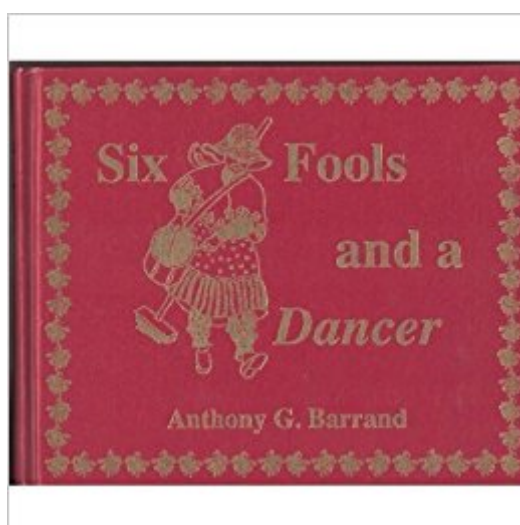


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# Six Fools And A Dancer: The Timeless Way Of The Morris (With Notations And Dance Instructions)



## Synopsis

From the Inside Cover: It is a Monday in late May. Six men form up in two lines of three facing a musician, odd numbers on the left, even on the right. They are all dressed neatly in white with rosettes or favors and ribbons pinned to their shirts and a cluster of small brass bells on a leather pad is fixed to each shin. Just before the musician strikes up the tune, a dubious-looking character steps forward to address the assembled crowd. He wears a clown suit, has his face painted somewhat crudely with red and green make-up, and swings a dried pig's bladder attached by a short string to the end of a stick. "Here we be, masters," he declares, "six fools and," pointing to himself, "one dancer!" To understand this characterization of the Morris is to know the quality without a name. To be able to learn from it is to follow the timeless way of Morris dancing and use its pattern language. If this book serves as a gate to the timeless way for any dancer, musician, spectator, or teacher it will have fulfilled its purpose.

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## Customer Reviews

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without a name. To be able to learn from it is to follow the timeless way of Morris dancing and use its pattern language. If this book serves as a gate to the timeless way for any dancer, musician, spectator, or teacher it will have fulfilled its purpose.

REFLECTIONS In the early 1900s, Cecil Sharp wandered around England, collecting the last of the Morris tradition in a multi-volume set called *The Morris Book*. He was really collecting the dregs—often time, there’d be just one or two old men that would orally describe the dances as they could no longer do them themselves. Across the board, pretty much never documented the Morris in action, in part, because there were so few people still practicing. To make matters worse, very little is known about the origins of Morris dancing. So this means the Morris tradition we’ve crafted in modern times is more inspired by tradition than something that’s been immaculately kept-up. Notably, the revival movement for Morris was associated with women’s suffrage, and therefore had a revolutionary air to it at the time. I was not aware of this until reading this book. Published in 1991, Barrand’s book is a review of Morris in the United States, which, by that point, had developed into a tradition in its own right, no longer tied to its British roots. Before I review the book, I should give an overview of relevant personal background. I grew up in the Miller’s River watershed in North Central Massachusetts. My community has a team, founded in the ’80s, called the Miller’s River Morris Men. As soon as I came to adulthood, I joined the team [almost a decade ago now]. Although I rarely come in contact with other Morris teams, Morris has never been foreign to me. Our team was founded while members of my community were on a Fourth Way course in Sherborne England. One of our group had just about had enough of the Basic Course with J. G. Bennett he was attending [Anthony Blake], and wandered down to the village pub, where a Morris practice was underway. After a little while, he realized that the Morris was just a different version of the spiritual work he was learning on the Course, and decided to return to the program, bringing the Morris with him. Understandably, our team dances the Sherborne and Bampton-in-the-Bush. In other words, this book was written during the period of the inception of our team. I almost dismissed this book altogether, but, as it’s the only Morris book I’ve ever come across, actually mentions our team, and was written by someone just an hour away, it felt worth reading. The reason I almost dismissed it is that Barrand claims that the Morris is merely street theatre. He lays out a rational argument that Morris is purely aesthetic, and has no symbolic or spiritual significance. Ironically, he then goes on to argue, why would people dance the Morris for such a petty reason as the sustenance of all life? To me, the sustainable of all life is a tad bit more important than street

theater. Insurmountable fundamental differences aside, Barrand covers a lot in his book about Morris that I find quite useful. My favorite part is about the fool, a role of which I wasn't even consciously aware until recently. I would describe the Morris as a pagan-derived British fertility rite performed by a set of six men in a set dance to music [in our case, the accordion]. We dress in white with sashes and ribbons and large red and white hankies. Our team colors are orange, green, and red [with a white background]. Our first performance of the year is on May Day, and we perform until the Summer Solstice. Coming back around again, the fool is the link between the dancers and audience. They're a bridge between worlds. I'm appreciative that Barrand gets into this bit of magic. Otherwise though—for all his references of Christopher Alexander, pattern languages, and timelessness—his sense of Morris feels contrived. For example, we didn't choose a tradition, we were given a tradition through circumstance. I didn't choose an outfit, I inherited it—bells with patina and all. And we certainly don't have a team captain that calls all the shots. Different people on the team play different roles, but there's definitely not a dictatorship as Barrand describes and strongly recommends. It's interesting to hear how differently our team does things as well. Barrand starts practice in September, and has weekly marathon practices. We start practices in March, getting in maybe three practices before our season starts, dancing maybe three times at each practice. Apparently we've been called a drinking team with a Morris problem, and the sense of community is a big part of our team. That said, most people on our team are in their sixties, so it has a more laid-back feel to it. I'm part of a next generation, but I haven't been joined by many others. Overall, I can recommend the book if you're a Morris dancer, but not strongly.

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