



Why the ‘black’ face-paint in Border Morris?

In recent years, the black face-paint worn by some Morris sides has caused some controversy.

The usual explanation for the blackened face is that it was for *disguise*, when out-of-work labourers and farmworkers sought to supplement their income by a bit of anonymous dancing and begging.

It was traditionally done using soot.

Whatever the theory, modern Border sides certainly do not attach any racial significance to the blacking of their faces and accept the explanation of “disguise” for the tradition.

Following recent media attention over black-faced Border morris, one of our members wrote to Karen Bradley MP, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, asking her to support and protect our folk culture in the same way as other countries protect and encourage participation in their traditions.

The reply overleaf recognises that there are no racial connotations linked with this tradition.



Department
for Culture
Media & Sport

Ministerial Support Team
4th Floor
100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ

T: 020 7211 6000
E: enquiries@culture.gov.uk

Our Ref: 296830

www.gov.uk/dcms

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Dear I

Thank you for your email of 10 January to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, about Morris dancing. I am replying as a member of the Ministerial Support Team.

I appreciate your concerns, and I would like to reassure you that we are fully supportive of this traditional dance. We are of course aware of a small number of complaints relating to the blacking of faces for certain dances, and, as the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Sajid Javid, recently made clear, there are no racial connotations linked with this tradition.

DCMS continues to be supportive of traditional art forms such as Morris Dancing, and that is why, through our arms length body, Arts Council England, we will continue to fund organisations such as the English Folk Dance and Song Society through the National Portfolio Programme.

Thank you for once again for writing.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Shirley
Ministerial Support Team

Produced on behalf of the Joint Morris Organisations by:

Melanie Barber	(President of the Morris Federation)
Ed Worrall	(Squire of the Morris Ring)
Nicki Pickering	(Chair of Open Morris)