



25th BIRTHDAY WEEKEND 21st-23rd JULY

When you've got a major anniversary coming up you start the planning early. Well you do if you have even a modicum of sense and Suzanne our Squire has buckets of it, thankfully. So invitations to our special weekend were sent out before we had even sent the invitations to our twenty-fourth! We sent eight invitations - and received eight acceptances. We didn't even have room for a wild card entry. Apologies to all the sides we couldn't ask. It's even harder when we've announced that we're taking a break from this weekend for a while, but watch this space!

So now it was down to some serious planning. We obviously wanted to keep the key elements from our normal, very popular event but to add highlights that would make it memorable for not just our guests, but for ourselves as well. Twelve months of ideas and teamwork building ensued, all leading to the knowledge that we were going to give our guests an absolutely cracking weekend.

Schools broke up on the Wednesday, so Crook members were at the school in Coniston in force from the Thursday night. The starkness of the John Ruskin School Hall was transformed with two thousand square feet of silver foil, massive silver 25s and Crook symbols, hundreds of silver balloons and enough streamers to launch the QE2. Juliet had done an amazing job.

Guests arrived to be greeted with very attractive 25th badges made by Maggy and Gary and a commemorative, recycled plastic mug with all the necessary bits to make a cocktail and even two vouchers for the two free drinks. Nice one Squire. The t-shirts, designed by Chris Malkin, were very smart and carried on the strong identity of the weekend. Soon everyone was tucking into excellent food, homemade as is always the way with Crook. At last the start of the cocktail party was announced and served by two of the most stunning cocktail waitresses you are ever likely to see, plus their minders! Crook Morris isn't daft when they know their guests so well! In no time at all we were ready for the entertainment to kick off.

Crook started it with all thirty-eight members of the side in black and silver (there's a surprise) absolutely raising the roof with their version of Les Barker's "I'm in the Morris Team". Hot on our heels were the "Cheeky Girls" - you had to see them to believe it! This

was followed by a touch of normality with a splendid twenty minutes of join-in French dancing with Mortimers and their fine musicians. No time for a rest as all two hundred and fifty of us tramped outside to be entertained by Technopire and Smiffy the pyrotechnic pensioner, as regularly seen at Whitby Folk Week.

Back in the hall and all was set up for Rique (give me and excuse and I'll dress up!) and Claire with their woad enactment.

Hardly any hitches so far, but next up were Ryknild Rabble, oh dear! We had asked for detail of any PA or other requirements. Rabble had asked for two microphones. As they were about to go on ... Can we have all the lights off? ... Is it all right if we dance with sparklers? They won't damage anything, honest, they're strapped to our sticks, honest!!! Imagine the scene, a pitch-black hall, lit sparklers flying through the air as the strapping loosens and screams of anguish as the sparks land on unprotected flesh!! Will we ever forgive them? ... Yes, of course we have, we're Crook Morris!

Surprisingly, a short break was needed, and we were running to schedule - it's easy if you don't bother with one, but Dave, as well as being in two acts himself, had compared with aplomb and that always helps.

Glasses replenished, we hoped for a touch of decorum, then realised that next act was Silhill Morris with a join-in horse race game. No, we didn't understand it either, but what a hoot. Gaffer controlled the starts and the rest of Silhill did what they do best they stood around drinking and laughing at the representatives of the other sides making total fools of themselves. Truly magnificent!

Thank heaven for Sheffield City Morris. They brought and air of normality, almost, back into the night with some stunningly well-sung songs, though some of the lyrics were a little dubious!

The final act was back with Crook Morris and the Big Hats routine. It needed to be an item of stunning simplicity, well-choreographed and with exceptional timing. And at the rehearsal it was, indeed, all of that.

On the night it was perhaps a different matter. OK, we couldn't hear the music, so we came on at the wrong

time. OK the paint hadn't dried on one of the hats. OK, the stuck-on eyes and noses worked on dry skin, how was I to know that we would be hot and bothered and they would fall off during the performance. OK, it wasn't in the plan that one guy would collide with another and snap a big chunk of his brim off. OK, my dinner jacket kept sliding sown and the audience witnessed the sight of an arm descending from inside the hat to yank the garment back up! Well, what we reckoned was that we got away with it and that no-one noticed the odd glitch as they were all so p-ss-d that they thought it was deliberate.

Cool or what! Crook Morris rules. OK?

I believe that there was a fair bit more drinking and that somewhere about 3:30am the last of the stragglers staggered off to bed. That was one hell of a cracking good night.

to Bob the Saturday tours were a total delight. The timings were spot on, the coaches were on time and the drivers a really cheerful bunch. Every side danced with vigour and panache. We all showed the public that traditional dance is fun, colourful and spectacular. It was really good to meet up with every other side during the day and with good crowds we all enjoyed each other's dances. Even the packed lunches carried a surprise with special bags of sweeties (jelly babies, fried eggs, sherbet space ships). The steamer on the lake saw lots of playing and dancing and included just about the best ever performance by Crook Rapper. We must practice sometime!

can honestly say that we were stunned by the effort and creativity which our guests put into their costume for the Saturday evening meal. There were hats the shape of birthday cakes, one whole side had individually worked out a "twenty five" theme with costumes decorated with, for example, twenty five crooks, corks, party poppers, etc. One side insisted on wearing burglar masks and kept stealing the microphone!

Yes, there were speeches of thanks and all that stuff and Squire Suzanne got her tankard for two years of hard graft. She has been brill. Of special note was that the truly sumptuous, two hundred portions of locally farmed, free range chicken that had been cooked by our most ardent vegetarian. It was hats off to Jenny. Even Judy had her gorgeous salads all ready on time. There were rumours that, with emotions running high, I almost couldn't speak. I said almost!!

The weather was stinking hot and we were so happy that we had chosen our side's favourite ceilidh band, This Way Up. We've run eighteen of these weekends and they've been the chosen band on four occasions and have absolutely always given us a brilliant night. Our traditional mid-dance break of a reverse bingo has always been good. This year we had over £500 worth of prizes on show and the woman who won third, I think, couldn't believe that she had won not one prize but about a dozen items, all of excellent quality.

The singing and dancing continued as ever, almost to the dawn chorus. It will have been a relief to Simon and Mark that the cocktails had been brilliant, the bar had run smoothly and that we even had chilled white wine and ice for those who wanted it. Job well done guys.

Sunday - our third day of stunning summer weather. The procession in Kirkby Lonsdale delivers a powerful message to the English public that we have our own culture, and we are proud of it. We had laid on a PA so that, with the help of Richard and Dick, we could let the audience know who they were watching and where they were from. It does give a more professional delivery.

It helped that Anne had produced a special weekend leaflet with information for our audiences. The day was exactly what we had wanted it to be.

Crook Morris danced first and later on we were joined by quite a few past members, whom we were delighted to see. To be able to dance four sets is a rarity for most Morris sides. We were so pleased to be joined by Carreg Las, Chiltern Hundreds, Loose Women, Mortimers Morris, Ryknild Rabble, Sheffield City Morris and Silhill Morris. They made our twenty-fifth just about the best weekend we could have hoped for.

The final Dorset Four-Hand Reel was splendid and the beautiful singing from Sheffield City of John Tams' "Rolling Home" left the whole of Crook with tears running down our faces but great bit smiles as well and a sense of belonging which is hard to explain.

MARTYN HARVEY (FOREMAN & FOUNDER CROOK MORRIS)