



# The Bassett Street Hounds

If you thought you knew what morris dancing was, you may just have to throw it all out the window. The Bassett Street Hounds perform a boisterous and energetic style of dancing known as border morris which comes from the English counties of Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. No prettified dancing with hankies and ribbons for us! With the Hounds, it's all sticks and rags, clashing and shouting!

Traditionally, border morris was danced during December and January when farmers were seasonally out of work. Drawing from other mid-winter customs such as wassailing and mumming, dancers went from door-to-door performing for their neighbors for a bit of cash or drink. Often a form of ritual disguise was involved, blackening the face with charcoal and disguising the body with bits of rags ("tatters") sewn or pinned to shirts and jackets. Although the custom was frowned upon by the local authorities, the villagers delighted in the dances' complicated patterns and forceful sticking.

Although many morris dances from the Cotswold region of England were extensively collected at the end of the 19th century, the dances from

the Welsh borderlands did not receive the same attention. Not until the 1930s did researchers attempt to document border morris, by which time most of the traditional village teams had died out. That the dancing was associated with begging made informants reluctant to admit their involvement with it, leaving researchers with scanty second-hand information.

Today, border morris describes a general style of dancing rather than encompassing dances from a particular region or village. The Hounds no longer perform any of the collected dances. Instead we base our repertoire on dances learned from two prominent English border morris revival teams, the Shropshire Bedlams and Red Stags, together with a growing number of dances that we have creatively remembered ("we make 'em up"). Our own dances, in turn, are danced by other teams in the United States, Canada and England.

The Bassett Street Hounds are a performance-oriented border morris team, dancing throughout the year. The Hounds were formed in fall 1984 and first performed on May Day morning, 1985. We have exclusively danced border morris since 1996.