Making Traditions: Girls' Carnival Morris Dancing and Material Practice

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Girls' carnival morris dancing holds a curious status in the canon of English folk performance. On the one hand, this highly competitive team-formation dance operates at a fundamental remove from the conventional spaces and narratives of the two English folk revivals with which most morris dancing is associated (Wright 2017).[1] More closely linked to the popular "town carnival movement"[2] of the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries than to the contemporary folk scene, girls' morris dancing is practised in sports halls and community centres, predominantly in the northwest of England and parts of North Wales, and is rarely seen in public. The dancers—almost exclusively girls and young women from working-class communities—compete as members of morris dancing troupes within regional and cross-regional carnival organizations. They do not straightforwardly identify as "folk" dancers.[3]

On the other hand, girls' morris performances share aspects of a common history with other forms of morris dancing in the Northwest. Once an integral feature of the popular carnival street parades held throughout the region during the summer months,[4] troupes of carnival morris dancers performed alongside

1. The first English folk revival, spearheaded by Cecil Sharp, is generally understood as taking place from the 1880s to the 1920s. The second revival took place in the wake of the Second World War, from around the 1950s to 1970s.

2. "Town carnival movement" is my coinage, drawing on the cognate notion of the English folk movement and the colloquial use of "town carnivals" to describe the local and regional events where girls' morris dancing was historically featured. Further research is underway to determine the boundaries, landmarks, and protagonists of this movement.

3. Indeed, within the girls' morris dancing community, the performance is generally referred to as simply "morris dancing" or "girls' morris dancing"; the qualifiers "carnival" and "fluffy" morris dancing are more recent, usually external designations (the latter term being somewhat derogatory). In this article, I will occasionally refer to "carnival morris" when seeking to differentiate the performance from other aspects of English morris dancing (also described as "folk revival morris"); most often the term "girls' morris dancing" will be used to reflect community usage. At other times, I will signal comparison using the terms "morris troupes" and "morris sides" to refer to girls' morris dancers and folk revival morris dancers, respectively.

4. Such celebrations were frequently modelled after the very successful May Day celebrations in Knutsford and were catalysed by, among other factors, socioeconomic changes affecting the

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.49.2017.0026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"North West" morris sides[5] in Cheshire, Lancashire, and Cumbria from at least the 1890s onwards. Dance scholar Theresa Buckland suggests that girls' morris dancing demonstrates convincing claims to an historical depth, geographical continuity, and social role comparable to most morris groups in the UK (Buckland and Howison 1980; Buckland 1991). Similarly, morris dancing historian, Roy Dommett, described the practice as "heir to the richest of the English dance traditions" after attending a girls' morris competition at a carnival in Colne in 1968 (1986:5).

Although most contemporary scholars acknowledge girls' morris performance as congruent with any "defensible definition" of folk dance (Heaney 2006:39), the practice is largely neglected in extant morris dancing literature.[6] Mike Heaney suggests that associations with an urban context and female participants, as well as the presumed modernity of the form, have led some "purists" to "deny its place in descriptions of traditional ceremonial dance" (ibid.). It is well documented that performances associated with industrialized centres were largely neglected by the early folk collectors (see Buckland 1991), not least because rapidly modernized, post-agrarian contexts were deemed inauthentic. Georgina Boyes has also argued that the contribution of women (and children) in the first folk revival is unfairly represented in scholarship: they are "at worst trivialised or ignored" (1993:xii).

Less has been written about how notions of modernity may continue to influence attitudes about traditional dance, or about the ways in which an association with contemporary origins comes to be identified with one type of performance instead of another.[7] This seems particularly important when those assumptions about modernity lead to differences in interpretation, influencing whether a practice is regarded as traditional or not. Girls' morris dancing arguably possesses a role and provenance similar to that of many other morris dancing styles, but it is viewed and interpreted differently. Could it be that an impression—or appearance—of modernity provides one of the keys to comprehending girls' morris dancing's marginalized position in traditional dance discourses?

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distribution of leisure time for the working classes, and the development of the railway network across the north of England (Toulmin 2006).

5. "North West" is the accepted proper noun used to describe morris dancing historically performed in Cheshire, Lancashire, and Cumbria. This differs from my use of "Northwest" to refer to the broad geographic region in which girls' morris dancing takes place.

6. With the notable exception of Theresa Buckland's research (1991), a short summary in Roy Dommett's *Morris Notes* (1986:3–7), and work by the author (Wright 2017), this performance practice is rarely addressed. It is occasionally referenced in regional histories of North West morris styles (e.g., Bentley 1959:65, 68; Buckland and Howison 1980:10–13; Boswell 1981, 1984; Howison and Bentley 1960). It does not appear to have been explored significantly in other areas of scholarship.

7. In the case of girls' morris dancing, Heaney describes it as a "twentieth-century development" (2006:39).

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Figure 1. Orcadia Morris Dancers (Juniors) at English Town and Country Carnival Organisation (ETACCO) End of Season Championships (photo: Lucy Wright, 2016)

Distinguished by heavily embellished costumes, pom-poms ("shakers"), and precise, synchronous routines choreographed to recorded pop music, girls' morris dancers superficially bear little resemblance to the better-known morris performers of the English folk revivals. In particular, the girls' morris dress—brightly coloured and abundantly decorated with sequins (see figure 1)—is more often likened to the costumes worn by competitive Irish dancers or American cheerleaders than to other forms of morris dancing attire.[8] At least in part, this distinction can be attributed to regular changes in girls' morris dress designs, which are replaced annually (or as often as funds allow) as part of a yearly cycle of competitions rewarding originality in both costuming and dance routines. Girls' morris dressmakers typically employ contemporary fabrics and motifs when creating costumes, and draw their influences from a range of sources, including high-street fashions and other popular dance styles, such as Irish and disco dancing. This means that the appearance of girls' morris dancing dresses does not remain static for long periods and that costume designs respond quickly to changing tastes and material availabilities.

8. Women's participation in cheerleading began in the 1920s, developing in the United States through the decades that followed the Second World War (Adams and Bettis 2003). By contrast, women's involvement in morris dancing is traceable at least as far back as the early-nineteenth century in the northwest of England, although further research is needed to fully document its history.

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In this way, the visual appearance of girls' morris dancing intersects with the material practice of dressmaking. To examine this intersection further, this article reflects on my experience as an apprentice to Samantha Hamer, a girls' morris dancing dressmaker (and troupe trainer) for Orcadia Morris Dancers from Skelmersdale in West Lancashire, in 2012 and 2013. Working in Samantha's dressmaking studio enabled me to consider, first hand, how girls' morris participants approach the creation and renewal of a coherent visual identity; it also offered insight into what the making of girls' morris costumes might reveal about the community's relationship to notions of tradition.

The article also comments on the potential efficacies of material practice as an aspect of ethnomusicological inquiry. Indeed, my role as a trainee dressmaker—a crucial first point of contact in the girls' morris community—influenced the trajectory of my research significantly by providing an introduction to girls' morris dancing, which was framed at the outset by material and visual concerns. A turn toward the material can currently be witnessed in a number of cognate disciplines across the arts and humanities, opening up the possibility of research not only *about* the making practices of girls' morris participants, but also of conducting research *with* and *through* material practices. My use of a practice-led methodology borrows particularly from David Gauntlett's idea that "making is connecting" (2011) and Tim Ingold's model of "transformational" engagement (2013:3–4), and offers a potential alternative or addition to established ethnomusicological methods of participant observation and "performance as a research technique" (Baily 2001).

It is not the primary purpose of this article to provide a comprehensive comparison of the costuming practices of girls' morris dancers and other (morris) dance performers. Instead, I seek to demonstrate that the material practices of girls' morris dance troupes are suggestive of a highly generative approach to tradition in which continuity is not signalled through an (apparently) unchanging visual presentation, but rather through conscious and ongoing adaptations that meet the needs and preferences of the participants. In the next section, I outline some of the key features of costuming in the girls' morris dancing community and its responsivity to change. This is followed by some comparisons with the costume-making of folk revival morris participants by drawing on my experience as a Cotswold morris dancer and interviews with members of Lymm Morris Men from Cheshire. I conclude by posing broader questions about the relationships between tradition and material practice, and the efficacies of costume-making as research technique, emphasizing prevailing preoccupations in ethnomusicology. Throughout this article, I interweave descriptions taken from my fieldnotes in order to highlight specific revelations and forms of knowing that emerged during my apprenticeship.

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THE GIRLS' MORRIS DANCING COSTUME

> I crouch in a corner of the sports hall, amidst jumbled rows of plastic chairs, deckchairs, pushchairs and packed lunches. Makeup bags and cans of hairspray are strewn across the scuffed vinyl floor and bright, sequinned dresses suspend from every available hanger. In the top half of the room, a line of pre-teen girls stand in order of decreasing height, as two middle-aged women circle around them carrying clipboards. The judges examine socks, hairbands, and skirt lengths, making scribbled notes on a small pink score card. Then, some loud pop music issues from the speakers and the performance begins. The dancers rise up onto their toes and march: knees high and toes pointed. Their lilac dresses glimmer beneath the strip-lights. The audience of supporters cheers. (Fieldnotes, July 2012)

Appearance is paramount at girls' morris dancing competitions. Dancers are judged on the design and cleanliness of their costumes as part of a formal adjudication process and costumes are widely felt to contribute to the overall spectacle of a successful performance. Girls' morris dancers wear short fluted dresses with padded shoulders and wide bell sleeves. They are typically constructed from two or more colours of fabric; one constituting the main body of the dress, and the others (typically highly embellished) used to emphasize motifs and accents (see figure 1). Organization rules state that each member of the troupe must wear the same style of dress, headpiece, and shoes (excepting the Leader and Mascot, who wear a variation of the main design) and costumes that appear visibly damaged or worn may lose crucial points on competition scoring cards. In spite of strict regulations governing the condition and required elements of the girls' morris costume, troupes compete to have the most striking and innovative dresses. Dress is considered an important platform on which to gain a competitive advantage and teams are distinguished from their rivals by their choice of colours and embellishments.

Girls' morris costumes also demonstrate a sense of belonging and a common troupe identity. Dancers within a single troupe often wear dresses of the same colour, with different shades of fabric sometimes employed to distinguish members of different age divisions or "lines" of dancers. When not performing, the participants—including many spectators—often wear troupe-branded team wear, such as T-shirts, sweatshirts, and hoodies, also in the same colours as their morris costume. This relatively recent development in girls' morris dancing attire responds to the increased affordability of garment printing technologies—also indicating a readiness within the community to embrace new materials and processes—and assists in the expression of troupe cohesion when not on the arena.[9] Troupes employ motivational slogans, such as "Simply the Best," "Believe

9. The "arena" is typically a cordoned area of a sports hall or community centre in which girls' morris competitions take place. Spectators sit on chairs around the edge of the performance space, while adjudicators stand on the arena itself to award marks for footwork, timing, originality, costume, etc.

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2 Achieve," and "Less Me, More Us" as embellishments on their team wear, using the garments as a canvas on which to demonstrate their shared values and team spirit.

Although a number of costuming elements, such as team wear (and often shakers), are now routinely imported from outside of the immediate morris dancing community, the making of morris dresses is predominantly conducted within individual morris dancing troupes. It remains relatively rare for participants to employ the services of commercial garment-makers. Most often, the process is undertaken by current or former dancers, and troupes that do not have the benefit of a dedicated costume-maker within their own number typically commission dressmakers from other troupes (although preferably from different organizations[10]). In this respect, the material practice of girls' morris dressmakers is comparable with the specialist industry around Irish dance costumes: the design and manufacture of the dresses is considered to be a process that requires insider knowledge of the specific physical—and organizational—requirements of girls' morris performance.

Despite the specialist nature of dressmaking for girls' morris dancing competitions, like most other aspects of girls' morris participation, the task is typically an unpaid, voluntary enterprise. Girls' morris dancing remains a low budget, amateur, and non-profit-making activity that strives to maintain an ethos of accessibility among a wide range of participants. In contrast to the high-profile solo competitions associated with Irish dancing and disco, girls' morris dancing is almost exclusively a group activity. As such, although individual girls' morris dresses are rarely as costly to produce as the one-off custom-made dresses created for Irish solo jig competitions, the task of outfitting a whole troupe of fifty (or more) dancers on an annual basis can still be an expensive undertaking. Troupes often engage in fundraising, organizing activities and events to generate funds to make new dresses, a task often led by a highly active network of parents, trainers, and supporters (referred to as the "troupe family") who assist in the everyday running of the dance team. Troupes that lack sufficient funds (particularly newly established teams) will sometimes purchase complete sets of dresses second-hand from other troupes at the end of a performance season. Other groups choose to replace their costumes less frequently, relying on the troupe's wardrobe keeper to carefully protect them from damage between events and to conduct regular repairs.[11]

10. There are a range of girls' morris dancing and carnival organizations spread across the performance region in the Northwest and Wales. The largest of these—for example, the English Town and Country Carnival Organization (ETACCO) with whom Orcadia Morris Dancers compete—may host upwards of fifteen individual troupes each week. Smaller organizations may include only six to eight teams. Morris dancing dressmakers do not usually make costumes for troupes that are members of the same organization (i.e., direct competitors) as this would likely be interpreted as a conflict of interest.

11. Dresses are typically worn for short periods only and are kept in protective suit bags between performances.

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The importance of costume within the girls' morris dancing community places significant value on the role of the dressmaker. While the preliminary design of dresses may be carried out in conversation and/or collaboration with other members of the troupe, it is the dressmaker's responsibility to ensure that all dresses are exactly alike and appropriately fitted, as well as visually striking in performance. In this way, the overall success of the team is linked to the skill and originality of the dressmaker.

GIRLS' MORRIS DANCING COSTUMES AND CHANGE

> "Are you going to measure me?" The little girl tugs urgently at Samantha's coat as she puts down a heavy bag filled with dressmaking supplies. Samantha winks. "Maybe …" The little girl grins broadly.
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> It is a few days into October at Blue Mount Community Centre in Skelmersdale. Orcadia Morris Dancers attended their annual End of Season Championships in Southport a fortnight ago, but the competition hadn't gone as well as they had hoped. The Tinies' section (girls aged four to eleven) won first in their category as expected, but the Juniors (aged twelve to sixteen) only came in fifth. In the over-sixteens Senior competition, Jen fell while on the arena, incurring a significant penalty, but "they weren't going to win anyway," Samantha says. "I haven't told them that …" she trails off pointedly, "but even I didn't like it." Nevertheless, this evening, the troupe must put the championships behind them to begin creating new routines—and new dresses—for the next season of weekly "comps"[12] which will begin afresh in the spring.
>
> Late autumn is generally acknowledged as the hardest working period in the carnival morris calendar: "Not the busiest for the girls, but the busiest for the trainers, you know," says Samantha, "everything changes, everything has to start again from scratch." The girls are looking forward to the promise of new costumes. I admire the chosen fabric before the rehearsal begins: turquoise dupion for the skirt and bodice, and sleeves a cascade of tiny silver sequins. "There are one hundred and ten dresses waiting to be made before March," Samantha says with a sigh. "To be honest, it's going to be difficult. I'm working a fifty-hour week outside of the sewing … I am never in front, always behind." (Fieldnotes, September 2012)

My apprenticeship with Samantha was conceived as one of informal exchange: I offered my basic dressmaking skills during a period of pressurized workload and, in return, Samantha agreed to be interviewed about her experiences in girls' morris dancing. Having been introduced by morris dancing adjudicator and community archivist Ian McKinnon, apprenticing with Samantha represented a crucial starting point in my research, providing access to the typically private spaces of girls' morris performance. As well as spending time in her dressmaking studio, Samantha also permitted me to observe Orcadia practices and competitions alongside her. The interconnectedness of these two spaces in my research—the

12. Short for "competitions."

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studio and the performance arena—mirrored the close relationship between performance and material practice in the girls' morris dancing community.

As the primary costume-maker for Orcadia Morris Dancers, Samantha had danced for over forty years before retiring from performance to focus on training and dressmaking. Like many girls' morris participants, involvement was a family tradition: Samantha's mother ran a girls' morris troupe in the 1960s and her aunt, also a trainer, was the group's chief dressmaker. An awareness of the significance of costume was instilled very early on: she wore a morris dress before she was even old enough to perform. On one occasion, she showed me a photograph of herself at two years of age dressed in a miniature morris dancing costume. "I was taken on the troupe bus at twelve weeks old and I've been going ever since," Samantha said. "I had no choice. But I loved it; I've always loved it" (interview, August 2013).

Later, as a mature student, Samantha studied dressmaking at the local college, balancing coursework with the demands of a young family and fulltime employment in a florist's shop. "I'd always done a bit of sewing," she said, "I saw this course advertised and I joined it because [my son] was just about to go to nursery and they had a nursery at the college." Becoming involved in morris costumes occurred almost by happenstance: Samantha assisted a seamstress friend when the troupe's regular dressmaker was unable to accept a commission. The two novice costume-makers improvised their way through the process of creating more than thirty matching dresses in a four- week period. It was an intense and formative experience. Samantha remembered that her collaborator "was the one that taught me, if it goes wrong just put it in the [garbage] bin and do it again. When [the commission] was done we both said, 'I'll never do that again'" (interview, August 2013).

With twenty years of experience as a dressmaker, as well as her lifelong involvement in morris dancing competitions, Samantha has witnessed significant changes to the appearance of the morris costume. Although contemporary morris dresses tend to have a highly recognizable silhouette—itself a relatively recent invention—the choice of fabrics used to create them has varied widely over time. Recent years have witnessed a strong preference for heavy embellishments, including sequins and holographic prints, and a number of troupes have begun to eschew long-favoured satins, dupions, and sturdy crimpolenes in favour of stretch lycras and other "performance" fabrics. This development reflects the growth of material availabilities since the 1980s and 1990s and, perhaps, an increased emphasis on visual spectacle. As Lyn Booth, general secretary for the Manchester and North East Cheshire Carnival Organisation (MANECCO), who first began dancing in the 1950s, explained:

> You could do anything you wanted in crimpolene and it would never ever wear out … it'd all be decorated with little daisies, just a line on a strip and you'd have to sew them all the way around your collar. Well, you've seen the

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> trimmings they have now. Goodness me, it's just sequins and glitter, and they are lovely, really lovely. They really go to town … but there's a lot of expense. The costumes, I'd say, are definitely a progression. (interview, September 2013)

Samantha suggested that such changes in fabric might be attributed, among other factors, to the community's recent displacement from their former performative context at the town carnivals: a shift away from public-centred display that was accompanied by increasing emphasis on adjudicatory scoring. For instance, Samantha explained that the voluminous bell sleeves, now a common feature of the girls' morris costumes, were initially introduced to conceal the detail of dancers' arm movements from the judges' scrutiny. Although some troupes are now opting for a slimmer silhouette, sleeve sizes grew exponentially with the rise of competitive doctrine in the early 2000s, in some instances reaching extreme proportions.[13] Samantha felt that the role of costumes had become more strongly implicated in the creation of a spectacle. Commenting on the now-widespread preference for heavily sequined fabrics, she said, "I've got a picture on my Facebook page from the Isle of Man when we won in '86. The comment I put was, 'those were the days when you didn't need sequins to sparkle' … The sparkle was your dancing" (interview, August 2013).

Despite this shift in competitive emphasis, most members of the girls' morris community appeared to welcome the changes to the morris dancing costume, feeling that such developments were necessary in order to appeal to young people. Some even felt that changes in costume could go further, with organizational rules occasionally preventing popular developments, particularly around personal grooming. Samantha expressed her own wish for the development of girls' morris costumes to mirror progressions seen in other contemporary dancing styles: "I would change the rules to make it as beautiful as you can be," she said, comparing girls' morris to contemporary Irish dancing competitions. "I would say, 'yes they can wear fake tan, yes they can wear makeup' … They need to make it more glamorous and then more kids will want to join" (interview, August 2013).

In this respect, the materialities of the girls' morris costume can be seen to extend into the lived social and cultural environment of which girls' morris performance is a part. Girls' morris dancing cannot be considered separately from other participatory dance or leisure activities on offer in the region or in British society. Several trainers commented on the increased difficulty of retaining dancers in recent years, attributing falling numbers to the pressures of education and employment, as well as competition from other popular dancing styles. The decision of girls' morris dancing organizations to enshrine elements of costuming in formal competition rules ensures the continuity and coherence

13. Samantha also suggested that an increased emphasis on competition had led to a reduction in the size and spatial reach of girls' morris formations, as troupes seek to reduce the margin for positional errors.

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.49.2017.0026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of visual identity, and differentiates girls' morris from other popular dancing styles. Embedding costume renewal and redesign in organizational structures also indicates that change is an accepted part of the process of continuation and that innovations to the appearance of girls' morris dresses are vital to ensuring the survival of the practice. The fine balance between fostering creativity and safeguarding continuity is key to the maintenance of many traditional practices, and offers an interesting point of comparison with the morris performances of the English folk revival.

COMPARING GIRLS' MORRIS AND FOLK REVIVAL MORRIS COSTUMES

Unlike girls' morris dancing, most forms of morris associated with the 1970s English folk revival do not formalize the design and replacement of the morris costume (or "kit") within seasonal or organizational structures.[14] Approaches to costuming are demonstrably diverse across the landscape of English morris, with significant differences evident between performers of disparate morris dancing styles, as well as between different groups performing in the same tradition.

Costume specialist Chloe Middleton-Metcalfe's recent research on folk revival morris dancing attire suggests that many groups place strong emphasis on historical provenance when designing a kit. Although subtle differences between men's and women's sides can be identified, Middleton-Metcalfe discovered that a significant number of groups from the 1970s revival were influenced by the stylistic preferences of Cecil Sharp, and that such influences continued to be visible (2013a:37, 2013b:2). All-male sides, particularly those dancing in the Cotswold morris style, made frequent reference to specific historical dance sides in explanations of their appearance, while all-female sides—often associated with the North West dancing style—tended to refer to generic (though still historical) models as the basis for their costume. Factory- and millworkers' attire were common inspirations (2013a:41, 43).

By contrast, girls' morris dancers are unlikely to refer directly to previous costume designs when creating new dresses. Although dressmakers continue to create costumes that are clearly recognizable as girls' morris costumes—indicating that participants value some form of continuity—a specifically locatable origin is rarely a factor in dressmaking processes. Neither are costumes designed to echo the appearance of other historical groups or figures. In addition, the materials used by girls' morris dancers tend to differ from those of folk revival morris sides. While sequins and performance fabrics are common features of girls' morris

14. This is at least, in part, attributable to an absence of formal competition in folk revival morris participation: with the exception of the John Gasson Memorial Jig Competition held at Sidmouth Folk Festival, competition in English morris dancing is predominantly informal. However, rapper and clog dancing both have long histories of formal competitions, and future research might explore comparisons with these performance traditions.

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costumes, these are less frequently found in folk revival morris kits. Despite this distinction, the fabrics employed by folk revival morris dancing groups vary widely, and significant differences can be observed between those groups that privilege uniformity and those that permit individual differences in the visual appearance of the kit. The more variation permitted between members of a folk revival morris group—for example, the colourful "rag jackets" made and worn by Border morris dancers—the more likely they are to employ conspicuously contemporary fabrics.

While girls' morris troupes require strict uniformity, many folk revival sides approach costuming as a personal and personalizing task. Groups typically begin with a common "core" costume—which may include basic components such as white shirt, trousers, and bells—but dancers are often expected to make or customize other aspects of their costume, such as hats and jackets, which can demonstrate significant variety between members. Indeed, although most groups source some garments from shops or commission skilled dressmakers to create aspects of the basic morris kit, the individual creation of other elements of the kit is sometimes perceived as an informal "rite-of-passage" for dancers performing in public for the first time. Personal customizations of this kind are not generally perceived as being at odds with an emphasis on historical continuity: such costumes might be perceived as an evolution, with the addition, loss, or re-organization of effects representing a form of documentation of the personal journeys of performers. For example, Lymm Morris Men, from Lymm in Cheshire, described their costume as based on detailed archival study and reference to photographic records. However, the expression of individual difference was encouraged between members of the group in the form of elaborately decorated hats, which included badges and buttons representing personal interests and experiences (often within morris), and "ribbon braces" customized by the performers themselves. While girls' morris dancing does not generally permit significant differences in appearance between members of the same line, parallels might be found in the subtle variations in hairstyles, makeup, or arrangements of medals on the ceremonial waistcoats sometimes worn by girls' morris dancers at competitions.

The extent and importance placed on uniformity versus individual difference in girls' morris and folk revival morris dancing is almost certainly linked to the disparate performance contexts of the two groups. With the movement away from public displays in the street (still one of the primary locations for folk revival morris performance), girls' morris dancing is now almost exclusively performed for the purpose of competition, and audiences overwhelmingly comprise members of the wider girls' morris dancing community. By contrast, folk revival morris sides frequently dance in the presence of non-specialist audiences, and often value showmanship and the performance of a public spectacle.

The strong emphasis on a common team identity in the girls' morris dancing costume may also reflect the highly demanding conditions of girls' morris

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participation. Troupes practise regularly to achieve the precise synchronicity of stepping and formations required for a successful performance, and members are expected to demonstrate significant commitments of time and energy to maintain a place in the performance line. Buckland argues that the drive for uniformity in historical girls' morris dancing troupes may have links to wider social movements in the Victorian period that sought to reduce individualism in working-class children and aimed "to render [girls] fit and strong to become the nation's mothers" (Buckland 1991:59). While such motivations are no longer conspicuous in contemporary girls' morris organizations, competition performances continue to emphasize group identity as opposed to individualism. Dancers join the "troupe family" and are expected to conform to the rules and expectations of the team, including adopting a shared troupe aesthetic on the arena.

However, divergent approaches to costuming may also reflect differing approaches to the notion of tradition in girls' morris and folk revival morris groups. For example, for the Lymm Men, variations in kit revealed the members' disparate opinions about the importance of authenticity in their morris tradition (see Bendix 1997). While some were driven to produce a pleasing visual display, others enjoyed the challenge of attempting to achieve some level of historical accuracy (for example, using fresh rather than plastic flowers on the morris hat or fustian rather than nylon ribbons on the braces). Changes to the kit were also understood to be inevitable over time: shirts were sourced from different suppliers, and certain fabrics became unavailable or were superseded by more practical, easy-to-care-for options. However, few purposeful or highly conspicuous revisions were introduced after the group's origination in the late 1970s. In this way, changes to the Lymm kit might be understood as responsive to practical requirements and material availabilities, rather than the result of a conscious desire to alter the group's general appearance.

By contrast, changes to the girls' morris costume happen regularly, and I would argue, with greater receptivity to the creative possibilities of contemporary materials and styles. While both the material practices of girls' morris and folk revival morris costume-makers can be seen to involve acts of replacement, the girls' morris model involves a process of continual renewal, rather than one that is more focused on refreshment or maintenance. Or to borrow terms from folk performance scholarship, costuming practices of all morris dancers can be understood to exist on a continuum between "dynamic replication" and "constant transformation" (Young 2010:67), but the importance of historicity represents a noticeable fault line between the two broad groups. The emphasis on regular innovation, as opposed to faithfulness to an historical model, suggests that girls' morris participants do not straightforwardly perceive the role of costume as one of historical replication or allusion.[15] In particular, I suggest that

15. In fact, the present-day responsivity of girls' morris costume-makers to societal changes may

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the conscious transformations of the girls' morris costumes—influenced by a competitive cycle rather than the ideological project of revival—reflects a sense of continuity (or tradition) motivated less by historical concerns and more with meeting community needs.

IN THE DRESSMAKER'S STUDIO

> Walking into Samantha's home studio—piled high with half-sewn bodices, shiny rolls of fabric and tangled piles of glittering embellishments—is like entering the seething locus of troupe life. In this small room at the centre of a pristinely tidy house, the walls are plastered with hastily traced motifs and sketches, scraps torn from magazines—tattoo designs and celtic mandalas—and posed troupe portraits in brushed velvet frames. On a shelf behind the overlocker, a couple of tarnished silver trophies belonging to Samantha's mother jostle with conical reels of cotton and boxes of pins. In the wardrobe, Samantha's own troupe waistcoat, bowed under the weight of innumerable medals, tells a story of morris dancing successes past.
>
> These artefacts, like the dresses Samantha makes, have a history of their own—and also an agency. They are the tangible outcomes of an intangible tradition and symbols of the creativity, cooperation, and independence of the girls' morris community. Sitting at the sewing machine, I feel as if all of the questions I have about girls' morris and the mystery of its separation from other forms of morris dancing might be answered—one stitch at a time. (Fieldnotes, March 2013)

Samantha worked in the studio every day during the 2012 autumn vacation and every Saturday until the costumes were completed. Employed as a teaching assistant at a local school, during term time she woke up at 5 a.m. to make progress on her sewing jobs before going to work. Throughout the performance season, Samantha's role as the primary seamstress for Orcadia Morris Dancers involved a continuous process of making repairs to existing dresses, and occasional alterations or assemblages of new ones as dancers grew taller or joined the group mid-season (see figure 2). Then, at the end of the organizational year, if funds were available, she would be tasked with making a batch of new dresses, overhauling the previous year's design in time for the next competitive season. In 2013, Orcadia wore turquoise dresses with silver sequins, a design that had already gone through several revisions before it was agreed upon by all senior members of the troupe.

I came to the studio less often, balancing my apprenticeship with work commitments elsewhere. Mostly, there were only the two of us in the room, sitting at adjacent desks or moving between the sewing machine, ironing board,

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mirror the early history of women's morris dance costumes more broadly. In their archival analysis of Cheshire morris dancing during the first morris revival, Lesley Edwards and Janet Chart argue that, in contrast to men's morris groups, the costumes of female morris dancers corresponded "more closely to the era in which they danced" (1981:8).

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and overlocker, engaged in our respective tasks. Samantha worked quickly and efficiently. As a newcomer—both to the morris costume and to dressmaking more broadly—I was slower and made many more mistakes. Samantha was patient, setting me relatively simple tasks, such as folding headbands and ironing, ensuring that I did not cause too much damage to materials for which the budget had been carefully set.

One of the first projects Samantha gave me was to disassemble an old Juniors' dress in order to learn more about its form and methods of construction. As I did so, I reflected not only on the painstaking process that had led to its creation, but also on the ways in which the dressmaking of girls' morris troupes functioned as a kind of metaphor for the community itself. Largely non-commercial and uninstitutionalized, performers actively *made* their own entertainment: governing their own community, creating and perpetuating their own ongoing traditions. Girls' morris dancing belonged specifically to the participants: its small scale and unceasing cycle of events provided valuable roles for generations of girls and young women in places where they were often perceived to have few opportunities. The outcomes of this making—whether physical artefacts or fleeting performances—were significant and communally shared objects of pride.

Samantha and I usually worked quietly while listening to the radio, each absorbed in our own creative labour, but I was always able to ask questions or request anecdotes about Samantha's experiences with girls' morris, often



Figure 2. Samantha Hamer at work in her studio (photo: Lucy Wright, 2013).

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recording our conversations on my mobile phone. Samantha explained that while it was crucial that her dresses be practical and durable, she also aimed to create beautiful costumes that were up-to-date with current girls' morris dancing fashions and popular with the dancers (as well as the judges). Previously influenced by Irish dancing costumes, her older designs were highly detailed and "Celtic" in aesthetic; her more recent designs were less complex, more graphic, with little unnecessary intricacy. She now took inspiration from tribal tattoo designs, torn from magazines and enlarged in pencil using sheets of tracing paper, as well as from the motifs and embellishments used by high street fashion brands. She said that the pleasing appearance of the dresses was important to best showcase the hard work put in by the dancers at rehearsals. The costumes were also part of ensuring that the dancers not only felt like a team, but that they felt like a team of fierce competitors.

Making dresses with Samantha also helped me to recognize—and eventually to access—the inherent sociability of dressmaking in the girls' morris community. Sociologist David Gauntlett suggests that in undertaking the "thoughtful, physical process of making … an individual is given the opportunity to reflect and to make their own thoughts, feelings or experiences manifest and tangible" (2011:4). In his treatise on "making as connecting," he argues that this process "can generate insights which would most likely not have emerged through directed conversation," increasing the sense of "engagement and connection with our social and lived environments" (ibid.:2). Similarly, ethnomusicologist P. Allen Roda speaks of "the interconnectedness of material and social relationships" in the tabla-maker's studio, describing "the way in which social relationships and interactions influence the structure and sonic capacity of musical instruments as well as how the instruments themselves bring people together in social, economic and musical relationships" (2014:364). In Samantha's studio, dancers and supporters often dropped by to be measured, or to bring supplies, offer an opinion, or engage in conversation, rendering the studio a community hub for the Orcadia Morris Troupe.

As participants learned more about my project, many invited me to see the old dresses they stored in their closets, or loaned me photographs of competitions to include in my archive. I was interested in the strength of feeling that the dresses provoked in many of the dancers. For older participants, certain dresses evoked memories of the old carnivals or about family members who no longer performed. For younger members, dresses were an important incentive for dancing. The children in Samantha's Babies' class—little girls aged from eighteen months to three years of age—were almost as excited about putting on their costumes as they were about participating in the competition. Teenaged dancers spoke fondly of the costumes they had worn as children, and described particular successes of the troupe as intrinsically linked to the appearance of the dresses on the arena. The dresses were not just material objects, but social ones too.

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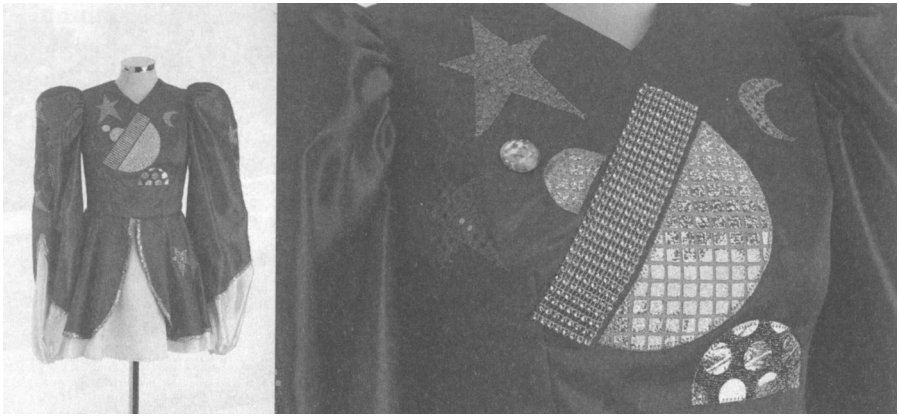


Figure 3. Detail of dress made by Samantha Hamer and Lucy Wright (photo: Lucy Wright, 2013).

A few months into the apprenticeship, when the majority of the Orcadia dresses had been completed, Samantha and I began work on a new project that aimed to further draw out this social materiality, as well as explore the historical progression of the girls' morris costume. I was, at the time, conducting interviews with former members of the prize-winning 1956 Lower Withington Senior Morris Troupe from Lower Withington in Cheshire. Lower Withington Morris was one of the last mixed-gender troupes to perform at carnivals alongside all-girls' groups and, shortly after they disbanded in the early 1960s, morris dancing competitions became female only. I felt that the Lower Withington troupe might represent a point of transition between the contemporary girls' morris dancing and the mixed-gender morris groups of the English folk revival. Samantha and I decided to create two costumes based on information provided in the interviews and archival photographs of the group to demonstrate the ways in which girls' morris costumes had changed since the 1950s.

We approached the design of the dresses in a way similar to Samantha's other commissions, allowing me to experience the creation of a morris dancing costume from scratch. It was important to me that the dresses met organizational standards, and that they were wearable, theoretically, at a girls' morris competition. Nonetheless, our reference to an historical Lower Withington colour scheme (i.e., red and white) was perhaps more reminiscent of folk revival morris sides, and the motifs—unlike most contemporary girls' morris dresses—were stylized images of features of the local Lower Withington landscape. For example, one dress was appliquéd with a representation of a famous observatory telescope, located on the Lower Withington boundary (see figure 3), while the other commemorated the blacksmith's forge within the village. The dresses were also more detailed than many of Samantha's extant dresses because we were not producing multiple iterations. This meant that we were able to experiment more with colours and techniques, creating extravagant "show pieces" that demonstrated what might be

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Figure 4. Members of Irlam Royalettes at Lower Withington Rose Day, modelling dresses made by Samantha Hamer and Lucy Wright (photo: Lucy Wright, 2013).

achievable with the girls' morris dancing costume if time and resources were no object.

The dresses we created helped to generate conversation and debate, enabling me to develop my research in ways that invited the participation and collaboration of the girls' morris community. I understood this exchange as another form of inquiry, which re-connected "interview" with its original meaning in French, *s'entrevoir*—that is, "to see each other." Later on, the dresses were worn at the Lower Withington Carnival, representing the first occasion in which girls' morris had been seen in the village since the 1960s (see figure 4). Researching through dressmaking—and through participation in dancers' social lives—offered me a space that disrupted my conventional methods of observation, interview, and performance: it presented a new space in which I could work with others to explore broader questions about girls' morris dancing.

MATERIAL PRACTICE AS A RESEARCH TECHNIQUE

Working as a dressmaker gave me a privileged vantage point from which to observe the costume-making process of Orcadia Morris Dancers and to learn about the practice of girls' morris dancing more broadly. In this respect my apprenticeship functioned in a similar way to John Baily's "performance-as-a-research-technique": it provided me with an "understandable role and status" within the community, which offered "potentially crucial insights about [girls' morris dancing] methods

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and institutions" (2001:95). Coming to girls' morris without the benefit of an established canon of literature, almost all knowledge generated by my research was in some way a consequence of my role as a dressmaker. I found that my relationship with Samantha opened doors to other members of the morris dancing community, offering me a character reference and shared point of interest, as well as a way to reciprocate through the making of new dresses.

Like performance as a research technique, my engagement with material practice also enabled me to explore girls' morris dancing "from the inside" (ibid.).[16] Approaching girls' morris dancing via costumes, instead of as a performer, reframed my research questions, shifting focus away from the embodiments of dance toward performance as a material and visual phenomenon. My apprenticeship highlighted the important role of dressmaking in girls' morris troupes, revealing some of the ways in which material practices crossed into the performance arena and the wider social life of the troupe. It was the close involvement of dancers and supporters in the making of costumes that suggested to me how girls' morris dress might be viewed as a symbol of the community's sense of autonomy and self-determination. Locating girls' morris dancing in the wider context of UK morris material traditions, I felt that the frequent evolutions of the girls' morris costume demonstrated a highly generative approach to the task of continuation which, unlike many folk revival groups, does not foreground an historical aesthetic.

This interpretation of the material practices of girls' morris participants may help to make a bigger point about tradition. Reflecting further on the ways in which girls' morris costumes differ from those of folk revival morris dancers, I postulate that the historical neglect of girls' morris by scholars—attributed, in part, to assumptions about its contemporary origin (Heaney 2006)—might be indicative of an unstated emphasis on visual and material appearance in some transmission models of tradition. Girls' morris dancers are not widely viewed as traditional dance performers perhaps because their contemporary aesthetic fails to live up to popular expectations of how a tradition should be presented.[17] This aesthetic is more closely represented by the costumes of folk revival morris performers, whose reference to historical models may correspond more closely to popular ideas about the "unchanging" nature of tradition.

It is an oft-repeated sentiment in folklore studies that practices that do not adequately adapt to the changing needs of communities risk becoming irrelevant

16. With a parallel practice as a dancer, perhaps a more obvious approach would have been to research girls' morris dancing by participation in the performance itself. However, the specific nature of membership of girls' morris troupes raised feasibility issues from the outset. While I occasionally trained alongside the troupe on the "backline"—a common practice for novice or injured dancers in preparation for (re)joining the main performance team—the very high levels of skill and commitment would have been impractical during the period of my research.

17. It is important to stress that it is not my intention to suggest that girls' morris participants *should* begin to self-identify as traditional performers. Rather, my interest is in attempting to articulate why the performance has historically been absent from descriptions of English folk dance.

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or obsolete (see Jacobs 1893; Bennett 1993). As anthropologists Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold suggest, traditions are defined by change and renewal: "Real people, as the living organisms they are, continuously create themselves and one another, forging their histories and traditions as they go along" (2007:6). However, a gap between scholarly and popular understandings of the ways in which traditional practices adapt may lead to an identification with some practices and groups more strongly than others (Trubshaw 2002). It is also worth noting the generalized class distinction between participants of girls' morris and folk revival morris groups, suggesting that at present, tradition may be more strongly identified with a middle-class rather than working-class participation (Mackinnon 1993; Brocken 2003).[18]

Dressmaking has also enabled me to reflect on the efficacies of material practice as a research technique from the standpoint of an ethnomusicologist. While musical performance is sometimes considered the primary currency of ethnomusicological inquiry, now is a timely moment to consider the material interactions apparent in performance research, in keeping with a turn towards materialities in cognate fields such as anthropology (Ingold 2013), art history (Elkins 2008), and literary and cultural studies (Atkinson 2014). The material turn highlights ways in which materials (including the materials of performance) express consonance and dissonance with broader social and cultural values (e.g., Miller 2012), which are key issues for ethnomusicologists. It also reveals the agencies of material things, constituting a response to the "textualization" of culture with its dominant social and discursive constructions.[19] In particular, with regard to the more widespread acceptance of practice-led and artistic research, the scholarly value of non-text-based approaches has long been recognized in ethnomusicological methodology, and as such, ethnomusicologists are well placed to contribute to discussions on material practice.

My evaluation of dressmaking in the context of girls' morris dancing research should not, of course, attempt to enforce a straightforward dichotomy between the material and the performed. Both performing and making are integral practices of performance communities, complementary rather than distinct or opposed—and we might beneficially explore making as a type of performance in itself. Ethnomusicologists already employ a wide range of methods and approaches, challenging expectations that performance scholars should "privilege

18. Folk revival morris performance is typically associated with middle-class participants while girls' morris dancing is predominantly performed by young working-class girls and women. Of course, a contemporary association with middle-class practitioners stands in marked contrast to the working-class performers documented by the early folk revivalists. This shift reflects the broad ideological and pedagogical aims of the English folk movement. As Boyes writes of the "re-appropriation" of traditional materials, "At a stroke the possibility appeared that the urban working class could be re-made in unthreatening form and provided with a role in a culture for all" (1993:71).

19. The material turn is typically positioned in response to a parallel "digital turn" (Dever 2014), which now impacts most areas of life and research, including music.

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'doing music' over other kinds of fieldwork participation" (Bigenho 2008:28) and although material practice is not yet a common focus or methodological device, ethnomusicologists frequently engage with material artefacts, including musical instruments, technologies, recordings, and costumes.[20] Indeed, Roda's recent "materialist music ethnography" also involved undertaking an apprenticeship in a tabla-maker's studio (2014), demonstrating that performance and materiality intersect in many ethnomusicological endeavours and can be an integral and illuminating part of the research experience and dissemination.

Perhaps most importantly, material practice as a research technique opens new ways of relating to the process and participants of research. Ingold (2013) advocates for the "transformational" potential of making (used broadly to refer to multiple forms of creating and designing) to transform understanding of human life and sociability, suggesting that scholars seek studies *with*, in addition to studies *of*, social relations. He writes that "we are already used to the idea that the results of anthropological fieldwork need not be confined to written texts … but could they also include drawings, paintings or sculpture [etc.]?" (Ingold 2013:8). Ingold's rejection of the hylomorphic model of human mastery over the material world in favour of a fluid, dialogical relationship between makers, making, and effect (ibid.:21) is mirrored in experiential accounts of musical performance, in which instruments are described as being "mastered" by the player. Skilled performers know that each instrument has its own material qualities and conditions that must be understood and harnessed; the musician must play *with*—literally alongside—the instrument, in order to exploit its best potential. In a similar way, ethnomusicologists might perceive their research as a dialogical relationship between researcher and researched, between different kinds of makers and different kinds of created output.

In his study of tabla-making, Roda remarks that "by corresponding with the material in terms of what it does rather than what it is, I was able to learn from it and be transformed by it" (2014:365). Although the outcomes of my work were not fundamentally concerned with the material qualities of fabric or with understanding dressmaking as an end in itself, my pursuit of material practice as research in the girls' morris community was transformative, influencing the trajectory of my inquiry and laying the foundation for an ongoing relationship with girls' morris dance participants. Five years later, the material processes begun during my apprenticeship continue to function as way-markers for my unfolding research within the community.

20. Related fields, such as musicology and anthropology, are sometimes perceived as more sensitive to materialities than ethnomusicology. Such perceptions occasionally lead to overstatements of the role of musical performance within ethnomusicological inquiry, leading to accusations of phonocentrism (Atkinson 2014). An emphasis on performance-as-a-research-technique might also result from the desire to differentiate ethnomusicology from other disciplines.

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.49.2017.0026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgement and thanks are due in particular to Samantha Hamer for her ongoing support and expertise, and to Orcadia Morris Dancers for welcoming me into their community. Thanks also to Tilo Reifenstein and Theresa Buckland for their help in preparing this manuscript, as well as to my two anonymous reviewers and the *Yearbook*'s editor and editorial assistant for their patience and close engagement with my text. This article is dedicated to the memory of Lyn Booth.

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