

PRINCESS ROYAL MORRIS MEN, ALBANY, WA

Albany is located on the south coast of WA about 450 km to the south of Perth. It is scenically very attractive with a rocky coastline interspersed with fine beaches and a backdrop of the inland mountains ranges to the north and forests to the west. In 1826 it was the first settlement in WA, three years before the Swan River Colony (Perth). It was originally referred to as King George Sound and provided a safe natural anchorage in the Princess Royal Harbour. It had a strong association with whaling and the nearby Frenchman Bay Whaling Station finally closed in 1978. It is now a fine whaling museum.

The Princess Royal Morris Men formed in 1980 following a visit by the Perth Morris Men. The name chosen was 'bleedin' obvious' and we chose royal blue and tan (orange/brown) for our colours signifying the sea and the timber country. For a few years (until it got wrecked by mice) we had a 'Hobby Whale' complete with water spout hand operated by an old style 'squeezey' washing up liquid container. This was very popular with the crowds...

Having lived and danced in Perth since 1974 I picked the eyes out of the more popular Cotswold and Border dances typically used for massed Morris, but I also introduced our own focus with a number of East Anglian Molly Dances and my native Yorkshire Long Sword. We also learnt Abingdon Princess Royal as our theme dance for obvious reasons. The Molly was very easy to do and the Long Sword really fitted well into the maritime theme. For long sword we adopted the Flamborough costume that I had seen at Rudston Fair on a trip home to Yorkshire. I liaised with Richard Traves at Flamborough and also with Cyril Papworth near Cambridge regarding the Molly.

The side went well for about 5 years and we danced not only locally but around the south west of WA and joined up with the Perth Morris Men and Fair Maids of Perth at various festivals including the 1984 National in Perth where we disgraced ourselves with an almost complete strip tease to *Monks March* at the Ale.

Sadly the side slithered into active demise in the early 90's. It is not easy in a small country town, although we peaked at about 10 dancers at one stage. Unfortunately, Bob, our main muso relocated to Perth where he still remains as a lead muso for Perth Morris. Three of us and a muso still remain in Albany and occasionally we help out with some unusual requests including choreographing Morris dance scenes for a local repertory group and most recently working out and then coaching a stick dance for primary school kids in their annual musical show. We were acknowledged in the programme as '*Morris dance consultants*' (beat that!). Other than that we retain our colours, still have sticks and swords and occasionally dance with Perth Morris Men at festivals and other gigs if our paths cross.

John Watson
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