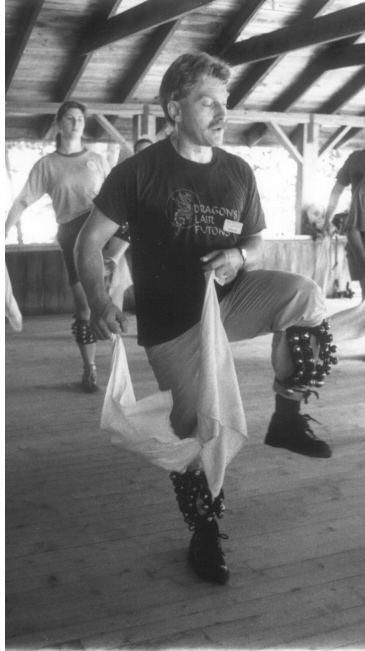


“The dance should be in your body”—an Interview with Tony Barrand

by Allen Dodson



CDSS is proud to recognize Dr. Anthony G. (Tony) Barrand as the 2008 recipient of its Lifetime Achievement Award. Tony's contributions have been numerous: he is a founder of the Marlboro Morris Ale; an archivist, historian and author on morris dance; and a singer of English and American song, both with John Roberts and as a member of the ensemble Nowell Sing We Clear. As a faculty member, first at Marlboro College in Vermont and later at Boston University, Tony has directed the work of many students who have contributed to our understanding of Anglo-American dance.

In 1986 he was diagnosed with MS, which over time has curtailed his dancing but not his commitment and interest in filming dances and working with students. He currently is a faculty member in the University Professors Program at Boston University, and continues to perform with John and Nowell Sing We Clear.

Tony has been involved with so many different dance activities and groups through the years, as well as singing solo and with others, that even in the course of a two hour interview it wasn't possible to talk about all of them. What follows are excerpts from my interview with him at his house in October 2008. I've provided some notes to assist with context and to bridge between topics, but otherwise have let Tony speak for himself.

~ A.D.

ALLEN: I remember reading a review of your book *Six Fools and a Dancer* in an English publication which referred to you as “an Englishman who only learned Morris dancing once he moved to America.” Is that pretty much right?

TONY: Yes. Actually the first time I saw morris dancing was at Swarthmore College! I was born in Lincolnshire, and when I was young my parents moved to Bletchley—on the edge of the Cotswolds, where many morris dances come from. But I never saw any of them. I then went to school at the University of Keele (Staffordshire). Keele was set up after the war and had a different approach to undergraduate studies than the other British universities. Traditionally you were admitted to a college at Oxford, Cambridge, wherever, and quickly you decided on a focus of study and studied in that department. Keele had a foundation year where you were exposed to various departments. Also,

Keele was very interested in bringing in ideas from American small colleges into their program, and so had one year exchange programs with Swarthmore on the east coast and Reed College on the west coast. I attended Swarthmore in the late sixties for a year on this program, and that's where I first saw morris dancing.

ALLEN: Do you remember much about it?

TONY: At one time I had some photographs, but seem to have lost them over the years. There was some event after finals but before commencement where the dancing took place. I saw a set of men dancing what I now realize was a twentieth-century imitation of nineteenth-century morris. And women danced also: a dance over pipes (Headington Bacca Pipes jig) and a Nutting Girl jig.

ALLEN: And that started your interest?

TONY: (laughs) Well, no, not really. I remember watching it, but it didn't "take." But in 1972 John Roberts and I were hired by CDSS to be on staff at Pinewoods [at] Folk Music Week. There were a bunch of what later became the Greenwich Morris Men on crew, and toward the end of the week they came out and danced a couple of dances one evening. And that was it. I thought, "I have to know how to do this!"

ALLEN: What appealed to you, exactly?

TONY: Well, it was very masculine, and very physical. I had played rugby in college and enjoyed physical activity, so that appealed to me. And also the togetherness and power of the dancing. I just had to do it. Tony Saletan hired John and me again in 1973 for Folk Music Week, and Jim Morrison taught me the Bampton Fools Jig and Genny Shimer taught me the Nutting Girl jig. When John and I would do concerts I would dance them as part of our performance—John had learned concertina so would play for me.

And then in 1974 I went back to Pinewoods—to what was then called simply Dance Week—to learn morris. Ronald Cajolet (Cajy) taught Headington. So that's what I learned.

By now, Tony had finished his classwork in psychology from Cornell, and had accepted a job at Marlboro College. The small, experimental nature of the program there suited him perfectly and he began teaching morris dance to some of his students.

TONY: In the fall of 1974 I started Marlboro Morris and Sword. The first members were students, both male and female, and also some guys that had danced with Roger Cartwright (American Travelling Morrice) and found out about it.

ALLEN: So you began as a mixed side? Was that a conscious decision?

TONY: No. Sharp's *Morris Book* referred to both sexes dancing morris, so I didn't think much

about it. Though I think fairly quickly we were dancing with the men on one side of the set and women on the other. It was an aesthetic decision—I just thought it looked better. I taught what I had learned at Pinewoods—Headington—and we danced at our first May Day in 1975.

The timing was fortuitous. The English folk revival was in full swing. Bands like Steeleye Span and Fairport Convention, singers like Martin Carthy and the Watersons, were household names in England, and their music became more available and more appreciated here. Many of them were involved in a revival of morris dance, too, and as more Americans learned about morris, interest grew.



Tony at the Working Waterfront Festival in New Bedford, MA in 2005. Photo courtesy the Festival.

TONY: The original Marlboro team grew and fairly quickly split into two teams: I led the men, still dancing Headington. Andra Herzbrun (now Horton) was a member of the original team, but she wanted a group she could teach too, so the women's side was formed and started dancing Ilmington with galleys.¹

ALLEN: Which brings us to the Marlboro Ale?

TONY: Yes. Well, if you talk to anyone from Ring o'Bells they'll tell you the first Ale was in 1975. They had actually been at

Pinewoods in 1974, and when Andra and I were married the Marlboro Men danced and Ring o'Bells came and danced as well. But the first official Ale was the next year.

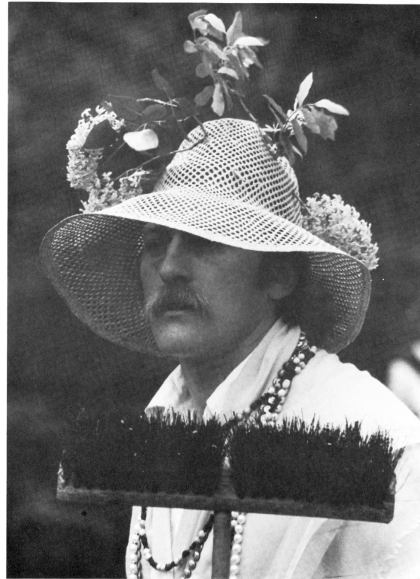
ALLEN: What did you hope to accomplish?

TONY: I suppose two things. One was to get together and teach, learn new things. For many years part of the Ale was about teaching new dances, new dance styles. And the second was to meet other teams, to see other teams dance. I think in 1976 we had Ring o'Bells, Greenwich, Dudley Laufman's Canterbury side, maybe. And Pokingbrook, which I think were mixed in those days...my involvement with the Ale went through to about 1986, by then I was teaching in Boston.²

During the late 1970s, Tony's intellectual curiosity about morris and related dances continued to grow, and he started a project that would eventually result in the largest video archive of display dance ever recorded. It began with a primitive video recorder and a feeling that there was much more out there than what he'd seen so far.

TONY: I was starting to feel that some of the stuff I had learned, and that we were doing, was wrong. For example, there's a photograph of William Kimber (the Headington concertina player) holding really long handkerchiefs. He's holding them in his hands and they're practically touching the ground. And in Headington, as you know, the hankies are bunched up for the dances. And we were using these small things—it just didn't look right.

In 1976 the Headington Quarry dancers came to Washington, DC and danced at the Smithsonian as part of the Bicentennial celebrations. So I went down and filmed them. Some of what they did I didn't like—they did four traditions, I thought, you're from Headington, you have a great dance style there, why do you do anything else—but watching them gave me a different feel for what the dances were like.



Tony as "Mother"; photo by Rosemary Donovan.

ALLEN: In what way?

TONY: They danced—well, the movements were powerful. We danced the arm movements with our arms; the Headington dancers danced them from the shoulders, with the upper body, and it looked much better. Much more strong. Big, strong movements.

ALLEN: It strikes me that you had a very wonderful and unusual situation here: a lot of freedom to collect and experiment. Did you stay working on your own, or were there people you asked for advice and came to recognize as mentors?

TONY: Roy Dommett and Ivor Allsop. Roy came to our Ale in 1978, and in 1979 I took a trip to England with the idea of filming as much dancing as I could, with the help of a grant from CDSS to buy film. Roy was more out there (compared to the English morris establishment) than I was in some ways—he had a street dance side with both sexes dancing together, for instance—he was very helpful to me. So I'd say he became a mentor. And Ivor Allsop—I went to film Handsworth's longsword dance because Dinah Breunig wanted to teach the Marlboro women a longsword dance, and that's where I met Ivor.

ALLEN: And you became more involved with CDSS's efforts.

TONY: Yes, by 1978 I was teaching at Pinewoods and in 1979 CDSS began offering separate English and American dance weeks. In 1980 I created the kind of camp I wanted at Pinewoods—an English dance week where if you wanted to you could do nothing but morris all day. There was a ritual dance track, there was a social dance track, you could mix the two. CDSS gave me the freedom to do all this. Pinewoods was a place where I could experiment with different ways of teaching—a wonderful opportunity.

ALLEN: You taught workshops for other teams as well, didn't you? I'm thinking of your work with Mayfield Morris and Sword on the west coast.

TONY: Yes, in the eighties sometime...I taught them the Lichfield that Marlboro had started to dance in the late 1970s.

ALLEN: What attracted you to Lichfield? It's such a wonderful dance tradition.

TONY: Well, I liked the idea of dances for eight [most morris dances have six dancers]; it gives you a lot of opportunity for interesting figures.

And the story behind the revival of the dances is so interesting, and no one else was doing it!

ALLEN: If you had to describe your aesthetic of morris, what would it be?

TONY: That's a good question! Well, in my book I make the point that there is an aesthetic, it's not just getting up and dancing but it's developing a particular style and approach to the dance. And beyond that—well, the dance should be in your body. You shouldn't have to think. Things like learning a dance from one position, and that's your position—[the] Headington [tradition] does that. You don't have to think.

Tony has been singing with John Roberts for nearly forty years now, as a duo and as part of Nowell Sing We Clear.³ I asked him to tell us about how they met.

TONY: We met at Cornell. We were the only two Englishmen in the Psychology Department, so the school figured we would want to room together. Never mind that we wanted to get away from England! Well, John had done a stint in India first... We started singing together in 1969. I think our first gig was at a farm for juvenile delinquents near New Bedford, Massachusetts. We went to Fox Hollow, met Maggie Pierce...in fact, we met Margaret MacArthur at Fox Hollow, her husband was Dean of the Faculty of Marlboro College. That's how we ended up at Marlboro.

ALLEN: And had you learned traditional English songs growing up?

TONY: Oh, no. I played guitar. Rhythm and blues. But John had some recordings of traditional English songs. I remember people were surprised, me being from England, that I sang American songs, and I thought I should learn some English material. So we started with things John had and went from there.

ALLEN: And then you became part of Nowell

Sing We Clear. How did that start?

TONY: (smiles) Patrick Shuldham-Shaw!⁴ Another CDSS connection. He taught at Pinewoods—Dance Week—in 1975. And that Christmas he put on a show at Cecil Sharp House: one half told the Christmas story using traditional religious songs, and the second half was secular carols. It was a great thing, and I wanted to do something similar. And in 1976 Fred Breunig moved to Brattleboro [Vermont]. Creating Nowell gave John and me a chance to play with Fred and Steve [Woodruff]. Our first performance was in 1976 in Bethlehem, New York, near where the Old Songs Festival is. I

think we did it that first year at Deerfield Academy—we performed there for many years. And I had learned that the word “carol” refers to dancing, too, so we included sword dancing and a mummers play in the show early on.

ALLEN: I heard that you got in some trouble—was it with a school system?—for performing “The Bitter Withy” as part of the Christmas story? [*The Bitter Withy is a traditional English carol in which the young Jesus builds a bridge*

from the beams of the sun in order to drown some rich lords' sons who were evidently bullying him. ~ AD]

TONY: I don't remember that, but I do remember singing that song once and a gentleman in the front row got up, started shouting it was blasphemy and so on, and wanted his money back! I like your story though.

ALLEN: Apart from building on Pat's original “folk Christmas” idea, did you have other goals in mind as Nowell developed?

TONY: Well, we didn't want to do what Revels did. We actually went up to New Hampshire once and auditioned for Revels—we were doing the Sleights sword dance, and you know it has five figures and each one ends with a lock. That



Tony with John Roberts; photo courtesy Tony Barrand.

was too much for them—they wanted to cut the dance and use only a bit of it. I thought the performance should work for the dance, not the other way round. We really wanted to be as authentic as we could. And also we wanted to take the show to the towns where people live, rather than have them go to a theater to see it.

Having taken morris workshops from Tony, I can testify that part of what makes him special is his academic approach to the dance—filming, notating, publishing what he has recorded—but to simply collect is not enough. The dance needs to have a life of its own, one gained through performing it and teaching it to others.

TONY: At Cornell I focused on perception psychology and psychological approaches to aesthetics. I taught at Marlboro for ten years; it was wonderful to be in a place where the students designed their own majors. I moved to Boston University in 1982 through the efforts of Sigmund Koch, who was interested in Empirical Aesthetics. Actually John Roberts and I almost ended up there earlier, in 1976. Koch wanted to hire several people, but the funding fell through. Anyway, he got funding for one person later and hired me. We had a sort of falling out, but I found a home in the University Professors Program—I still teach a class “Stalking the Wild Mind” —perception psychology—the students learn to dowse. And then I do a more folklore-type class where the students get to see and do morris dance, a longsword dance and a mummings play. Over the years I’ve had graduate students focus on modern dance, Indian classical dance, and Kari Smith did her dissertation with me on the Lancashire Hornpipe.

We concluded our talk with Tony’s reminiscing about an example of his work in American clog dancing—the Marley clog dances.

TONY: Rhett Krause was a student of Amherst College but had hitchhiked up to dance with the men of Marlboro Morris and Sword. He won a Watson Fellowship—people always talk about the Rhodes, but I think this one is better; you don’t have to go to Oxford, you can do what you want with it. And Rhett went to England for a year in 1982-83 with my 8mm film camera and filmed every traditional dance he could find. In

1988 he was an intern in the Boston area and his mother was at their summer house in Vernon, Connecticut because their next door neighbors, Dan and Sophie Marley, had sold their house, were in their eighties, and moving to Arkansas to live with their son. [Dan] asked where was Rhett and Rhett’s mother said at some dance thing in Boston. Dan said: “I was a dancer, you know.” “No, I didn’t,” said Rhett’s mother. “Oh, yes,” said Dan, “all our family were English clog dancers.” “Excuse me,” Rhett’s mom says, “I have to make a phone call!”

She called Rhett, who drove home and asked the old man if he knew any of the clog steps. “No,” he said, “my dad wouldn’t teach me because I held my arms out and he liked to dance with arms down by his side, but my sister Anna in the next town (Rockville) knows them all.” Rhett, who had lived next door to the Marleys all his life says: “Why haven’t you told me this before?” Dan’s reply: “You never asked.”⁵

Well, one thing led to another and beginning in 1989 Kari, then one of my students—she went to England, filmed many dancers there, and did her Ph.D. on nineteenth century clog dancing—she and I traveled to Connecticut frequently until 1996 to learn from Anna. We ended up collecting twelve complete routines. We formed a group the New Dancing Marleys (Kari Smith, Meg Ryan, Margaret Dale Barrand, Margaret Keller) to perform them.

In 2000 I gave a talk about Anna and the New Dancing Marleys performed her dances at a dance colloquium in Washington, DC. Anna was too ill to attend, but we made a videotape of the performance and I showed it to her at the nursing home just before she died. “And you weren’t even dancing,” she said to me, meaning “you have learned from me and passed the tradition on to others.” She was very proud.

ALLEN: That’s a wonderful story to end with. Thanks so much for talking to me and I’m looking forward to seeing you receive your award from CDSS!

Tony Barrand will receive the Lifetime Achievement Award at a ceremony on March 28, at Oak Grove School, Brattleboro, Vermont, from 1 to 4 pm. Please RSVP to Alisa Dodson by February 1 (alisa@capercat.com). If you cannot

attend, written or audio-visual tributes also are welcome—send them to Kari Smith at kari@svcable.net.

A bibliography and discography of Tony's work is posted on our website as an addendum to this interview. For a list of his books and recordings we carry in the CDSS Store, see www.cdss.org/sales/index.html. (Look under the "English Country Dance" and "Folk Song" sections.)

¹ A kind of turn-to-place with a flourish.

² Teams mentioned in the article: Greenwich Morris Men, a men's side (or team), and Ring o'Bells, a women's side, are based in New York City; the Canterbury team is a mixed side in New Hampshire; Pokingbrook Morris in the Albany, New York area, has a women's side and a men's side; the late Mayfield Morris and Sword danced in and around Palo Alto, California.

³ The other members of Nowell Sing We Clear are Fred Breunig and Andy Davis.

⁴ Pat Shaw (1917-1977), the English country dance teacher and prolific composer of English country dances.

⁵ Rhett Krause wrote several articles for *Country Dance and Song*, our former magazine, including "Morris Dancing and America Prior to 1913 (issues 21 and 22)", "Step Dancing on the Boston Stage: 1841-1869" (issue 22), and others.

Allen Dodson is a morris musician, morris dancer and English country dancer now resident (with his wife Alisa) in Hatfield, Massachusetts. He has participated in many of Tony's Pinewoods dance workshops, and while his first love is Cotswold morris, he has especially fond memories of Tony's Portuguese stick dance class!



This interview was published in the CDSS News, issue 206, January/February 2009. See below for a partial listing of Tony's articles, books, recordings and videos.

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(compiled March 2009)