

## Isca Morrismen

Isca Morrismen were formed in 1976 by three experienced dancers, and we take our name from the Roman Fortress of the Second Augustan Legion which once stood on the site of the town of Caerleon in the old county of Gwent in Southeast Wales, UK. We wear the national colours of Wales (red, white and green) and the kit includes a red sash on which is mounted a Roman helmet badge. The green Monmouth caps which we wear were once knitted in the county and are an example of one of the earliest surviving medieval knitted garments, extremely handy for the cold Welsh weather. Our kit also includes green britches, white shirts and socks together with a tatty coat.

Morris dancing has a long history and is thought to have originated many centuries ago as part of a primitive religious ceremony. Throughout Britain most villages used to have their own team of Morris dancers with their own dances, costumes and allied characters and this area was no exception. Morris dancers had become a local rarity however by the end of the nineteenth century and few of these local teams survived. Fortunately the steps and tunes of the ancient dances were noted down by a selection of prominent Victorian folklorists from some of the surviving older dancers and in recent years there has been a great revival in the dancing. Unfortunately with the upheavals of industrialisation and the upsurge of the chapels, very few Welsh dances survived to be collected. The side continues to research into the local dancing history and would be keen to hear from anyone with knowledge of Morris and associated rituals in the South Wales and Borders area.

The music associated with the dancing uses both ancient and modern tunes, several being popularised in recent years. The traditional instruments were the fiddle, pipe and tabor (drum) and more recently the concertina. Nowadays these are joined by the accordion and other related instruments. With their colourful traditional costumes and superb musicians, the Isca Morrismen bring history alive, adding colour and atmosphere to any occasion.



The Isca Morrismen have danced at many different types of event, ranging through Barn Dances and Folk Clubs to Fetes and larger Folk Festivals and have appeared on television and radio on several occasions. In recent years, the side has travelled extensively throughout Wales and the English Counties and represented Wales at festivals in France, Germany, Guernsey and the Czech Republic. The Isca Morrismen are also active with visitors from other countries and have entertained folk dancers from a variety of European countries.

Our dancing season usually extends from May 1st (when we dance at dawn in the Roman amphitheatre at Caerleon) to about mid-September, every Wednesday evening, at a variety of real ale pubs across Newport, Torfaen and Monmouthshire. We can also be seen some weekends in various parts of this country and abroad. During the winter the side dances out on Halloween, Boxing Day and Twelfth Night and also occasionally at Ales and other traditional events. In addition, the side holds an annual family dance weekend every September when we are host to a large number of sides from all over the country.

As well as the normal dancing repertoire, the side traditionally performs in aid of a variety of children's charities each year. In the run up to Christmas, the Isca Mummies act in a local Gwent Mumming Play. Recently there has also been a revival on Twelfth Night of the Mari Lwyd (or Grey Mare) which starts from the Star Inn at Llanfihangel Tor-y-mynydd and visits several of the local houses. The Mari Lwyd ceremony has been described as a pre-Christian horse ceremony associated with similar customs spread throughout the world. The Mari Lwyd itself consists of a decorated horse's skull on a pole draped with a white sheet, the decoration varying depending on the original area of the performance.

The Isca Morrismen hope that you enjoy our performance of traditional Morris Dancing and are always pleased to hear from you. The side is proud to be a member of the Morris Ring, the central organisation for Morris and Sword groups which ensures the survival of this ancient and traditional art. For the latest information on the Isca Morrismen, please visit our internet website which can be found at <http://www.Isca-Morrismen.com>

Alternatively please feel free to email us at [Enquiries@Isca-Morrismen.com](mailto:Enquiries@Isca-Morrismen.com)



The Isca Morrismen wish to acknowledge the support and encouragement of The Gladiator where the side practices during the winter months. Our traditional dancing programme is sponsored by local Welsh Breweries, all producers of excellent real ale, and we are grateful for their wholehearted support. These include the Otley Brewing Company, Cwmbran and Warcop Breweries and Tomas Watkins Ales.



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