

After beginnings in 1973 and our first public foot up on a Saturday in March 1974 in the Hay Street Mall in Perth and then the same afternoon at the Caversham Wine Festival, Perth Morris Men (PMM) have entertained thousands and disappointed none in an unbroken Morris rule crossing two centuries to the present day.

The early days were in 'pure revival' style – full of energy and fun and in essence a bunch of ex-pats and local yokels whose eccentric pranking and poncing about became synonymous with the multi-cultural revolution that was quietly permeating Australia at the time. PMM were a godsend to the organisers of everything from school fetes, *mardis gras* events, festivals and street processions through to the TV stations who in those days produced their own programmes and eagerly sought new angles...even the Morris!

We proudly took our place alongside the Lithuanian dancers, the Maoris and the Scottish Country Dancers on many an occasion. We even danced for the blind (in full gear), the severely mentally challenged (at Graylands) and for the inmates at both Fremantle Gaol and Bandyup women's prison where the long sticks caused considerable apprehension for the authorities before we eventually convinced them that sticks were an essential part of the act.

The side has survived and thrived in the intervening years and still does plenty of foot-ups although with some of the older guys are finding themselves fighting gravity a little more these days! One founding member, John Watson, recalls dancing with the embryonic Sydney Morris Men at Numeralla in January 1975. *THE* first big multi-side interaction for PMM was when we danced with several other Morris teams, incomplete teams and lone stragglers at the 1977 National Folk Festival in Adelaide. We applied for and got on the main festival concert at the Adelaide Festival Hall and in front of 2000 people 'winged' a complete Bampton dance when musoes Ken Ferguson and Terry Sweet played the wrong music. At the first chorus we all broke out in a cold sweat but just kept going...and luckily it fitted; probably the one and only completely unrehearsed dance performance of any kind at this iconic establishment. Our rivals from the Sydney Morris Men didn't even spot the error!

By the end of the 1970s the side sported as many as twenty or more men and had a reputation that occasionally led them astray as well as into some hallowed halls. ("astray" is used cautiously as one of our members became an axe murderer). The side was a featured act at the celebrations held at Government house for the 150th anniversary of the founding of WA. The guests had been tutored in the finer points of bush dance steps and divided in two halves; they were either sampling the feast or dancing. We on the other hand were either eating or dancing. A veritable cornucopia was enjoyed by all, especially ourselves. Those too, were the days of the Shell Folkloric shows and we had some fun. The Shell shows were under the direction of Guillermo

Keys-Arenas (who sadly passed away in 2006) the Perth Morris Men were knocked into a better “stage” shape by a man who had a passion for folkloric traditions. He also allowed us a lot of licence to interact with the audiences and our Fool, Richard Curtis, made the most of it riding a kid’s bike through the auditorium at the Perth Concert Hall and carefully “picking” a Maid of the Mill from the audience. As well as dancing at numerous notable events in Australia, a contingent of the PMM danced in Perth, Scotland in 1979 much to the delight of many, including The Provost.

The side is often asked why their baldrics are maroon and yellow. Simple. When the side formed in 1974, most of the men lived in Subiaco and found a cheap ribbon supply in ready supply because of the Subi footy team. Our Subi colours have been on show at many National Folk Festivals, and despite the distances, most of us have danced in other parts of Australia, and always with a sense of irreverence built of course on a dedication to styles and tradition. Never mind that, Bampton and Adderbury and Field Town and the rest always have our “stamp”. We have had connections with English roots, Bampton, The Travelling Morice, Eynsham (including Andy Dixon, an émigré to Perth from that village), Kirtlington, Herga, and more.

These days the grey hair shows but that hasn’t stopped us. Still doing gags like “ Hello folks, Morris dancing is always done by the most handsome and virile men of the village... today unfortunately they couldn’t be with us so they sent their fathers instead”. Then we recall the days when we all dyed our hair black... and used our horse to frighten mounted police, and “assaulted” police officers and guard soldiers with pig’s bladders.

Once we were sticklers for the “maleness” of Morris, and still are by default, but there was the occasion some years ago when Christine Hogan, a talented muso had to be voted in as an “honorary man”. She was accepted unanimously of course.

To claim we are the leading lights would be a bit precious, but as Morris men have come and gone we have acquired a vibrant mix of dances and traditions ranging from Border to Bampton and we dance on. If only we could get the Adderbury parallel hey perfected ...