

## A Strange Ancient Dance with Unknown Origins □ How Far Back Does the Morris Dance Really Go?

Morris dancing is a type of folk dance from England. It is unclear as to when Morris Dancing began to be performed, though there is evidence that this dance has existed for several centuries, the earliest reference being from the year 1448. It has also been claimed that the dance is so ancient that its origins have been lost in the mists of time.

### Moorish Origins?

The name of this traditional English dance is said to have been derived from the word 'Moorish' or 'Morisco' (a derogatory term meaning 'little Moors'), however it is uncertain if this was the original name for the dance. Nonetheless, during the Late Middle Ages Morris dancers were occasionally referred to as 'morisco dancers'. During the 17th century, Morris dancing did have some connection with the Moors, as dancers blackened their faces, and tied bells to their legs. The latter was believed to have had something to do with North Africa. Whilst this theory was accepted for some time, doubts have been cast as there is a lack of strong, irrefutable evidence that this dance had anything to do with the Moors or the way they danced.



*Morris dancers with black-painted faces. This is traditional in Morris dances along the border of Wales.*

**A Pagan Past?** Another popular notion attached to Morris Dancing is that it has its roots in the pagan past of England, hence the claim that its origins have been lost over time due to it being so ancient. Proponents of this view point to the fact that in various societies around the world, the celebration of a festival would typically involve one form of dance or another. Therefore, it has been argued that Morris Dancing was performed during ancient Celtic festivals and at ritual ceremonies conducted at megalithic sites such as Stonehenge. It has also been suggested that Morris Dancing was once a type of fertility dance. However, there is a lack of evidence supporting this claim for the dance's origins as well.