> It is easy to envisage that some animosity on Rolf's part may have developed towards a man who cuckolded his father with the full knowledge of his servants. To later find himself a renegade member of a society governed by the large extended family of that man may have tried Gardiner, and could go some way to explain his animosity towards the Society, even without the difference of opinion over the meanings and motives of Morris.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

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