

Kennet Morris Making History – St George’s Chapel, Windsor Castle – Friday the 24th April 2026.

Danny Giani, a long time Kennet dancer and Design Technology head at St George’s School Windsor, had arranged that we would present a history of St George and of “the morris” at their St George’s Day school assembly which, as the “choir school”, is held in St George’s Chapel inside Windsor Castle. Being a church school, the holidays leading up to Trinity Term often included the day, so it was rare event to be able to celebrate their patron saint in term time and the whole assembly “service” had been given over to us. They were most excited about the prospect.

After much preparation – including obtaining security clearance for all involved, and even rehearsing our planned programme, we assembled at the school by 7.45 on the morning of Friday the 24th May 2026. As Danny later pointed out in his presentation ‘It was still St George’s Day somewhere in the world’.

After a short mini-bus trip from the school to the chapel – driven by Danny via the Security Office to collect our official passes – we were secreted in a far corner of the Chapel. The armed police actually managed smiles. We awaited the arrival of several hundred school children, staff, governors and parents who very were efficiently seated and entertained by the choir. Jon Holmes, our musician for the day, struck up the “once to yourself” for the Winsters and we processed the full length of the nave to our dancing pitch, in front of the low altar. After a short introduction - with a public health warning, and apologies to the choir, as we then sang the “overture” for Jonny So Long, a dance we created some time back in the Bucknell tradition. The acoustics were fantastic and the song reverberated around the chapel, as did our stick clashing, the main feature of the dance. The applause was long and enthusiastic. There may even have been cheering!

Mr Giani, as he was referred to throughout the morning, took to the lectern and delivered an enthralling talk on the evolution of England, our diverse heritage and the legend of St George. The audience lapped it up. His talk “climaxed” with the introduction of St George’s dragon-slaying accomplice – his trusty steed. Our hooden horse, Dobbin, had been briefed before as to which teachers could be nuzzled and teased en-route. They then began a double act at the lectern which would have graced any music hall, including quips about Waitrose hay being available in the royal stables (Duchy brand, no doubt). Dobbin now identifies as Bayard, St George’s legendary, and rather magical, horse. Very appropriate.



Our next dance was an obvious choice, England’s national flower, The Rose, Fieldtown. More rapturous applause. Our singing must sound a lot better in a cathedral-like interior, and our bells rang out loud and clear. Inspiring.

My turn next to deliver the second lesson on the history of Morris in Windsor and beyond. I was fortunate to have discovered an amusing first historical record of morris featuring Windsor;

'Windsor's first record of the Morris was 6th May 1619 following King James "intervention" allowing Morris dances to be performed after the end of "Divine Service". It was still discouraged during the church service, having been totally banned in 1571 – in theory!'

The record is a complaint when the morris dancers directly challenged the minister ...

"upon the feast day of the Ascension last past, when one of the morrice dancers had leaped and daunced in the face of the minister standing before his own doore [and] did before a great number of people, revile and abuse the minister, with these reproachful speeshes, cs. that the morrice dauncers should daunce before his doore and before him in spite of him and in spite of his teeth and that they should ridd the town of him; asking disdainfully what he was."

The Dean of the Chapel and his 4 canons (to the right of him , and canons to the left of him?) listened avidly with great amusement and lead the applause. You can't beat a captive audience. Bringing them into modern times I related how Windsor Morris (temporarily named The Merry Wives of Windsor before adopting their more appropriate title), was one of the first female Morris teams. I had the privilege of introducing Denise Allen, now a Kennet dancer, who was one Windsor's earliest members. More applause. Was that a whoop, we heard? (We had invited Windsor to join us, but as far fewer of their members were retired than Kennet, and had to work, it was not to be).

And so to our finalé – the Upton on Severn stick dance, complete with "borderish" shouts and vigorous stick work. Our sounds filled the place and we danced out of the Chapel to resounding cheers from all: apparently that's not how the school's assemblies usually end... in fact one of the Windsor castle long term employees remarked he'd never heard so much fun coming from an assembly!

We formed a guard of honour, with Jon playing a medley of morris tunes for the exiting audience. Someone decided that our arched sticks should strike in time with the music, normally an excellent idea. However, an orderly exit two, by two of several hundred people made for many aching arms. My call of "tall one" allowed us a break whilst we lowered the sticks for short periods, every time an adult appeared. Much mirth.



And the making history? On returning inside to retrieve gear, the Dean warmly congratulated us and told us that the chapel historical records had been searched and as far as they could tell, no other morris side had ever performed in the chapel since its dedication over 500 years ago. He did add that he agreed with the complainant I had quoted, that there might be good reasons to have excluded the Morris from church services (said with a mischievous twinkle)! And as a foot note, a Windsor Castle archivist, a member of the aforementioned Windsor Morris, confirmed his findings. She had thought she imagined hearing the sounds of Jon's melodeon playing in the courtyard for the departing guests, before she remembered the occasion!



The day was not quite over as we had been belatedly asked to dance for their Pre-prep school children. We were a little surprised to find perhaps a hundred under 5s lining the playground on the beautifully sun-drenched morning. They seemed to enjoy our performance as much as their older school mates and were keen to have a go themselves. Teaching Shepherd's Hey has never been quite as challenging – or as much fun and we eventually waved good bye to a mass of very happy children and smiling teachers.

Danny treated us all to tea, coffee and croissants in his marvellously equipped Tech room before we departed, thoroughly elated by the whole experience, about which we will reminisce for many years to come. I wonder if we'll be invited back next year as St George's Day will fall on the actual day of their next Friday Trinity term assembly? We live in hope. The School mag write up looks promising!

Watch this space!

Peter de Courcy
Kennet's Foolish Squire
14 May 2026

