

W.M.F. FOREWOMENS INSTRUCTIONAL. NOVEMBER 1978.

SUBJECT : Upton-on-Severn Morris Dance

LECTURER : Roy Dommett.

"Now I think I want to say one or two things about Upton-on-Severn in general. One or two of you have done the dances else where come to that, in your own variety and way."

"Upton was discovered quite by accident, as all these things were, at a Cheltenham Summer Festival Meeting back in the summer about 1930-28-29-30ish. Kenworthy Schofield and his wife had left the festival and from Upton they met somebody who said he danced. So they arranged for a party to come over from the festival and to see the side, and this chap who was about 40 years old got his father and his brothers and one of his sisters all together and they actually did the dance. The trouble was that when they did the dance, despite what they all said, only two or three of them had ever done it before. So the man that actually knew what he was doing spent most of his time pushing the others through.

Now when I say that at the end of it Maude Karpeles, who was an experienced collector of dances wasn't sure whether there was an eight bar dancing on the spot between each figure in the Upton-on-Severn Handkerchief dance or not, it shows you the state it was actually in. You couldn't tell for there were long speculative periods. Now the first problem is that the man, the expert as it were, the 40 year old son, was a bit bandy legged you know; rode a horse and danced like this (demonstration). So in fact one has got (demonstration) out of it. You see now whether he intended to put his foot across or not; they could not make up their minds. But when writing the dance up to publish it in the Six Morris Dances and Jigs they decided to describe this kicking across because that's the same as what the man basically did (demonstration) but it was much more (demonstration) in other words, they were not at all sure. The others walked, skipped or did 1,2,3 hop or ran as the occasion took them; bearing in mind they really were not sure how the dance went. Maud and the others who came were more sure in the Stick Dance; they tended to do a 1,2,3 hop. In the Handkerchief Dance they were not in the least sure what the step was intended to be. Right! so again if somebody does a single step, that is probably quite right. Again as described as collected, people did almost any hand movement from swinging (demonstration) to this, to this. Right! so again one takes ones choice on what seems to suit the dance. I know that when I first learnt the dance with a side, they actually swung both hands together but it depends on your club. There is no doubt that at the sort of speed you want it gives a very satisfactory movement (demonstration swinging alternate hands) but it is no more and no less traditional than any other way of doing it. If you want it to be like the traditional side you have to have everybody doing something different! That clearly was not how it was, because they got very uptight with themselves on that day for not being able to put it over properly.

Right, realizing there is a lot of it, you may meet people teaching it different ways; if you go back to Maud Karpeles' original publication of the Journal of the EFDSS you will find there is a whole variety of ways described, for steps and hand movements and no-one who offers you something, is anymore authentic than any other.

The stick dance as you know lends itself to proliferation and ideas. The original was just one hit to a bar (demonstration) and the bit that everybody 'sort of does' (demonstration of the turn) was really just stepping it out and the turn with stepping (demonstration) might have been from the handkerchief dance done between each figure. Maud could not tell. The chap spent so much time trying to push it and explain to people what they were supposed to be doing that he didn't spend much time dancing, but most of his time dashing around so again you are left open to different interpretations.

When you come to the change figure, you have already met a way of doing it.. Let me show you two others. Can I have a set? Just six.

"First - corners face; 3 and 5 face; 2 and 4 face and go straight into back to back. There is one thing I'm sure of that the side rotated 45° , not 90° . Right rotated 45° ? (question to dancers.) How it got into it is again not clear. The most likely thing is just what we have performed and they went straight into it. Back to where we were".

Now I think the way it was published is suggesting that you spend about eight bars dancing on the spot slowly edging into a set then going into it. Maude's notes are much more consistent with them (doing whatever they did) going straight into the change of movement.

When I teach the back to back in the handkerchief dance I also like to use an alternative, to the back to back, which is holding half way, so that when you go across, (you go- demonstration) which helps when it comes to the change. You go across and pause; mind you, when I say it helps you then get lost at that point wondering where they are (speaking to the dancers trying it) - that is right.

Now the other way is for us all to face up for two bars with first corners facing for two bars. Then all move into position facing up and we go into the repeat of the dance. Of course, you can keep changing direction endlessly, shuffling around these 45° s as often as you like. You do not have to do it just twice.

Of course the varieties of the stick dance are endless. Sets of six, let us have six up again.

An Upton-on-Severn Dance I picked up in my travels has the usual figures but in the chorus turn out to the left like people do in the stick dance. Then half three top Hey, middles to the right, half way, then you carry on - half three top Hey. Then everybody out to the left again, left, and half a three top Hey, again middles to the right. Then you have the usual figures. Back to back each way; a Morris hey and rounds.

Practical demonstration with dancers performing the dance to the tune of Yankee Doodle with Roy calling.

Rounds (16 steps)

Chorus

Circle to left individually (8 steps)

$\frac{1}{2}$ Three tops Hey (8 steps)

Circle to left individually (8 steps)

$\frac{1}{2}$ Three tops Hey (8 steps)

Back to back (first half and stepping on spot)

Chorus

Back to back (second half and stepping on spot)

Chorus

Morris Hey (from the top) (Hey-on-the-side)

Chorus

Rounds (all in to end).

Explanation using dancers in the set

Right, that's middles to the right or middles to the left depending on how you feel like doing it. The four corners dance together. I know they are going in opposite directions but these two and those two actually try and dance together like you would in a normal hey. Now the other thing also, which quite a few of you noted while you were waiting for this to happen (referring to middles moving into position for three top) it is usual, good, to move apart. Right, can I actually show you or watch you do it?"

Dancers perform Three tops Hey and as the middles move into position 1 and 2, 5 and 6 move backwards away from each other before entering into the hey.

Roy then went on to describe a leading off figure for an Upton-on-Severn stick dance.

Rounds. Push your sticks up to form a crown in the centre of the round. No. 1 breaks off followed by No.3 then No. 5 etc. The other dancers keep circling holding sticks in crown until their turn to break away. To use as a leading off figure form the crown in the final rounds and half way through the figure No. 1 peels off followed by each dancer in turn".