

MUCH WENLOCK

There are a number of interesting dances for 6 or 8 dancers in circulation generically called "Much Wenlock" but with little evidence of being based on collected material. The dance collected by Maud Karpeles in 1937 and seen again in 1949 was very simple.

- Source** : collected by Maud Karpeles from Baden Minton, a miner, then aged 37 on 30.3.1937, when Mr Minton, as the melodian player, came to the Raven Hotel in the evening with 3 dancers, two stick men and a tambourinist, to show the dance.
- Music** : various tunes, including jigs. The band consisted of melodian, bones, triangle and tambourine, depending on numbers available.
- Sticks** : stick 14" long and 4" in circumference, not decorated.
- History** : The dance came from Homer a mile away in the 1880's. The old team last came out before WWI and Mr Minton danced with them. He revived the dancing in 1926 involving workers from the limestone quarries where he used to work. They used to come out first on Christmas Eve and dance from 6pm till midnight, then again on Boxing Day, and sometimes every day afterwards until the New Year. They believed the dance was to celebrate the birth of Christ. Dr Cawte met George Walters on 29.5.57 who joined the side in 1917 and Nick Rowlands on 29/30.5.57 who joined in 1897. These dancers originally wore tags of cloth on their ordinary clothes, then later the tags were of paper and finally they went to fancy dress with top hats because the boys used to set the paper tags alight.
- Costume** : All blacked their faces and hands, and no one wore bells. They wore any fancy dress, such as that of an Italian clown, King Jester, and Sambo the Black. Some dancers dressed as women, which idea Mr Minton said he had introduced. There is a photograph of the team in the Shrewsbury Chronical of Friday 5th April 1935 under the headline "Wenlock Tells the World".
- Set** : The dance could be performed by from 5 to 8 dancers. There were always two "standards", a bones and a melodian player, who did not dance.
- When 8 in troupe : there were 4 stick dancers and 2 tambourine players who danced in a set of 6.
- When 7 in troupe : there were 2 stick dancers and 2 tambourine players who danced, and a triangle player who did not dance.
- When 6 in troupe : there was no triangle player.
- When 5 in troupe : there were 2 stick dancers and triangle player who did not dance, but no tambourine player.

Thus the set for the dance was either,

T S S	T S	S
(top)	(bottom) or (top)	(bottom) or (top) (bottom)
T S S	T S	S

- Bars 1/4** : Partners cross over, passing left shoulders, and take a half turn to the right to face back.
- Bars 5/8** : Partners cross back, passing left shoulders to places, and then arm once around with the left arms linked, to end in place.

The tambourines are held up and shaken during the crossing. The "step" during the above was something between a run and a walk. In jig time, the dancers put in occasional fancy steps, such as a cross step and a hockle step, but only indeterminately. Dr Cawte was told that for part of the dance they used a clumsy single shuffle as we know for the rapper dance. When in the streets, the dancers progress slightly in these movements, by making their track slightly diagonal. They are then headed by the melodian and the bones.

Bars 9/16 : Stick Tapping : Partners stand still, facing each other. The even stick dancers hold their sticks still in a vertical position whilst the odds hit the tips of the even's sticks alternately from right to left and left to right with their tips to the rhythm / x x x x / and finish with / x . x . //. The strikers sticks are also held almost vertically and the tapping is done mainly by a movement of the wrist. The tambourine players beat time and the bones player, who has hitherto been silent, joins in.

Bars 17/32 : The above is repeated but the evens hit the odds.

Whole dance continues ad lib.

The same men as seen by Maud Karpeles performed in 1949 when some were living at Stretton Westwood as reported by Geoffrey Mendham in "Encounters with the Morris Dance in Shropshire" in English Dance and Song Dec/Jan 1953/4 p.100.

"The Westwood Morris Men, five of them, met in August 1948. Dressed in fancy dress mostly modelled on circus clown costume. One wore a tightly fitting blue costume, wide waisted and tightly banded at wrist and ankle - carried two pairs of bones. Another wore top hat and tail coat and was almost immaculate - with a tambourine. Other three in coloured pyjama like suits. Two has short sticks one foot long - third had a small melodian. A full team included two more stick men. All had blackened faces.

Four dancers stood in a square 12 feet wide, with musician in middle - reading sunwise - tambourine, stick, stick, bones - musician played 16 bar tune loud, fast and inaccurately. Second tune was recognisably as "Three Jolly Sheepskins", largely as at Sleights - this because Sharp's "Sleights" came from John Locke of Leominster!

During first strain the three in motley moved rapidly round each other in a serpentine track, apparently arbitrarily - came occasionally near a hey for three. Step was a rapid rolling walk - as if a hurry to get somewhere. Meanwhile the top hatted tambourinist moved fairly slowly anticlockwise round the set and performed a variety of polka and rant steps in an almost sitting position. At the end of 8 bars all back to position, except stick men now within reach.

One held his stick very rigidly vertically at arms length. The other beat it from side to side with great vigour, four times in each of first six bars, twice in bar seven and three times in eighth. Tambourine and bones did same rhythm, both facing away from centre, the bones at head level, the tambourine at knee level. All instruments played with extreme vigour. Sequence done three or four times, stick men change roles each time. Dance ended on second strain. Usually performed at Xmas."

MUCH WENLOCK

Source : Dave Jones book "The Roots of Welsh Border Morris".
Steps : Jogging run.
Stick : 12 inch long, held by four dancers only.
Music : "Yankee Doodle" and "Tipperary" played very quickly.
Set : 10 people, 4 with sticks, others are music, eg. an accordion, 2 with bones, a triangle or mouthorgan and 2 with tambourines. (Suggest that a side without so many musicians should have people equipped with two short sticks which they hit together rapidly, right on left downwards and upwards)

m x m x m

m x m x m

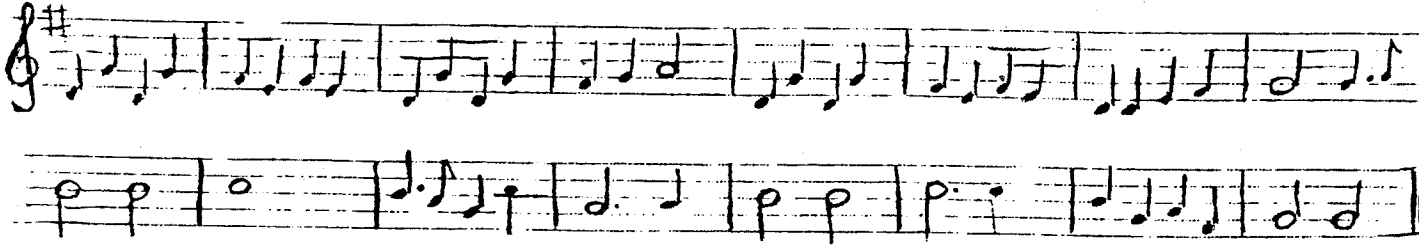
Sticking : / x x x x / x - x - / ad lib, danced by the stickmen, either, (a) standing on spot (b) going round opposite (like whole gyp, possibly more than once). (Suggest use choruses alternately)

Figures :

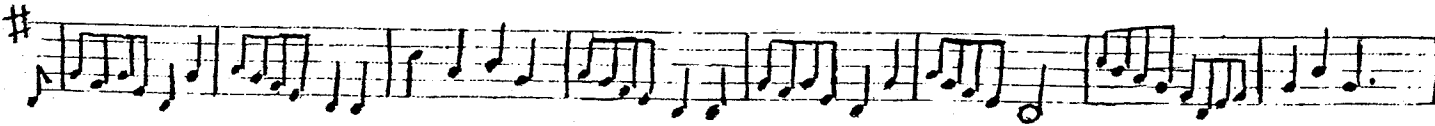
1. Cross over passing left shoulder and turn to the right to face back, cross back and arm with left once round as pass to end in starting place.
2. One stand still while others dance a circle around them. (Suggest that this one of each pair of stickmen and the other four at their end dance a circle round them and back)
3. Hey for 3. (Suggest done by 2 stickmen + one other, like "three-tops" either/or/ or both with the middle pair 'going to their right' or an end going to their left)
4. Cast. (Suggest from the top, down outside and up centre)
5. Zig-zag processional figure. (Suggest ignore in set dance)

MUCH WENLOCK - Salop - Karpeles col. from Baden Minton 30.3.37 Other Morris 7. (9)
sticks:- 14 " long x 4 " circum. undecorated.

"Nbt for Joe" KarC 5346



"Jig" KarC 5346



Dance came from Homer, a mile away in 1880's. Old team last came out before WW I. Mr. Minton danced with them. He revived the dancing in 1926. The men were all workmen in the limestone quarries where Minton used himself to work. They used to come out first on Xmas eve & dance 6pm. till 12. then on Boxing Day & sometimes every day afterwards till the New Year. It was believed the dance used to celebrate the birth of Christ.

Costume:- any fancy dress - such as that of an Italian clown, King's Jester, Sambo the Black. Some dancers dressed as women - Mr. Minton said he introduced this. All black faces. No bells.

Team:- from 5 to 8 dancers. Always two "standards" ie. bones & melodeon player who do not dance.

Eight:- 4 stick dancers, 2 with tambourines who dance.

Seven:- 2 stick dancers, 2 tambourines - & a triangle player who does not dance

Six :- no triangle.

Five :- a triangle but no tambourines.

On 30.3.37 evening Mr. Minton (melodeon) & 3 dancers came to Raven Hotel, Much Wenlock & showed Miss Karpeles the dance.

	T	S	S		1-4 partners cross over left shoulder
Top				bottom	and make a half turn right.
	T	S	S		5-8 cross back, left shoulders to
					places & arm once round with
					left arms. Tambourines are held

up and shaken during arming. The step during the above is something between run & walk - when in streets dancers progress slightly in these movements by making their track slightly diagonal. They are headed by the accordion & bones.

9-16 Stick tapping. Partners stand still facing each other. Tambourine players beat time & the bones man who has hitherto been silent joins in. The stick dancers do :- Even nos hold sticks still in a vertical position whilst odds hit alternately from right to left, left to right

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Other Morris 8.

tip against tip, 4 times to a bar & twice on main beats of last bar. The strikers stick is also held in an almost vertical position & the tapping is done mainly by a movement of the wrist. The above is repeated but evens hit odds. Whole dance ad lib. In "jig" tune dancers put in occasional fancy steps such as cross step & hockle step but only indeterminate.

Cawte met George Walters (29.5.57) who joined the side in 1917 and Nick Rowlands (29 & 30.5.57) who joined in 1897. The dancers originally wore tags of cloth on their ordinary clothes, later the tags were paper, then the clothes changed to fancy dress & finally the tags were abandoned because boys used to set them alight. The dancers blacked their faces & hands & wore top hats. For part of the dance they used a clumsy single shuffle as for the rapper dance.

There is a photo of the tea in "Wenlock tells the World", Shrewsbury Chronicle Friday 5th April 1935.

The same men performed in 1949 when some were living at Stretton Westwood - see Geoffrey Mendham "Encounters with the Morris Dance in Shropshire" E.D. & S. Dec/Jan 1953/4 p.100.

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