

## Fylde Coast Cloggers' World Tour of Lancashire May 6<sup>th</sup> 2013



Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue . . . . .

This day was not a wedding, but it was certainly an anniversary to remember. Fylde Coast Cloggers is a women's team of morris dancers dancing in the North West style and we are celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Many of our dances are traditional (something old), some are composed and choreographed in the traditional style by members of the side (something new) and, in a few cases, we have taken (borrowed) dances from other traditions and made them our own. Many of our dances are associated with places in Lancashire and this celebration day out was to take us to all the Lancashire locations named in our repertoire, to dance the special dances in situ and include as many other Lancashire based dances as we could along the way. Just for the fun of it.

Morris dancers are known for dancing at dawn on May Day. Well, this was at least May Day Bank holiday and, although it was not dawn, it felt pretty early as our bus, driven by a rather bemused Welshman, collected the dancers, the band, the groupies and the kit at 8.45am at **Warton** near Preston. Only 10 minutes down the road we were arriving at **Lytham Green** to dance "Lytham Mill" (new) by the side of the iconic white windmill



which is the emblem of the town and our team. We followed this with a garland dance called "Lytham St Annes" (old) before rejoining the bus to cross the Fylde countryside to take in "Fylde Folly" (new) by the signpost on **Wrea Green** which points to some of the small places mentioned in the figures of the dance, e.g. **Kirkham** and **Singleton**.





We continued the journey across rural Fylde, for our assault on **Poulton le Fylde** railway station. There seemed to be such an echo as we clattered down the station steps in our clogs, with the bells rattling to the odd stray chord on the melodeons, amid our excited chatter. With an audience of not many, we danced "Poulton le Fylde" (old) as a train rattled through, slowly enough to see faces and smiles at the windows as it passed.

Time was of the essence and we pressed on along the A586, calling at **Churchtown** for a quick photo call. We would have to dance "Churchtown" at the next stop, for we were expected at Oakfield Nursing Home near **Forton** on the A6. Fylde Coast Cloggers was founded by the team's original Squire, Sheila Mugan. In recent years Sheila has been in very poor health, not always able to relate to what is happening around her and sometimes apparently distant and difficult



to reach. As a tribute to her drive and commitment we took our tour to her at Oakfield, and it was here we danced "Churchtown" (old), "Annie M" (new), the dance Sheila herself composed in memory of her late mother-in-law, and a couple of the dances from Sheila's era which we hoped would stir in her memory, "Dolly" (old) and "Green Willow" (borrowed from Playford dancing). We hoped for a smile of recognition from Sheila, but what we actually got was absolute joy and rapture on her face, her feet tapping perfectly to the music, and her hands clutching a tambourine. I think there is something very visceral about north-west morris tunes which can reach into our soul, where other music cannot reach. A fabulous result, made all the better because Sheila's family were there to see it.



By now the morning was getting late, and there was still a way to go down the M6 to our next stop. In the 1800s, the present street known as Waltons Parade was on the outskirts of **Preston**, but then the railway station was built nearby and now this narrow sloping street is in the midst of the city centre. No room here for a coach to wait for dancers, so after a photo shoot in the street to mark the event, we danced "Waltons Parade" (new, we think) at the Continental Pub round the corner, along with "Lancashire Rose" (new) and "Ragged Crow" (borrowed from border morris). Time here for lunch and a breather too.



They say that time flies when you are having fun, and in no time at all we were fed, watered and back in the bus, this time on an urban journey. This was to be a day characterised by railway stations because of the boldness of their signage and the exactness of their location, and now we were on our way to **Lostock** station. I came here twice beforehand and found the station deserted each time, so I concluded this was an unmanned station. Imagine my surprise as we all clattered towards the platform gate, when the door in an apparently closed cabin opened and the lady on duty asked what was going on! I hurriedly explained and her face was overcome with panic as, probably, elf n safety was rearing its ubiquitous head. After reassuring her we didn't want to go on the platform itself, just get the Lostock sign in the picture, all was ok. "Lostock" (new) and "Polly" (old) were danced by the ticket cabin outside the station and we were all happy and on our way inside 15 minutes, having had waves from a passing train and shock and awe from some French people buying tickets.



My dictionary defines an "odyssey" as "an extended adventurous voyage or trip", and "an intellectual or spiritual quest". By now today was definitely beginning to feel that way, and still two more stops to make. Next was the stop which gave rise to this whole idea, that is to dance "Blackrod" (old) in **Blackrod**, and again the railway station was designated, this time truly unmanned but with some commuters coming and going, clicking their camera phones to record their surprise. One more for the road, "Conington" (another borrowed from Playford) and we were off to the final destination.

When you actually have a genuine Australian north west morris dance in your repertoire, imported by two of your team members who learned it there while on holiday, where would you go to give the dance some authenticity? (No, not Australia!) We thought about Whitby, from where Captain Cook sailed when he discovered Australia. No, that would be too far away. We thought about Liverpool, from where many prisoners were transported to Botany Bay. No, still too far away. But the light bulb came on just then. Botany Bay Mill at **Chorley** was the perfect tongue-in-cheek choice. Out came the didgeridoo, and with some of us sporting corks dangling from hats we danced



"Marton Bay" to the tunes of South Australia and Waltzing Matilda. We rounded off the odyssey with "Belfagan" (borrowed from Cumbria), "Martin's Mallarkey" (new) commemorating our late, great jester now dancing with the ultimate morris side, and a reprise of our signature dance from home, "Lytham St Annes"

The tea and cakes were very welcome and we came home very happy with our day. We had plenty of the "old" tradition, some "new" from the living tradition, and some "borrowed" from a different tradition. And what of the "blue"? I hear you ask. Time will tell, but I venture to say May 6<sup>th</sup> could turn out to be the day we had summer 2013, for the sky was the clearest and bluest sky you could hope for in this wonderful country of ours.

Who says the English have no traditions left?