



The Ripley Morris Men, along with the Ripley Green Garters, entertaining in Ripley Market Place for the traditional Boxing Day dance

tic because the French audiences tend to sit through the whole performance whereas in England people tend to watch a bit then wander off.

“We do have people join in public. When we’re out, if there’s enough people around, we get them to join in if they wish to or... they’re coerced to join in.”

Historically, Morris sides have featured a variety of colourful characters, such as fools, beasts and molls who challenge convention, engage with the audience and add charm or cheekiness to the spectacle.

Ripley has embraced this tradition wholeheartedly. Over the decades they’ve built a cast of legends that not only bring joy but also have become icons in the Morris world.

One character, the Magical Mascot, is a unicorn at Ripley Morris called Horace D’Unicorn. Horace is a skirt-wearing hobbyhorse who has charmed audiences since 1982.

“He’s our beast,” says Clive. “Nobody’s supposed to know who he is. He’s named Horace and he’s kept somewhere in a stable and he comes out to dance.

“He’s very mischievous, he’s got a cape and he’s hands-free. So he can dance if the wearer so wishes.

Characters like Horace are all part of the fun and magic of Morris. The group is keen to welcome new members, to ensure the tradition continues for the

next hundred years.

“The community is so welcoming,” says Clive. Performing at so many different sites – you all get along and chat and get looked after.

“We used to have a ritual where if we were out all day we’d all stand in a circle, and you were responsible for looking after the person to your right.

“Things like that are so important because it’s what helps people feel settled and want to keep dancing.”

The Day of Dance on September 13, will be more than just a lively celebration – it marks 100 years since Morris dancing first took root under school-teacher Stanley Evans.

Reformed in the 1950s and still going strong today, Ripley Morris Men and Ripley Green Garters have kept the tradition alive through rain or shine, pub car parks or marketplaces.

As they take to Ripley Market Place, they’ll not only be dancing in celebration of the past, but calling on new faces, especially younger ones, to help shape the next 100 years of Morris in Ripley.

“It’s just the sort of passion that grows and sticks with you really,” says Clive.

“It was the sort of thing that really took me by surprise, but all those years ago I ended up absolutely loving it, and it’s loved by so many. There’s something about dancing in a market square that people like.”

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