

# The Swan Song

March/April 2001

Edition 4

A Buckingham's Retinue Publication©

For those of you who haven't been keeping up with group developments over the past few months then this newsletter should get you up to speed. Because of our own AGM and also that of Livery & Maintenance occurring the same weekend there's a lot to report. There's also a lot to think about and do for the coming year. So please read on and take note as some of it's important and involves everybody. There's info regarding our new committee, membership for the coming year and what's going on in the world of re-enactment. Catherine Wetton has also written up how to play the game of Nine Men's Merel, all you need is a board with some lines on it apparently. There is also an excellent snippet about some of the more unscrupulous activities of the Stafford's. Yes, they were up to it then as well! For those of you who have noticed the lack of cartoons, well, you'll just have to cope until next time when we should have some more.

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## The Feast

For those members that did not attend the feast this year, boy did you miss a party! Based at Treowen, a fabulous manor house set in rural surroundings between Raglan and Monmouth, Buckingham's Retinue held the 2001 feast. Arriving from 4pm onwards on the Friday afternoon, the place gradually filled up with voices and kit as people found beds and explored. The kitchen, ever a place for congregating, quickly echoed with calls for tea and coffee and shouts of greeting as members appeared. The dining room was set up for the evening and food prepared as the group got itself organised for the evening meal. Apart from the occasional party loosing their way and the few late arrivals everything started as planned.

Optional fancy dress was the dress code and, as usual the group did themselves proud. We were visited by 2 versions of death, though while Kathryn Ribbons was by far the sexier, Simon Lane was indeed far more unnerving.

Keith Williams was excellent as Bob the builder. As were Chris, Allan and Phil as the Three Musketeers (although Allan's wig made him look like Mark Vance)! Darren Brown and Will Howell, who both came in kilts, showed a certain Celtic influence. Simon Clegg and Vicky appeared as re-incarnations of Janice Joplin and Michael Hutchins, although admittedly Cleggy's blue face ensured that he had more than a passing resemblance to a Smurf! Rachel Reeves' costume of Cruella De'ville was superb, and Rosie showed just how petite she is by wearing a brownie uniform! Wendy looked suitably Romany in a gypsy costume and Vicky looked lovely in her enchantress costume, albeit comment was passed that her hat reminded someone of Mickey Mouse whilst rather excited! However Paul Bravey's costume of an American was completely unfair considering he's been living out there for a few months now!

A big thank you to Kathryn Ribbins for organising the food for the Friday evening, especially the cheesecake! Everyone did a sterling job preparing the food, and with everything eaten and tidied away, the evening drew to a close with the most of the group tucked up in the snug. Saturday dawned with breakfast in bed for myself, with shouts for tea and coffee drifting up from the kitchen. With the traditional sausage and bacon sandwich in them many prepared themselves for a day of rehearsals, gossip and the AGM. Despite polishing off the majority of a bottle of port on his own, Chris Howell did a sterling job of Chairing our annual general meeting.

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Could anyone with any contributions please send them to the address above, the next issue will hopefully be ready sometime around May.

Thanks to prior planning and a few weeks preparation, the feast went off without a hitch. A big thank you to all those members who helped clean and tidy the kitchen after the feast, as well as the members who prepared the food.

The entertainment was a treat indeed this year. Darren Brown's play "The Rise and Fall of the Plantagenets" was truly epic. Starring Paul Bravey, Mark Hewitt, George, Darren and Cleggy, who proved to be the product of some rather inspirational casting. Emma Atkinson's monologue was excellent, although the sad ending left the group quiet for a while. The Four Old Re-enactors sketch, based on the Monty Python version, starring Allan Harley, Simon Lane, Ali Clamp and Paul Hadfield was enormously entertaining. The most worrying part of the sketch was that the whole thing was based around the truth (and also Simon having to use the wall to stand upright because he was so drunk)!

Then came the prize giving. Best Man and Best Woman, now renamed the Fred and Mabel awards, thanks to Keith Williams. A pair of new boots were awarded to Paul Hadfield, for his help and support, especially

for the building projects, and Samantha Kracke was awarded with a breast plate, for putting up with so many of us descending on her throughout the year and for her great contribution and support towards the group. Best newcomer was awarded to Louise, who was presented with archery supplies. The new award of Cheyenne dog soldier went to Simon Lane, Will Howell and Allan Harley, whom were presented with studded dog collars for being too eager on the field and not staying in line! Then Chris was caught out and bestowed with a new Stafford Collar and decorated tile from Stafford Castle, as a token of appreciation for all his hard work. Bearing full stomachs the group retired to the games room and snug for the rest of the evening to finish off any remaining alcohol and talk the remainder of the evening away.

Sunday started quietly with Allan and Chris leaving at some god-forsaken hour to make the L&M AGM at Warwick. Everyone was amazed to see Will Howell actually make it out of bed and downstairs before midday! An honourable mention for Paul Bravey as well in convincing his employer to pay for a flight across the Atlantic so he could attend.

*Catherine Wetton*

## The Siege of Stanton Harcourt Church

One of the most interesting aspects of the Wars of the Roses was the general lawlessness, which often culminated in the large battles we know so well. However, because of the corruption and lack of justice many wealthy families of the time developed personal feuds, some of which they were able to resolve only through battle. The Stafford family were not immune from this, and the more minor branch of the family from Grafton became embroiled in an argument with some supporter's of the Duke of Suffolk. Suffolk was the King's favourite during the late 1440's and many of his retainer's were involved in illegal acts and conducted a virtual reign of terror over most of East Anglia. Sir Robert Harcourt was one such fellow. Even other peer's were unable to take action due to Suffolk's influence and support from the King.

On May 1448, Sir Humphrey Stafford of Grafton, his eldest son Richard and a number of his servants, were making for their Inn at Coventry when they met Sir Robert Harcourt and his attendants. They immediately fell to blows. Harcourt struck Richard on the head with his sword, not seriously, for the young man made at Harcourt with his dagger. He stumbled and one of Harcourt's men stabbed

him in the back mortally. Sir Humphrey was also struck from behind and fell from his horse. A general melee ensued in which Stafford's servants killed two of Harcourt's men. The city coroner's indicted Sir Robert the next day of murder and he was detained in Chester Castle for a while. However he was soon released and had still not been brought to trial a year later, through Suffolk's influencing the local Sheriff by a writ of the Privy Seal.

Tired of waiting for satisfaction by judicial means, the Stafford's assembled some two hundred friends and tenants, travelling by night to Stanton Harcourt in Oxfordshire. Sir Robert had enough warning to make for the tower of the parish church. Where upon they laid siege to it for more than six hours, loosing off over a thousand arrows and killing one Harcourt retainer. Tiring of this they then threatened to set fire to the tower, which they did as he would not come out. However Harcourt was fortunate and managed to hold out until they had to withdraw. Soon after Sir Humphrey was killed in London during Cade's Rebellion, although his bastard son Humphrey was able to exact revenge in 1469 when he finally killed Harcourt.

## The Game of Merels or Nine Men's Morris

Nine Men's Morris or Merels (Merreles) is a simple two-player board game originating possibly as early as 1400 BC. Variations have been played throughout the ages and there are many different versions. Popular throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth century, it's a great one to play during quieter moments at events. The object of the game is to make as many mills as possible, while making it impossible for your opponent to make a move by either blocking them in or taking so many pieces they are only left with two.

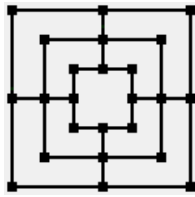


Figure 1: The normal Merels board

Merels is played on a square board, (as shown in Figure 1). The counters move between 24 points on the board (marked with dots in Figure 1), but may only move along the drawn connecting lines to adjacent points. Unlike chess or draughts, rather than the counters being set out in a designated pattern, the players place one of their counters on an unoccupied point on the board in alternating turns until all nine are placed. Only one counter may occupy and point at any one time. Play continues in alternate moves, each player moving one counter per move, along a line to an adjacent point.

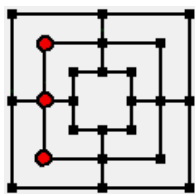


Figure 2: A Mill

The idea of the game, as mentioned above, is to form as many mills as possible. These consist of a horizontal or vertical line of counters along three connecting points (Figure 2). All three counters must belong to one player only. For each mill that they make, they capture (or pound), a counter belonging to their opponent, which may be removed from the board, and cannot be brought back into play. A counter cannot be captured if it is within a mill. If a player is unable to move, or has too few counters left to make a mill, that

player loses. This would seem easy if you could make and break a mill with each turn. No such luck I'm afraid. The general rule is the same mill cannot be reformed by the same piece in a consecutive turn. But you can move the piece to form another mill.

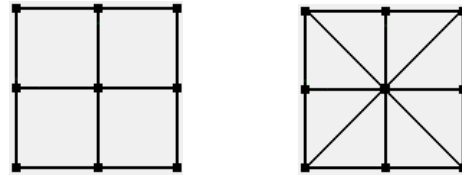


Figure 3: simple Merles boards

There are alternative rules and variations, although the group normally plays the common version. One of the alternatives to the usual rules is that the new mill is made along a separate line. Another alternative is when a player is reduced to three counters, they can move these to any empty point on the board. This may lengthen the game, but can also still produce a stalemate situation.

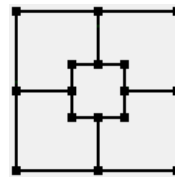


Figure 4: The Five Men's Morris Board

There are numerical variations of the game, which can be played as an alternative to the popular nine counter game. The boards shown in figure 3 are simple versions of this game. These are played with only 3 counters, as there isn't quite enough room for nine! The second board featured in Figure 3 may be played with four counters.

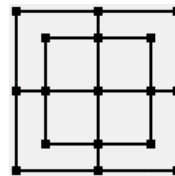


Figure 5: The Seven Men's Morris Board

A game of Four Men's Morris can be played on a slightly simpler version of the common board (Figure 4) and Five Men's Morris on another variation (Figure 5)

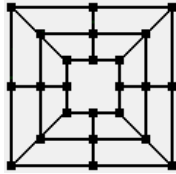


Figure 6: The Twelve Men's Morris Board

Figure 6 shows the Twelve Men's Morris board, a slightly more complex version of the usual geometric board. In all versions of the game from Three Men's Morris through to Twelve Men's Morris, Mills are made as in the common game, by forming three counters in a row along a drawn connecting line.

References are available from the Editor.

Catherine Wetton

## Our AGM

Bad luck if you had to sit through it, I forgot my pillow this year which was a shame! Though it has to be said it wasn't necessary in the end, the meeting was concise and a number of agenda points were discussed and issues raised, with general agreement on most of them. First off, the outgoing committee gave reports over the previous year that stated how fantastic we all were, or words to that effect! A number of agenda issues were raised regarding the future of the group. First off, the issue of Livery & Maintenance and our position within the organisation was discussed. It was acknowledged that we are having difficulty knowing where we fit into L&M at the moment, in part through a difference in attitude to re-enactment. However, the general feeling was that it was worth staying within L&M and working hard to improve the events in the future. A discussion of our events for the coming year was made, with the point being raised that we cannot rely on English Heritage anymore and will have to look outside for events in the future. As a result of this it has already become necessary to start booking events for 2002 now. What equipment the group needs to make for the year was also brought up and is discussed in more detail later

on. So too did training, which is also mentioned later on. The problem of group bills, or the lack of them was also mentioned. It was felt that in general people should own their own bills if they intend to fight and that provisions would be made to help buy some more. The general lack of spare equipment also led to the issue of missing kit, mainly from Blore Heath. It was decided later on that any group/personal kit loaned out to newcomers should be recorded. That way it can more easily be kept track of.

As usual a new committee was elected at the AGM, which took place at the end of the meeting. It is only fair to mention first the effort put in by those people who formed the committee last year and those that assisted them, without which our events would not be possible. Those fools that have been elected to stand this year are listed below with their addresses and positions. Please feel free to contact them for any reason, though you are best to try to direct it toward the person most relevant.

Full copies of the Minutes, which were kindly typed up by Catherine Wetton, are available upon request.

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## Livery & Maintenance AGM

Whilst some were still in bed, sleeping off the nine courses and assorted beverages of the night before, Chris and Allan were valiantly driving to Warwick for a meeting with the other representatives of L&M. As discussed at our own meeting, it was decided that our interests still lay with those of L&M and that every effort should be made to support it through the coming year. The meeting had unfortunately been scheduled the same weekend as our Feast and AGM but was unable to be changed, despite the fact that it had been specifically stated that we were unable to attend that weekend. Due to this, one of the proposal's put forward by us was to move the date of the AGM to November. To help avoid this happening in the future and to give the new committee time to plan the coming season. This proposal was passed. Another proposal we suggested is for L&M to adopt a three-quote system for all purchases, where possible, to avoid valuable funds being spent poorly. This was also passed.

It was agreed Buckingham's Retinue should help to coordinate Battle Abbey, Old Sarum in conjunction with the Clarences and Kirby Hall in conjunction with the Gloucester's and Gascoignes. Due to the confusion in event bookings for this year it was agreed that Livery and Maintenance should only seek four events in 2002. Mark Vance put forward the Gloucester's sword safety rules for use by L&M. They have been temporarily adopted and basically state that the point of all swords should have a curve of at least a 5 pence piece. In addition all sword combatants should also be passed by a group proficiency officer, thankfully being a professional group nobody should have any trouble meeting that requirement. These rules do not apply to any

other weapon type so don't worry about them overly.

No agreement on women fighting was reached with specific reference to cross-dressing. Despite arguing that it was discrimination, the issue was not moved forward. The case was brought up that if a black person wished to join how would that be dealt with? One rather interesting answer given was that it could be explained by the person could be a 'genetic freak'. As there have been cases of white people today having children with Black skin pigmentation, so conceivably it could have happened in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Just what are they on! Chris Howell suggested a "colour blind" approach, whereby re-enactment recognises the rich multi-cultural diversity of the present day and ignores the colour of a new recruits skin.

At the end of the meeting the elections for new officers took place, with the entire committee from the previous year not re-standing. Chris Howell stood for Chairman on behalf of our group and Allan Harley as Health & Safety. However, Chris was not voted into the position as out of those in attendance, only the Lincolns and Burghs supported his nomination. With all other groups either voting for Clair Holliday from the Levy or abstaining. By default Chris now has the position of Vice-Chair. Allan was also not elected to the position of Health and Safety, with it going to Willo Butcher from the Clarences instead. The other posts were taken by Phil Hill from the Gloucester's as Secretary, and Jo Robson from the Clarence's as Treasurer.

Full copies of our minutes are available on request, although the official ones are not yet available.

## Membership

As secretary it now falls to myself to send out membership forms, of which you should all have received a copy of the new form for 2001 with this newsletter. If not then please let me know and I'll send you one. The membership form has changed now to include additional questions on whether you own a bow or a bill. As discussed at the AGM, we are going to try to form an archer block this year and it will be helpful to know who has their own Longbow. That way we can try to persuade you to bring them more often! Also, for those people who wish to fight it is now becoming a priority to own your own bill due to the expansion of the group. This way we can work towards helping everybody equip themselves who needs one. In addition, could I ask all those who are able, to please agree to receive warning orders by e-mail. It dramatically cuts down on printing & postage costs, as well as saving valuable time. The warning orders and all other information will be available on the web site, which is to be re-

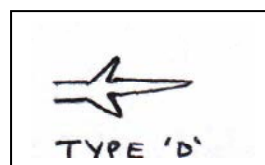
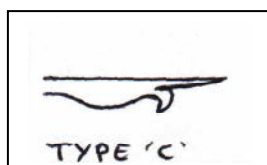
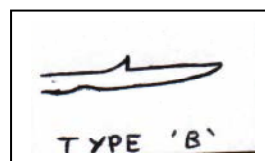
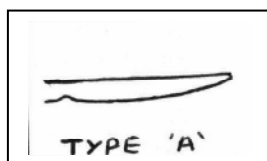
vamped and completed over the next month. So you will also be able to find them there way in advance of the event.

The terms of membership remain the same as last year, with the cost staying at £15 for everyone over the age of 16. The membership forms may be sent to myself (Phil Howell – for those of you who haven't realised who's been writing this letter) **as soon as possible**, this is because we must pass all the names along to L&M to be covered by the insurance at our events. The first event of the season is therefore not soon enough. Could you please send cheques along to Darren or myself whichever is the most convenient. Thanks for your help on this, and remember if you don't get back to me soon I'm going to come looking!

## Which Bill?

For those people who attended Blore Heath they will probably be aware of the fact that we encountered a slight numerical problem regarding pole-arms. It being that we had about 15, not enough for 23 people to fight with at once. As the group is growing it's important we get more to allow us to increase our twatting potential. For those that don't already own bills and those among you who feel that one is not enough (just look at Master Harley who personally owns six) we have

found someone who can make us some. They are rather basic but serviceable and we can also obtain good quality shafts to put them on. They will cost you around £25 each, which is very reasonable (£80 being typical). If you could contact me and let me know I'd appreciate it so that we can put in a bulk order and get them all shafted. Any of the four designs below are recommended, though if you can draw your own design full size on paper we can have it made.



On another note, we have just received the information for Tewkesbury, and in line with their ever-increasing level of safety they have stated that no one will be allowed on the battlefield without a helmet, even if they only intend to carry water. For those people who don't own their own and normally come onto the field, or wish to do archery for example, can I strongly recommend getting one. There are not enough spare helmets in the group and those we do have will go out to the most recent newcomers first. The normal cost of a good sallet is around £220. However, we have negotiated with Mark Taylor to produce high quality visor-less archers sallets for £80. These will come with a proper chinstrap and spider webbing inside. The only difference is they

will not have been polished off properly. This leaves it up to you to either get some sand paper out or to paint it. Definitely the best offer you will find and well worth getting. If you'd like one please let me know so we can order one for you now.

As some of you may know, being an impoverished student is a hard life these days. So to ease the burden of my finances I am open to making kit on people's behalf. I can do a variety of things, not all of them for sale! But if you're in need of some basic footwear then I may be of service. As some of you know I can also fletch arrows so please get in touch if you would like either.

## Training

It has become the fashion in recent years for many groups to hold regular training sessions. Not to be outdone by this some of us have been practicing throughout the off-season at Chris's house with some of our friends in the Stanley's. The improvements have been dramatic and well worth the effort. Anyone is welcome to attend, practice normally takes place on a Sunday morning at 11.00, weather permitting, although I'd recommend phoning in advance to check. Obviously this is quite a distance for most people to travel, so what we would like to do is to find somewhere indoors

to practice once a month. If anyone knows of somewhere between Stafford and Derby could they please contact us so we can try and arrange it. We have also been invited to come and train at Holdenby Hall with the Stanley's and other Fed groups on April 7<sup>th</sup>. It's our plan to go down for just the day, could anyone who is interested please let us know as soon as possible. Our group doesn't have an official invite and so we have to let them know who is going. This is a good chance to work with some decent groups outside L&M and practice our martial skills.

## Construction Projects

As discussed at the AGM the group is in the fortunate position of being able to finance a few little projects this year to help us at events. As per last year they will take place at Sam & Andy's house at Gnosall near Stafford. The dates have been set as the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> of March, though the second weekend is the same one as the trader fayre, so doubtless a few will be heading down to pick up their goodies first. After this there will then be a break and another two potential weekends if we need them. This year the intention is to make a set of steel-shod stakes for the archer block and to finish off the cannon. We also

need to repair the tables, have additional benches for the camp and make some poles for the banners and canopy. As well as clean up all the bills and shaft any new ones. There are also a number of other jobs which need doing that don't involve metal and wood working skills! If you're interested in coming to pitch in then please do, any help that you can give would be much appreciated. Please contact Sam & Andy to let them know you're coming and don't forget you're best power tools and workbench! And remember, if anyone asks we're re-enactors on our way to a massacre!

## Events

**Tudor events:** As some of you know, this year is going to be rather different in terms of our event mix and what we need to do in order to get ready for them. After the success of Dartmouth, English Heritage have presented us with two Tudor Events this year. Don't worry though, as Tudor is basically the same as late 15<sup>th</sup> century in terms of kit. Particularly since we're doing the early Tudor period anyway. For the common soldier you need do little more than get a white Tudor basecoat. This is basically a short dress to the knees, only a few people need have one. So there is no reason to avoid either of these events on costume grounds. Dover and Deal are both indoor events, so there is also no need to worry about your tents for camping! Deal is to be our murder mystery for the year and is once again Tudor. The role you take on will reflect the level of kit you have, or are able to borrow, so there is no need to worry about that. Allan Harley has agreed to take on the burden of plotting some murders; on the grounds it wouldn't be any trouble as he had a few in mind anyway. If you wish to come and have a role, albeit a minor one, please let him know on 01773 528804 so he can incorporate you into the plot.

**Site Visits:** As we're doing so many new sites this year it leaves us in the position of needing some information about each of them in order to help coordinate the events. If anyone is interested and lives near to one of these new sites, please let us know. There is a sheet with a list of questions that can easily be filled in to assess the sites conditions.

**Web site:** Hopefully the web-site will be reworked over the next couple of months, with help from Simon Lane, to include information about the group and information for the members. There will be a secure area on the site that can be accessed by members to check out warning orders, newsletters and other information. If anyone has any relevant ideas or skills and wish to dedicate some time to this then please do so! Otherwise we'll keep you posted on how it is going and when it is to be completed.

**Logistics:** To help alleviate the burden of the same people having to do all the groups chores, if anyone is interested in either driving the van, purchasing the food or organising cooking at events could they please contact Sam Kracke. It should be noted that purchasing the food and cooking are not the same task, and could be done by different people with a little coordination. These are some of the tasks that can really help out at events and if anyone can do them even once it would really help spread much of the work.

**Blackbird Leys:** Just a quick reminder that the Blackbird Leys trader market is on once again from Friday 16<sup>th</sup> of March till Sunday 18<sup>th</sup>. It will be open from 1.30pm till 7.00pm on Friday and 10.00am onwards on Saturday and Sunday. The Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre is located in Cowley, a suburb of Oxford. To get there take the M40 and exit at junction 8, follow the A40 towards Oxford, then turn left at a roundabout to take the A4142. Continuing down this road and you will see a large Rover (industrial) garage on the left, take the exit immediately when you see it, you will need to turn left at the round about. Proceed straight through 2 sets of traffic lights, at the third set turn right (note Bull Norris Pub on the right). Continue down this road, then turn left on to Pegasus Road, when you get closer to the centre you will notice an abundance of over parking - park where ever you can! Entrance fees are about £1 and your ticket is only valid for one day.

**Liveries:** For those who are planning to go to Kirby it was agreed at the AGM to attempt to have everyone in white English Liveries with a red cross of St. George on the front and back. This is mainly for the final parade. Don't get too worried about this, but if everyone could try it would be greatly appreciated. The livery can be any style, my plan is to make the inside of my new Stafford livery of this design saving me the extra work. To help personalise it, feel free to put a yellow Stafford knot on the front as per normal, or even a flaming Catherine wheel. If you're unsure about what it should look like, please ask a more experienced member of the group for advice. Remember, they need not all look the same.