



The Town Crier



VILLAGE GREEN ENGLISH COUNTRY DANCERS, March 2006

KICK UP YOUR HEELS AT OUR REALLY BIG SHEW!



The March workshop - info on page 10

CALENDAR FOR 2006

March 24/26	English country dance workshop with Scott Higgs
April 12	After-class social time
April 26	Last class of 2005/2006 season
May 3	Annual General Meeting, Harrow United Church
May 6*	Tropical social, St. Paul's Anglican Church * New date
May 10	Summer classes begin, Harrow United

Challenge class dates: April 9 & 23, May 7. No class March 26.

PRESIDENT'S MUSINGS

With Spring just around the corner, -- can it be far away? -- we are reminded that much of the Village Green season of dancing is behind us. Planning for the AGM (Wednesday, May 3) is under way. The Nominating Committee is scouting for volunteers to serve the group on the business end.

At the last Executive meeting, we noted that a number of dancers are leaving Wednesday evenings before 9:45. We recognize that many have to get up early next morning and wonder how we might meet the needs of such dancers. Should we try starting the evening at 7:30 and ending at 9:30? What do you think? What would you like? Please pass on comments and ideas to any member of the Executive.

Time this season may seem like it's running out. There is, however, lots of activity and fun ahead! Most imminent, the weekend workshop March 24 to 26. As was the Ball last season, so is this upcoming workshop the main event of this season. There will be something for everyone, from beginners to experienced dancers, a guaranteed fun time. So spring lightly into step as we step lightly into Spring!

The official season of dancing will close May 6 with a Hawaiian-themed social (note the change of date!) . Here is another chance to honour Liz Bennett as we dance some of her favourites. Liz Goossen has created a dance to commemorate Liz B. Visit Value Village and get your Hawaiian shirt!

Dancing will continue Wednesday evenings through May, an opportunity for Village Green teachers-in-training to practise their newly-learned skills and for dancers to review steps and figures and for all *to dance!*

See you dancing,

Maureen

VILLAGE GREEN EXECUTIVE 2005/06

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HIGHLIGHTS OF MARCH EXECUTIVE MEETING

by **Sandra Johnston**

The executive met March 7, 2006 at the home of Zyna Boyes. Highlights are as follows:

- The dem dancers will be performing on July 16 at the Festival of Nations to be held in St.Claude this year. They have also been invited to perform at the Lily Festival in Neepawa on July 23.
- Summer dancing will begin May 10 at Harrow United Church for a drop-in rate of \$3.00. During this time student teachers will have an opportunity to enhance their teaching skills.
- The English-Scottish Social was well attended and the social conveners wish to thank everyone who provided refreshments. Thanks are also extended to all who assisted in the kitchen with preparations and clean up. As a donation to Winnipeg Harvest, The Fine Companions generously waived their honorarium for the evening. In total, VGECD was able to donate \$250.00.
- Liz Bennett's memory will be honored at the year-end social and some of her favorite dances will be featured. In addition, Liz Goossen is choreographing a new dance in her memory, which she plans to have ready for this occasion.

PUT OUT MORE FLAGS



Flags make colourful and appropriate decorations for our socials. We'd like our own supply, preferably for free. If you have any flags in good condition you'd like to donate - permanently - to Village Green, speak to Frances. The core of the collection would be the Union Jack, the English flag (St. George's Cross) and our own flag but other flags of the United Kingdom (St. Piran's Cross, anyone?) and the flag of the Republic of Ireland would be considered. 3' by 5' is a good size.

NOTICE OF MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of Village Green English Country Dancers will be held on Wednesday, May 3rd, 7:45 p.m., at Harrow United Church, for the election of executive members, appointment of working positions, the presentation and adoption of annual reports, the reception of the financial statements, and any other business. Refreshments afterwards. A list of those nominated for 2006/2007 will appear in the April *Town Crier*. This is the 14 days notice as required by our constitution.

Hell's Belles! Morris Dancing is for girls too!

Morris dancing has always been on the periphery of my consciousness as an oddly quintessential English “thing” that men do as another excuse to go to the pub. It seemed to be on par with cheese rolling, welly chucking contests and other obscure but fascinating celebrations that appear from time to time in the UK. Until I joined Village Green I could only recall one occasion on which I'd actually seen live Morris dancers – in the streets of Christchurch in Hampshire one lovely summer evening some 20 years ago.

My next exposure came at the social dance following our workshop in October 2004. The Village Green Morris Men were there, and then, lo and behold, the women's side, the Winnipeg Mountain Morris appeared! I loved the lively, intricate and exceptionally noisy dancing, which was accompanied by the brandishing of hankies, sticks, ribbons and bells.

My cool English blood raced – now this was *real* English folk dance, calling to our ancient roots in soil and toil (but what was with the bells?). And, obviously, not just the men could join in the fun! I remembered that my mother's maiden name was Morris – what better way to keep the family name alive! I resolved to give this strange ritual a try.

Winnipeg Mountain Morris was founded in 1991 and was originally a mixed side, founded by Judy Goldsmith and Andy Klapper. At one point the group had as many as 12 dancers and 3 musicians. Jeannie Gilbert and Colleen McCarthy took over jointly as squires in 1993 when Judy and Andy headed for bluer pastures in Kentucky. Colleen and several other members departed in the '90's and the dancers have been exclusively women since then.

I found out that practices were held at 9:00 on Sunday mornings, under Jeannie's expert guidance, and with Molly Pind as her able lieutenant. The Greendell Community Club in St. Vital was the spot and was conveniently close to my home. So, no excuses!

I was immediately made welcome by the group, which includes Village Green members Caroline McDowall, Maureen MacIntosh, Jean Scriven and Marilyn Armstrong. Ginny Helmer is not yet a member of VG, but we're working on her. A real bonus is the LIVE music, even for practices, provided by Virginia Stevens on recorder and Roman Soble, Jackie's husband, on accordion.

Ginny started just a few weeks after me, and Marilyn joined us quite recently. No quarter is given to the new kids on the block, and we soon found ourselves double-stepping, footing up and down, clashing and capering about, generally having a wonderful time, and a great workout.

We have been involved in a few dems, most notably at the annual Festival of Nations in July, held last year in Crystal City, along with the Village Green dancers and members of the Fine Companions. We'll be at the Festival again in July, as well as the Lily Festival in Neepawa.

We've recently decided on a new name. It's just too tough to explain about Winnipeg and mountains! We are now the **Hell's Belles**, which seems so much more appropriate!

Being a member of a women's Morris side is a real adventure. There's not a lot of us around, and it looks good on your resumé! Our practices are energetic and lots of fun, and I would recommend it to any of you out there looking for something new in dance. If you're interested, talk to Jeannie or to any of the other members of the group. *Frances Harris*

Hell's Belles at Crystal City, July 17, 2005



and speaking of Morris dancing...

The Village Green Morris Men will be presenting their annual "Big Show" at Crescent-Fort Rouge United Church, the corner of Nassau and Wardlaw, on Saturday, the 8th of April. The show starts at 7:30 p.m.. Guest artists this year are Celtic Folk musicians Susan and Paul Hammer.

Each year, the Morris Men showcase their repertoire, add some new dances, invite a guest or two and call some participation dances for the audience. This year the performance will be in the main church and will include a Mummer's play with sword dance. After the show there will be light refreshments available, followed by some dancing for everybody in the basement.

This summer the Side is off to tour in England and has invitations to dance out with several English Sides (teams). Proceeds from this event will go partly to the Church, as usual and a small portion will go towards the tour.

The Village Green Morris Men have existed in Winnipeg for over thirty years and all of their members participate in other dance groups, some of them with VGECD.

Tickets are \$10.00 each and can be purchased at the door or in advance from Dan Stone, Art Quanbury or Mike Lynch.

Both Morris sides will be performing at the VG dance Saturday night, Mar. 25. See page 10.

COOKERY CORNER

WELSH CAKES

Frances Harris made these for class on St. David's Day, March 1st.

8 oz flour***	3 oz sugar
3 oz margarine	3 oz currants
1 egg	a little milk, if necessary

Rub margarine into the flour. Add sugar & currants & mix together with the beaten egg. The mix should be slightly wetter than pastry. Add milk if necessary.

Roll out on a floured board to about ½ inch. Cook on a clean griddle or heavy frying pan (cast iron). Watch that you don't have the heat too high, so that the cakes cook inside before burning!

Dredge the warm cakes in sugar. Good served warm, split and buttered!

Yield: Never as many as you want – they're that good.

*** This is a recipe I received verbally from an English friend (living in Wales). When she says "flour" she may have meant self-raising flour. I make them with regular flour with no baking powder, but you may want to try them with a leavening agent as well.

Jeannie Gilbert

Ed. note – Since Jeannie and I couldn't find a time we were both free for an interview, I sent her a list of questions and she wrote the answers. So the words in italics are her own words. Thanks to Jeannie for taking the time and trouble.

Jeannie has been dancing with Village Green since for almost 20 years. In 1985 she and her husband, Paul, had moved to their home in Fort Richmond, where their neighbour was an English country dancer, Elizabeth Clutton-Brock.

In 1988, she 'collared' me for ECD. She had to take a friend to the next social as membership was low and informed me that I was going. I wasn't at all sure that I wanted to go actually, especially when my friend, Caroline McDowall called me up to ask if I wanted to do something with her that Saturday. In the end, she decided to try ECD with me and we had so much fun! The rest is history. Since then, I've come to every VG class and event that I was able to.

To anyone needing a friend to introduce to English country dance, Jeannie would seem ideal.

I have been dancing since I was 3 ½. My mother was told at that time that my twin sister had a foot that turned in. The wise old doctor told her to start us in ballet lessons rather than put a brace on my sister's leg. Of course, we have both walked a little like ducks ever since! Those early years of dancing provided me with great fun and excitement. Every year there would be the musical festivals. We would learn all kinds of solo dances, duets and group dances. My mother would stay up nights on end sewing us costumes. Dancing styles included ballet, Greek, modern, national and tap. I continued dancing until I was 15 and took a break while getting involved in drama. I started dancing again in my mid-twenties when we needed movement in a play that we were performing.

1988 was a significant year for Jeannie in another way, for it was the year she completed her Ph.D. in plant pathology at the University of Manitoba. Her post-secondary education had begun with a B.A. in English from Manchester University. Her career re-direction began some years after she and Paul had emigrated from England in 1970. Jeannie acquired a Certificate in Education and taught in the public system from 1973 to 1978. As she puts it, "Wanting to reach every child I found I had 31 reading programs". This was too much of a challenge even for a super-energetic person like Jeannie.



She and Paul wanted to start a family and Jeannie also embarked on a new field at the U of M, first a B.Sc., then an M.Sc. in Botany, and finally the doctorate. By 1988, Jonathan and Laura were also on the scene, aged six and four respectively. [Do the arithmetic – 10 years, 3 degrees, 2 children!] In that same year, Jeannie began working at Agriculture Canada as a research scientist. The picture at left shows her at work.

Jeannie does lots of teaching – Wednesdays, challenge class, Morris and dems. I asked about that.

.....Cont'd. on page 7.

Q & A with Jeannie Gilbert - from page 6

Well, I had been a teacher for 5 years and there was a certain challenge in making dance instruction clear enough so that even fairly inexperienced dancers could cotton on and enjoy. By now, I certainly enjoy complex dances; I love attempting to get the phrasing just right so that one figure naturally flows into the next. My early dance training has given me an advantage. I know my body and how I have to move it to get from A to B. I have also watched 'new' dancers develop their ability and it makes 'teaching' all the more worthwhile. The other aspect that I try very hard to watch for is 'covering'. After you have taught for a little while you are aware of 'magic moments', when the whole set appears to be dancing as one. It doesn't often happen, but when it does it sends shivers up my spine. It's thrilling.

I also asked Jeannie about other valued parts of her life, in addition to dancing.

***My family** – first and foremost – the children have brought so much joy into our lives, and my granddaughter, Gwendolyn, will fill a little the gap now that Jonathan and Laura are pursuing independent lives. **My garden** – huge and unruly – but it brings surprises & thrills (and sometimes disappointments) every year. **Dogs** – have always been a part of my life. They love you even when you feel that no one else can. **Being active** – I feel so fortunate to have the energy to bring lots of people & activities into my life.*

THE MAIDEN'S LAST WISH

Morgana Graham and I sat around playing with the dance names from the December Town Crier, making up impromptu stories for "Hole in the Wall" and "The Maiden's Last Wish." The first story was fun but not much of a narrative, but the second really held together -- so we've reconstructed it for your reading pleasure. – Kay Stone. (And may the example of Kay and Morgana inspire others.)

The Princess, an only child, was a tomboy. She cared more about climbing trees and riding horses bareback than she did about courtly affairs. And put her into a royal gown? Forget that! She wore jeans and striped t-shirts whenever she could get away with it.

Still, she couldn't prevent herself from growing into a fine young woman of marriageable age, and the King and Queen wanted grandchildren. So the inevitable proclamation went out inviting eligible princes from across the realm to present themselves as potential husbands. The Princess demanded the right to propose the familiar impossible tasks, and, because she was so clever and resourceful, all the hopeful princes failed her challenges, one after another.

Finally, there was only one young man left, and he wasn't a prince at all. He was a simple farmer out to try his luck. She noticed that he was comfortably dressed in jeans and a simple shirt -- the way she herself would have been dressed if her mother hadn't insisted – **"PUT ON A DRESS FOR ONCE!"**

Cont'd on page 8

The Maiden's Last Wish – from page 7

He wasn't particularly handsome but he wasn't ugly either -- and she noticed that he had a twinkle in his eye. Even so, marriage was not high on her list of things to do, so she devised the most challenging tasks she could think of (no dragons, though). She was amazed when he returned successfully, succeeding at each one. "Did you have help?" she asked accusingly. "Well of course I did, from the usual Little Old Woman who rewarded my kindness to her by giving me advice. There wasn't anything in the proclamation banning magical helpers." And she had to admit that he was correct. The Princess was annoyed to find herself beginning to warm to this young man -- and that wasn't a bad thing since, as her parents pointed out, he had accomplished her impossible tasks.

"I have one last wish," said this maiden. "We both get to wear jeans to our wedding." The Queen groaned and the King frowned, but the young man was delighted. And so it was that the very first informal royal wedding took place -- but it wasn't the last, since there would be several grandchildren in the future of that happily ever after.

Come to the Hawai'ian Social, May 6, and

GET LEI'D!!



Dust off your grass skirts and Don Ho shirts,
and bring a lawn chair!

Leis included in the cost of your ticket.

Fun[d]-raising raffle for a basket of wonderful tropical goodies!

VG TEACHER TRAINING

What makes a good English country dancer?

As most of you know, four of us—Mary Louise Chown, Maureen McIntosh, Roger Palser and I (or is it “me”?)-- are taking a teacher training course with Liz Goossen. We’ve been practising calling dances in class, but that’s not all! Liz wants us to teach dancing, not just dances, and we’ve spent hours working on how we can help people dance in a better and more enjoyable way. We moan about the homework, like most students, but the last assignment was especially interesting: describe the characteristics of a good English country dancer and then select three dances and write up, in detail, teaching ideas for developing these characteristics. I won’t bore you with the details, but I thought I’d throw out to you my description and see what you think:

A good English country dancer enjoys the music, moves with it, dances through each phrase and on to the next, dancing the whole time. He or she dances with good posture, lightly and with energy. Country dancing is a social activity, so hands are joined with firmness and eyes with friendly contact. There’s no room for rigidity or limpness, plodding or affectation.

Virginia Stevens

How about a good Neandertal dancer, or: Do you speak HmMMMM?

We all do apparently, and dancers more often than most. In *Archaeology*, March/April 2006, there was a review by Kate Wong (p.54) of what sounds like a fascinating book, *The Singing Neandertals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body*, written by Steve Mithen and published by Harvard University Press. It is now common scholarly opinion that language as we know it began about 50,000 years ago when our own species, *Homo sapiens*, appeared. So how did our ancestors communicate before that? According to Mithen, Wong says:

...shortly after our ancestors became fully upright around 1.8 million years ago, they began using music and gesture, including dance, to express themselves and influence others. Together these elements formed a sort of protolanguage, but one that lacked words or grammar. He believes this communication system – dubbed ‘HmMMMM’ for its holistic, multimodal, manipulative, musical and mimetic aspects – ultimately gave rise to language and music as we know them....Mithen’s early humans don’t just sit around the campfire knapping stone tools. They sing their babies to sleep, celebrate feasts with communal chanting and dancing, serenade potential mates, and mourn the dead with song.

So the next time you sit and listen to music, or coo to a baby, or dance on a Wednesday night, think of it “as a legacy bequeathed to us by our long-ago ancestors”.

*However Neandertals danced, bet there was lots of eye contact and **no** spaghetti arms!*

Don't trip, stumble or fall, and don't PLOD, above all!

IT'S TIME TO PUT SPRING IN YOUR STEP!

Step lightly at the weekend workshop, March 24-26.

It's a chance to learn from Scott Higgs, a wonderful and energizing teacher. All dancers at all levels will take away something new. And it's a chance for a whole lot of dancing! There will be dances Friday and Saturday night, two dance sessions on Saturday and one session on Sunday afternoon.

EVEN MORE FUN!

Saturday night will include a céilidh, with the Village Green Morris Men, Hell's Belles, Garland dancing, English country dancing and story-telling.

Sunday morning, 10:30 a.m., there will be a potluck brunch at Jeannie Gilbert's, 44 King's Drive.

On Sunday evening, around 5 p.m., rest your feet and unwind at a windup dinner, which is being arranged at the East India Company, 349 York Avenue.

Brochures available at class or contact Anne or Jackie.

