

THE SINGING GAME
by Iona and Peter Opie
Pub OUP, Oxford, 1985

see also,

The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren material collected in 1950's

Children's Games in Street and Playground (1969) part one of game material,

covering competitive games, this volume is part two and the third part, games needing equipment, is yet to be written.

Oxford Book of Children's Verse

Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes (1951)

Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book

THREAD THE NEEDLE

Boisterous procession, with as long a file as possible, the front pair raise their arms to form an arch or "Alley" or "Eye" and the back person leads the rest through and going ahead to form their own arch etc. Repeat ad lib. Often done with whooping and hollering.

Bradford on Avon - Shrove Tuesday - included "clipping church", forming a circle and going round the church three times. Trowbridge, Longbridge Deverell, Marlborough's Jacky John's Fair also on Shrove Tuesday. Ellesmere (Shropshire) had a similar custom to Bradford on Avon. Evesham, Minchinhampton - on Easter Monday. Tenby - on May Day, also danced round Maypoles, and when they met other lines they weaved through giving alternate right and left hands (called a Ladies Chain but really a hey). Saffron Walden, Linton (Cambridgeshire) on May Day. Mount Bay, Cornwall - on Midsummer Eve - cry "An Eye! An Eye!..." along with bonfires, fireworks and tar barrels.

Philip Stubbes...."may daunce the wilde moris thorow a needles eye." Dance also referred to by Hardy and Barnes. Variants - back pair arch so that tops have to double back - dance in a circle so that the next arch is beside the first arch etc.

GRANDY NEEDLES or DUCK UNDER WATER

Line up in pairs, with inside hands joined, and run through from back to top in turn but pairs following close together to make arches at top. At points in the song they would thump the backs of those going underneath. Could also use a handkerchief between the pairs. John Clare associated it with May Day celebrations after the garlands had been taken round. I learnt a Basque version at Sidmouth with yells.

Variant - capture the last person and question them in order to form tug o' war sides or capture the last person or pair, who either kiss the arch or each other.

WINDING UP THE CLOCK or TWINE THE GARLAND or BALL OF YARN

One end, perhaps arranged to be the tallest person, stands still and the rest wind up until unable to move further. The aim is either, (a) the middle to lead out somehow, (b) to jog up and down till someone falls over, (c) to tread on each other's toes, (d) to form a squeeze, or (e) unwind as fast as possible. Not quite as the **SNAIL CREEP** movement where the leader winds in and then leads out. In Warwickshire this movement was started from a Thread Needle figure.

BIG SHIP

Hold hands in a line, one end anchors, the rest lead through the end alley till the end one has to turn with their arms crossed in front of them and then repeat under each arch moving outwards in turn, till all have turned.

Ending either,

(a) let go and wag fingers at each other singing last verse,

“The Captain said, This will never never do etc”
(b) all sink to ground.
“The big ship sank to the bottom of the sea etc”

THE WIND BLOWS HIGH

Chosing by the one in the middle shutting their eyes, spinning round with arm outstretched, and stoping pointing at someone. Outer ring could circle round at the same time.

SALLY WATER - BUMP ON THE BACK

A player sits or crouches in the centre of the ring for the verses, springs up, touches someone who is in the circle and races round the outside of the ring before the touched player can get around the outside in the other direction to regain their place.

CUSHION DANCES

For 300 yrs temporary possession of a cushion gave a man the right on convivial occasions to kiss the women he most fancied. The Cushion dance was mentioned by John Clare. Man starts, kneels in front, she then kneels also, they kiss, and he joins line behind her either holding hands in a line or both hands on waist or holding a trailing part of her clothing.

A HUNTING WE WILL GO - GRAND OLD DUKE OF YORK

Two lines facing. Top pair slip down middle and back, separate and cast to the bottom, everyone follow, make arch and rest come through.

Alternate - top boy, bottom girl dance the turns of Sir Roger, top pair cast off and up middle then down middle to bottom under everyone's arches.

POP GOES THE WEASEL

“Every night when I get home, The monkey's on the table,
Take a stick and knock it off, Pop goes the weasel.”

Top pair works down set, down middle and back, down outside and back, circle and pop one then circle and pop other one. When done 3 or 4 next top starts....

WALLFLOWERS

Linking hands and dancing round in a circle with back to the centre gives the sensation of riding a merry go round. The back-to-back ring was used by witches and fairies. Walk round singing verse then one dancer turns to face out, repeat till all are facing out.

ROMANS AND ENGLISH

Two lines advance and retire alternately. Fight hopping on one foot till pushed off balance or touch ground with other foot. End with dance in ring.

BROOM DANCE

One dancer has a broom for a partner which they swap for a girl leaving the next to dance with the broom or sweep the floor.

King Pippin Polka = verse tune of So Early in the Morning.

IN AND OUT THE WINDOWS

All but one form a circle, and make arches, then stand still. Other runs in and out alone then selects one and chases them zig-zagging through the arches till caught. Shake hands and then change places.

DUSTY BLUEBELLS

As above but end stand behind one arch and tap a shoulder, that one links up behind the leader/line and all go off again. It gets more difficult to do as the line gets longer and the arches fewer. Putting both hands on the shoulders in front is one way.

ONE LITTLE ELEPHANT

As above but first one holds nose and puts other arm through the loop formed. Next one to join does the same but holds onto first.

DRAW A BUCKET OF WATER

Four with hands clasped in pairs, one pair across the other in a cross, see-saw back and forwards while singing, then one is brought in by putting one linkage over their head and behind them, then the other, then the first pair etc. Then all jump up and down, not circle!

OKEY KOKEY

Created by Jimmy Kennedy in 1941.

SEVEN SPRINGS

One step forward, two steps forward, kneel with one knee, kneel with other knee, touch with one elbow, then other elbow on ground, then forehead.

Camel walk - bent double with legs kicking out to the side.

CLAPPING craze peaked end 19th cent to WWI

a) b, r+l/l+r, b, r+l, b, l+r, b.

b) touch r side with r, b, touch left side with left, b.

c) alternately b, r+l/l+r at ends of lines of verses.

d) USA - clap palms, then similar against knees and face - USA versions died out after 1920

e) hands crossed on chest, clap thighs, b, r+r, b, l+l, b, etc ending b, b, b.

Used to clap hands with palms vertical, modern is with hands horizontal, right palm up, left palm down, for first clap, then r+l/l+r vertical, b. etc. This is the commonest clapping form today.

f) hold both together as praying and strike partner's slowly, keep hands in same general position, clap r+r **above** left neighbored hands, then l+l **below** neighbored right hands. Or open and clench fingers of hands alternately, synchronised so that one player's open hand is above the other's clenched.

g) clap in a circle left with left hand neighbour, right with right.

h) b, r+r, b, l+l, b, cross arms and touch own shoulders, slap thighs. etc.

i) THREE, SIX, NINE - b in praying position, r+r 2x, l+l 2x, clutch throat for choking... ending - r+l/l+r 2x, cross arms on chest, slap own thighs.

j) clap with each other using alternate clenched and open palms. Then cross arms one at a time to shoulders and end r+l/l+r ex.

k) clap then i) chop hands into angles of elbows, next time slap parts of body eg touch eyes (China), or pat cheeks, arms crossed on chest, knees slapped, tap toes (?)

l) SEE SEE MY PLAYMATE - hook little fingers in each others and shake up and down twice. b, r+r, b, l+l, b, b, - -. Then backs of hands together r+l/l+r, fronts of hands r+l/l+r, b, r+r, b, l+l, b, b. Repeat from backs and fronts.

ENDINGS

“Sex-y” - flick skirts up (and kick legs up_

“Um tiddley um dum, sex-y”,

“Hi tiddley i ti, brown bread”,

“Look at your father, bald head”,

“Rum tiddley batchcakes, brown bread. I struck a sausage, down dead!”,

“How your father, Blind Drunk”,

“Tripe and bananas, Fried fish”.