

Equally at home in Hexham or Hungary, the Hexham Morris Dancers are one of the most experienced, versatile and accomplished exponents of the ancient art of English Morris dancing. In summer they perform weekly in the traditional surroundings of local markets or village pubs (usually with informal music and singing afterwards, enlivened by a few traditional beers). They have also represented the UK at 7 International Events including the World Folkloriada (the World's biggest international folk dance festival) in Tokyo, Japan in 2000.

The name 'Morris' may be derived from 'Moorish' (a similar dance, the 'Morisco', was known in medieval Spain). Payments to 'Moryshe dauncers' were first recorded in London in 1448, and there were performances at royal and civic festivities before 1500. By

# HEXHAM MORRIS

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1600 Morris dancing had become a popular pastime in many villages, and the name gradually became used to describe a wider range of English traditional dances.

Originally danced only in their own localities, the different styles travelled more widely with the onset of industrialisation, as many people moved into the cities. Since then the English Diaspora has carried the dances around the world. The following styles are particularly popular:

## Cotswold Morris

Cotswold Morris: The earliest recorded Morris dance form, featuring large handkerchiefs, sticks and bells – it should be danced with athleticism and style, or as folklorist Cecil Sharp put it, 'graceful but manly withal'.



## Border (or Bedlam)

Border (or Bedlam): Wild and aggressive Morris from the Welsh Borders - a key feature is the use of disguise, which prevented the dancers (usually out-of-work farm labourers) being recognised while demanding money (rather menacingly) to supplement their meagre winter earnings.



## Garland Dancing

Garland Dancing: Lively and decorative - it was often danced by young girls at Well-Dressing ceremonies in the English Midlands.



## Clog Dancing

Clog Dancing: energetic and complex step dancing - prevalent across Northern England (with distinctive Northumbrian, Lancashire and Westmorland forms) and in Ireland - transported across the Atlantic at least as early as the 18th Century, it evolved into tap dancing in the mid 19th century (influenced by African-American dances) - unlike most other traditional dance forms, it is highly competitive.



## North West Clog Morris

North West' Clog Morris: Vigorous, almost with a military air - originally danced by male and female cotton mill workers in parades during "Wakes Week" holidays (the clogs, and some artefacts used in the dances, are reminiscent of the mills) - figures were developed later to provide 'set' dances.



## Rapper Dancing

Rapper dancing: Developed by coal miners in the North East of England, probably before 1800 - it utilised clog dance steps and two handled spring steel flexible 'swords' in a fast, furious and spectacular dance, traditionally performed around Northern pubs (sometimes to hair-raising effect) to collect money - also often danced in competitions.



## Mummer's plays

Mummers plays: Performed at festive seasons by local 'mummers' or 'guysers' at private houses or in pubs – most village plays shared common themes (usually St George fights various opponents, with the loser being resurrected by a 'quack' doctor) - they often featured improvised variations lampooning historical characters or local dignitaries. Some of the plays accompanied sword dances.