

May Day

May Day is a holiday celebrated on the first day of May in different parts of the world for *two reasons*.

First, it is a *celebration of new life and the beginning of Spring*. The month itself is named after the ancient Roman goddess Maja or Maia that means large or important (as the English word major we use today) and is connected to becoming bigger. The celebrations of the 1st of May have their roots on the ancient spring festival. Dancing, singing and crowning the May Queen with a flower wreath were included in those festivities. In countries like the UK, Sweden and Norway there are still this kind of events. *Maypole dancing* has been popular since the Medieval era in Europe, quite similarly to the Greek 'gaitanaki' (γαϊτανάκι). People and especially children dance around a pole holding colourful ribbons and creating various shapes by folding and wrapping the ribbons around the pole.



Maypole



Dancing around the maypole (like Greek gaitanaki)

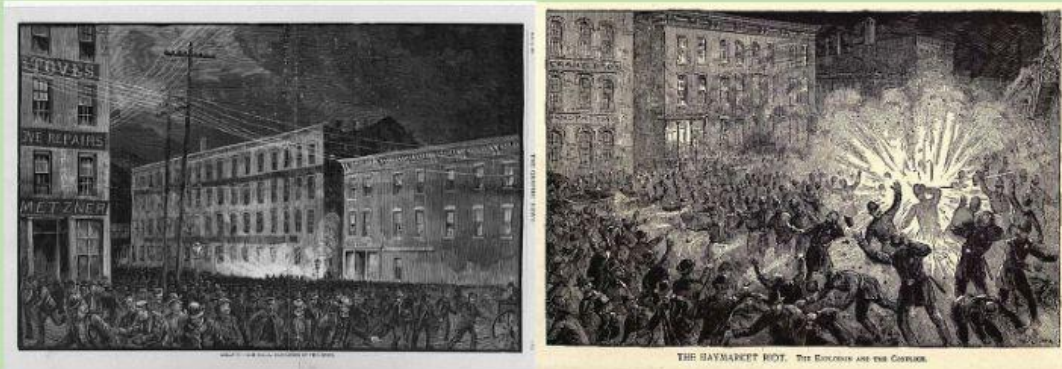


Another tradition for the British, is *Morris dancing* which is performed by groups of 6 to 10 dancers stepping at the rhythm of folk music. The unique feature of the particular dance is the dancers' outfit; they wear pads with bells as well as colourful clothes and may hold a stick or paint their face black. Painting their face was preferred in the past when people used to get paid for dancing and they didn't want others to recognize them.



Morris Dancers

The second reason to celebrate the 1st of May is the commemoration of the workers' fights in the nineteenth century. More specifically, there were no rules at that time about the hours or the days somebody could work so the people around the world tried very hard for something we take for granted nowadays, that is the right to work 8 hours a day, to have eight hours for sleep and eight hours for entertainment. It was such an important achievement that the 1st of May is also called Labour Day to keep that memory in mind. Workers enjoy a day off work in most countries and it's usually connected with a long weekend (=when Monday or Friday is a day off).



Pictures from local newspapers in Chicago (1886)

Let's watch three interesting videos about May Day traditions and Morris Dance!

