

EAST ANGLIAN MOLLY

The Molly Dance is the mid winter seasonal dance of Cambridgeshire and the neighbouring areas. It can be thought of existing now as two performing traditions, the old rural Cambridgeshire style based on simple longways social dances and the new approach commonly associated with the Seven Champions. Neither are seen as using sticks, wearing bells, or normally carrying handkerchiefs. The older collected dances are few, coming from a limited area and for a very limited time, when the seasonal custom was in terminal decline.

1 **WHEN**

The older traditional dancing used to centre on two performance opportunities which no longer exist.

A **Plough Monday** : the first Monday after January 6th. This was Epiphany or the Twelfth Day of Christmas and the **climax** of the mid-winter courtly celebrations until the end of the Stuart Age, and which became Old Christmas Day as remembered in more modern times since the major change of the calendar. The Monday was the end of the workers' mid-winter holiday. Plough Sunday with its blessing of the plough is a modern creation.

The team could consist of several ploughmen kitted out as Molly dancers, led by a better dressed "Lord" and a "Lady" who was a cross-dressing man, perhaps also with a simple plough, although this was often taken round by a separate gang. A good deal of time would be taken up during the evening before going out in preparation. It was said that it took two good women to dress a Molly Dancer, one to hold and one to sow, *[but perhaps only one wicked one to undress him!]*. The gang would perform during the day and then dance again in the evenings in the pubs when out of costume, but treating the same dances as social dances by including women in the sets. Only men went on the Molly Outings within living memory to the 1920's, as would be expected for it to be acceptable to society in those times. No references to practicing the dances are known.

B **The Village Feast** : The pubs would open up the bars for dancing. Perhaps it would be for the Benefit Club and the club night could consist of a supper and dance for all. But it was quite different from the Molly centred occasion. The "Feast Dances" would be the same in form but not done in the same spirit as for the Molly, again particularly because they were then danced mixed. Dancers would pay per dance, perhaps as much as 2d.

2 **WHERE**

The Molly Festival was once widespread throughout inland East Anglia, over both Cambridgeshire and into the neighbouring counties, although few traces of the dances have been recovered. Cecil Sharp himself saw the dancing near Littleport by Ely. Six men wearing white shirts, ribbons, sashes and box hats, danced what is recorded only as a "set" jig. Some account of the Cambridgeshire Molly dances were first published by Drs Needham and Peck in 1933. They wrote of the dancing around Cambridge and Ely as two separate groups of traditions. Near Cambridge at Girton, Histon and Comberton, the desired team was six dancers, although sometimes eight, one of whom was a Bessy, Betty or Molly, plus a musician and several cadgers. They might carry handkerchiefs and wore a form of wide baldrick or sash decorated with many rosettes. Also some would wear a little decoration tied around the leg below the knees, if it had a few bells on it was sometimes called a "ruggles". The teams would have a walking tour through fenland villages or into Cambridge.

The late Russell Wortley has been by far the most industrious enquirer, and has recorded evidence of dancing in many villages, although this has not yet been analysed and published in terms of the eras of their occurrence. His papers are now in the safe keeping of the Centre for English Cultural Tradition at Sheffield. Other accessible East Anglian material exists in the Alex Helm collection in the Folk Lore Society Library. The distribution of sightings is given in the Helm article in the *J of the EFDSS*.

3 **WHAT**

At Girton the dances were *Birds a Building*, *College Hornpipe*, *Double Change Sides*, *Gypsies in the Wood*, *Richard's Riddle* and *Soldier's Joy*. Around Ely the best known group now was that at Little Downham, because it was the longest lived, where the dancers dressed in ribbons and flower decorated hats. In the final years there were usually only four dancers so they danced as couples, reputedly mostly to the one tune, although there was a mention of tangos. They claimed usually to have had normal country dance figures, as elsewhere, and a four hand reel, although none of this was ever seen by any collectors. Other forms of dance existed. At Haddenham it was said that broom-stem dancing was done by the plough party, and that elsewhere, near Ely, four and six hand reels were performed. There never was any indication of an association with local mummers.

Russell Wortley and Cyril Papworth had published on some of the Comberton dances in *English Dance and Song*. Then Cyril printed his booklet *Polka Round*. In this he also explained the final version of a broom dance previously published learnt over a number of years from members of his own family. Mostly it was about the Feast Dances, *Birds a Building*, *College Hornpipe*, *Cross Hands Polka*, *Double Change Sides*, *Gypsies in the Wood*, *Six Hand Reel* and *Up the Middle and Down the Sides*, a version of *We Wont Go Home Till Morning*, explained as danced as social dances. They had much in common with the published Girton dances. He gave a consistent style for the dancing using a so called "Cambridge Polka", a 1 2 3 near-hop, which is three small steps and a lift, not a true hop, bringing the free knee fairly high in front, but being light on the ground. A later booklet "*...for a bit of sport'...*" by Richard Humphries summarised much of the known information on places, happenings, dances and music, but it also suggested that Sam Bennett's *Lively Jig* was obtained from an East Anglian gamekeeper who might have come from near Little Snoring by Fakenham in Norfolk. A very commonly known dance in Norfolk was *The Long Dance*, a social dance that survived when most other longways dances had been long forgotten, and this is very much in keeping with the known Molly dances. There are widespread references to "jigging", in terms of "a set jig", "simply jigged about", "merely jigged about" and "just jumping about", all suggesting simple step dancing or at least a significant proportion of it within the dances seen.

The available information is too small to be sure of what was not done in the past and there is a danger of developing too narrow a definition of what is in character. However what is needed for today has to be acceptable for current performance. It is necessary to analyse for possibilities and for why the past and the present may be different.

4 TODAY

The first attempt by outsiders to present the old dances in their villages in the old style was not particularly well received according to some of the villagers interviewed later. They can be made to appear about the least spectacular of the English traditional dances, perhaps contrasting poorly with the mature Cotswold dancing given before. Perhaps the approach then was wrong as their successors have now been successful. There has been a marked regional interest in the wider East Anglia in the local tradition and many teams are active either as purely Molly sides or with the Molly as their mid winter expression. Also many are mixed sex following the modern trend. Whittlesey Straw Bear, now on a Saturday in early January, brings many of the groups together, and several have their own Plough Monday tours. A video is available of the Whittlesea Straw Bear Festival that was made in 1993 by VPR Video of Spalding.

A strong and inspirational influence in the current revival of interest has been the impressive Seven Champions from Kent formed in 1977. They are as authentic and as lovable as their oft quoted treacle mines. These are widespread in folklore, although every place appears to believe itself unique, and the stories are most likely to have been inspired by the finding of underground tar pits rather than molasses! This team has been about style and discipline, at its best more akin to a music hall act than an amateur road show. They have opted for heavy boots and a slow deliberate stamping step and non social dance interpretations of the common country dance basics normally associated with that which had been collected. Starting from the collected dances, their repertoire has gradually expanded and developed in many ways as has been explored by George Frampton in a 1988 conference paper. They are the stars of two videos, one from the Sidmouth based JKL Video Services that recorded *An Hour with the Seven Champions* in August 1992 and their own *Pan-Galactic Guide to Molly Dancing*. This video is a pseudo history not a set of dances. They have been for some time very successful on

the Festival and Day-of-Dance circuits. Their existence and success has widened the dance options available. Both Cyril Papworth and The Seven Champions have found the need to enhance the simple available notations.

It is not unusual to find that published notations were intended as basic or “core” descriptions with the elaboration and extensions left to the performers. A similar assumption is consistent with the tradition.

5 **VIDEO SUPPLIERS**

J.K.L. Video Film Services, 58/60 Temple Street, Sidmouth, Devon, EX10 9BQ
Tel : (0395) 516233

VPR Video (R.Harrison), 38 Park Avenue, Spalding, Lincs, PE11 1QX.
Tel : (0775) 710564

- Music** : Fiddle or concertina.
Step : Ordinary country dance step (no knee lift), no double step or capers.
Set : Six dancers, one of which is a Bessy or Molly.
Kit : Handkerchiefs, a wide baldrick, whose colour depended on the team, decorated with many rosettes and worn over white shirts, but no bells.
Extras : Several collectors or cadgers, an umbrella man for musician, maybe up to eight men dragging a plough and others to crack whips.

1 **BIRDS A BUILDING** - duple minor

Tune : *Flowers of Edinburgh*

A1/(2) Nos 1 and 2 cross over giving right hands, Nos 1 and 3, 2 and 4 change down the sides, and so on round to place. [options (1) could be a progressive square, (2) Nos 3 and 4 never cross the set, (3) take two or four bars or polkas per change, (4) it involves the whole of the set]

B1 Nos 1 and 2 lead down the middle and back.

B2 First two pairs swing and change.

Nos 1 and 2 repeat all from the second place etc.

2 **COLLEGE HORNPIPE** - triple minor

Tune : *Sailor's Hornpipe*

A1 Hands Six Round - seven slips clockwise, seven slips back, [as would be familiar now from Scottish Country Dancing]

A2 Cast - all face up, engage with partner putting arms behind partners' backs, double cast to left and back to place, waving the handkerchief in the free hand.

B1 Swing - Nos 1 and 4 swing ; Nos 2 and 3 swing.

B2 Lead Down - first pair lead down the middle and back, first two pairs swing and change places. [This is faster than in the other dances]

Repeat whole until all reach original places.

3 **DOUBLE CHANGE SIDES** - duple minor

Tune : just possibly *Speed the Plough*

A1/(2) Nos 2 and 4 lead between Nos 1 and 3 and fall back ; Nos 1 and 3 lead between Nos 2 and 4 and fall back. (all move or just pair mentioned)

B1 Nos 1 and 2 lead down the middle and back.

B2 First two pairs swing and change.

4 **GYPSIES IN THE WOOD** - duple minor

Tune : *Smash the Window*

A1 Nos 1, 2 and 4 hands three (circle or star) round and back.

A2 Nos 1, 2 and 3 hands three round and back.

B1 Nos 1 and 2 lead down the middle and back.

B2 First two pairs swing and change.

[Suggest combine circle one way (hands round) and star the other (hands across)]

Other dances mentioned were *Richard's Riddle* and *Soldiers Joy*. The latter tune was used by Papworth for his version of the dance **Double Change Sides**

COMBERTON

- Source** : *Wortley and Papworth, English Dance & Song Summer 1978*
Music : Fiddle or concertina.
Steps : Walk and change-hop-step. Strength of the hop and the general vigour depended on the dance. Upper arm hold was suggested for the swings.
Set : Six or eight dancers.
Kit : The first pair are Lord and Lady and are more elaborately dressed, the Lady as a woman in a skirt. The rest wore four inch wide sash over left shoulder, a waistband, broad arm ribbons and narrow hat ribbons of mixed colours. The rosettes were stitched to the broad ribbons. All were worn over an ordinary jacket, [because of the season].
Extras : Two cadgers or collectors using ladles.

In duple-minor sets the first two pairs alone start and the rest are brought in progressively. In triple-minor sets the top pair swing to the bottom of the set at the end of the time through that leaves only one pair below.

1 **COLLEGE HORNPIPE** - triple minor
 Tune : Version of *Sailor's Hornpipe* or *Jacks the Lad*.

A1/2 Circle hands six to left and back, eight change-hop-steps each way.
 B1 Double cast to the left in pairs and back to places, waving a handkerchief in their free hand.
 B2 First two pairs swing and change.

[Does not say if danced half way round or one and half in the swing for a progression. Assume that the direction for travel in the swing is the conventional line of direction in a ballroom of anticlockwise.]

2 **CROSS HAND POLKA** - duple minor

Tune : Collected tune *Cross Hand Polka*.

- A1 Nos 1 and 4 half turn by right hand and half turn back with the left.
- A2 Nos 2 and 3 repeat.
- B1 Nos 1 and 2 lead down the middle and back with a walk step.
- B2 First two pairs swing and change.

3 **SIX HAND REEL** - triple minor

Tune : *Girl I Left Behind Me*

- A1/2 Nos 1 and 2 cross over and cast down outside of set, cross again below third pair and return to places. Four bars or polkas for each side.
- B1 Nos 1 and 2 lead down the middle and back with walk step.
- B2 First two pairs swing and change.

4 **SPECIAL MOLLY DANCE** - whole set.

A large handkerchief or ribbon is held between each pair [by the right hands].

- A1 Opposites go forward and back and cross over - (“dodging”) first going to the right into a line right shoulder to right shoulder, retring a little, and then passing left shoulder to left shoulder to actually cross over. [Handkerchief held up so as not to throttle the partner!]
- A2 Repeat with the same shoulders to cross back to place.
- B Nos 1 and 2 down middle under the arches, followed in turn by the second, third and fourth pairs and all coming up the outside (“edging”) in turn to their original places, like a sword dance “roll”. [With practice the roll could be done twice through]
- C Nos 1 and 2 swing down the middle to the bottom of the set, [under the ribbons].

COMBERTON

Source : *“Polka Round” by Cyril Papworth*, published by himself, Cambridge 1984

Step : A walking step is used for the lead down and back. The Lead Down is done holding right hands only, turning inward at halfway to face up, and leading back with crossed hands, ending in a swing hold position, holding opposite’s arms just above the elbows, and all facing up and down along the centreline of the set. Perhaps a call of “set” or “sit” by the leader to indicate a pause (or a bob down) before the next figure. This was thought by Cyril to be important for displays. “Cambridge Polka” - three short steps and a lift, raising the knee of the free leg in front to mid-thigh height. Start with the right foot, as he always did!

Set : Eight dancers in four pairs

In the original form the dances were slow, with the movements repeated and some dancers standing inactive.

1 **BIRDS A BUILDING** - duple minor, wider than usual set.

Tune : *Flowers of Edinburgh*

A1/2 First and second pairs move round four sides of a square, passing partner right shoulder and giving right hands shoulder high, then pass next **in the same way** to place, 4 bars per change, one to meet, two to pass giving right hands, one for quarter turn at the corner. All turns are the shortest ie “easiest” way.

B1 Nos 1 and 2 lead down the middle and back to places and “set” as described, ie bob down.

B2 First two pairs dance round one and a half times to progress.

2 **COLLEGE HORNPIPE** - triple-minor, perhaps only six dancers.

Tune : *Jacks the Lad* or *Sailors Hornpipe*

A1 Six hand circle left for eight bars with polka step nearly twice round.

A2 Circle back to the right for eight bars.

B1 All face up, odds place arm round even’s waist, evens put hand on odds shoulder. Double cast to left, dance to bottom and up middle to places.

B2 First two pairs dance round once and a half to progress.

3 **CROSS HAND POLKA** - duple minor

Tune : Own collected tune *The Cross Hand Polka*

A1 Nos 1 and 4 whole turn once round with the right hand and then all the way back with the left.

A2 Nos 2 and 3 repeat.

B1 Nos 1 and 2 lead down the middle and back to places.

B2 First two pairs dance round one and a half times to progress.

4 **DOUBLE CHANGE SIDES** - duple minor

Tune : *Speed the Plough*.

A1 Nos 2 and 4 take inside hands shoulder high and lead forward and back with a walking step between Nos 1 and 3 who stand still : Nos 1 and 3 then lead forward and back between Nos 2 and 4 who stand still.

A2 Repeat A1.

B1 Nos 1 and 2 lead down the middle and back to places.

B2 First two pairs dance round one and a half times to progress.

[A more active alternative is to dance A1 and A2 throughout with the polka step when moving]

5 **GYPSIES IN THE WOOD** - duple minor

Tune : *Smash the Window*.

- A1 Nos 1, 2 and 4 circle four bars clockwise and four bars anticlockwise, once round each way.
 A2 Nos 1, 2 and 3 circle four bars anticlockwise, picking up the new dancer moving in the direction already travelling, and four bars clockwise.
 B1 Nos 1 and 2 lead down the middle and back to places.
 B2 First two pairs dance round one and a half times to progress.

6 **SIX HAND REEL** - triple-minor, or three pair set
 Tune : *Brighton Camp* or *Girl I Left Behind Me*.

- A1/B1 Nos 1 and 2 cross over, passing right shoulders, and dance all the way around next two pairs, passing right shoulders again below third pair and then coming back to places.
 A2 Nos 1 and 2 lead down the middle and back to places.
 B2 First two pairs dance round once and a half to progress.

The dance is less tedious if A1/B1 is compressed into eight bars. In triple minors pairs work up set as seconds and third pairs alternately. In three pair sets, top pair goes through second place to bottom

7 **SIX HAND REEL** - a more active alternative.

- A1 Nos 1 and 2 cross over and dance around the set and finish up in the second pair's place, Nos 3 and 4 polka sideways to the top during the last two bars.
 A2 Nos 3 and 4 repeat and end in their starting place.
 B1 Nos 3 and 4, followed by Nos 1 and 2, lead down and back.
 B2 First two pairs dance round once and a half to progress, while the third pair cross over and dance all around the other two rotating pairs but themselves ending in the middle pair place, between the other two pairs.

8 **UP THE MIDDLE AND DOWN THE SIDES** - whole set
 from Whaddon as well as Comberton.

Tune : *We Wont Go Home Till Morning*

He saw girls did this in the cloakroom when it was raining

- A1 Top pair Nos 1 and 2 galloped sideways down the middle and back.
 A2 Top pair went around the set anticlockwise, either No 1 staying inside and No 2 outside the set all the way holding inside hands to end as they started, or No 1 goes down the outside of the odd side and up the inside of the even side, changing hands at half way, in either case "cutting across the corner" at the bottom.
 B1 Top pair zig-zags backwards and forwards to the bottom, through the other pairs, while everyone is jiggling.
 [B2 All swing]

9 **UP THE MIDDLE AND DOWN THE SIDES** - whole set, developed version
 Tune : *Shave the Donkey* and *Bob Ridley O*

- A1 Nos 1 and 2 take both hands and dance four side steps down the middle and four sidesteps back. Repeat, ending facing up holding inside hands.
 B1 Nos 1 and 2 make an arch, turn down, and dance round the set with No 1 inside the set, making arch over each dancer in turn until back to the top.
 A2 All take both hands with opposite, Nos 1 and 2 weave to the bottom of the set No 1 pushing and then pulling, while other three pairs move back and forward, keeping lines, the odds pulling then pushing. This is a combing and not a reel. [There is a timing problem of fitting it into eight bars]

B2 Both end two pairs dance round each other two times.

To end the dance every pair could dance round into one big circle.

10 **SOLO STEP DANCE**

Enquiries by Cyril Papworth suggested that this involved impromptu variations on the polka step, particularly towards the last days.

Typical East Anglian stepping was rather simple, see Ann-Marie Hulme and Peter Clifton article in the *Folk Music Journal*.

OTHER COLLECTED DANCES

1 LIVELY JIG

Source : Mary Neal's Esperance Book II from Sam Bennett. It is out of character with the other known Ilmington dances. Investigations by Richard Humphries have suggested that it might have been brought to Ilmington by a fiddler and gamekeeper from East Anglia and therefore may well be in the Molly tradition.

Music : A hornpipe collected with the dance. (A²B²)²A.

Step : To a simple step, with a basic phrase of, r l r l / r l r - /, without hops or stamps, and with the knee raised as high as the pace allows. The arms are swung alternately up and down, going up to high forward but not past the body in the down swing.

Set : Four dancers in a square, facing into the centre.

A1 Whole rounds round twice clockwise and end as at the start.

A2 First corner dance a back-to-back in bars 1-4, passing by the right shoulders first, and going across right to the opposite diagonal's place before retiring, while the other corners dance on the spot. The back-to-back is not repeated immediately the other way. The second corner then does the same in bars 5-8.

B1 The first corners, Nos 1 and 4, meet and clap, by dancing in two bars into a line of four with the other corners, Nos 2 and 3, across the other diagonal, so that they are right shoulder to right shoulder. They then slap right hands together on the [last beat of bar 2 or the] first beat of bar 3 and dance backwards to place [where they all clap again]. Meanwhile the other dancers dance on the spot and clap their both hands together over their head simultaneously with the first corner's clap. The first corner, Nos 1 and 4, then repeats the movement to the other side, left shoulder to left shoulder and clap left hands.

B2 Second corner, Nos 2 and 3, repeats all this.

Repeat ad lib, also using the other half of back-to-back, reversing the order of the siding and clapping, and anticlockwise rounds in the repeats for symmetry. End on an extra whole-rounds.

The dance can be expanded with other figures at A1 or A2. Also it can be expanded to a set of three pairs, or two sets of four can be linked by whole rounds, or versions of the figure eight danced in pairs.

2 NORFOLK THREE HAND REEL

Source : Mentioned by Joseph Needham in 1933 Geographic Distribution article here as interpreted by someone from notes provided.

Steps : Travelling and stationary polka, suggested cross over sidestep version for dancing on the spot, [note not a rant or a NW polka].

Set : Three dancers in a line facing to start 1> <2 <3.

A1 **Step** : Nos 1 and 2 face and "step" for four bars, No 2 turns, right shoulder going back, to face No 3 and they "step" for four bars.

A2 **Figure Eight** : No 2 dances a figure eight around Nos 1 and 3, starting by facing No 3 and passing by the right shoulder, while Nos 1 and 3 dance to meet in the centre and retire to places twice, avoiding crushing No 2 as that dancer goes round.

B1 **Step** : Nos 2 and 3 face and "step", then Nos 2 and 1 and "step".

B2 **Reel** : No 2 faces No 1 and all three dance a reel of three, Nos 1 and 2 passing right shoulders to start, and adding one more change at the end to bring a different dancer into the middle.

Repeat ad lib.

The “stepping” could be any local step-dance step, although it looks better if all or at least the ends do the same and perhaps with only the middle dancer being clever.

3 NORFOLK LONG DANCE

- Source** : *Community Dance Manual 1-7*, pp 26 and 102, being No 12 in Book 2 and No 1 in Book 7. These refer only to Norfolk. In the 1978 *Folk Music Journal* article by Ann-Marie Hulme and Peter Clifton the same dance is given for the Hindringham district.
- Tune** : *Perfect Cure*, a locally collected hornpipe and jig, and well known tunes and songs such as *Pop Goes the Weasel*, *Cock o’ the North*, *Keel Row* and *Tommy Make Room for Your Uncle*.
- Set** : Sets of six to ten pairs in a longways formation dancing in duple minor groups. The dance can start progressively or all together in fours.

- A1 First two pairs, or every two pairs, right and left hands across (stars), local called a “maypole”.
- A2 All advance and retire twice, first evens between the odds and then odds between the evens. Called “double change sides”, and the outer dancers could make arches for the inner dancers to go under.
- B1 First pairs or only the top pair lead down the middle and back to place.
- B2 Top two pairs take a swing hold and change places using a “flat polka” step progressing in the normal line of direction anticlockwise. This was called at Hindringham “twisting”. Alternatively only the top pair swing down the middle to the bottom of the set to progress as a whole set dance.

A local variant is for the leads down the middle to build up progressively during the dance, even though all join in the other figures, the first pair only lead down the first time through, then two pairs, three pairs etc, until all are active.

A variation that has developed in Barn Dances is that in B1 the top pair gallop sideways down the middle and up the outside of the set, while the bottom pair gallop up the outside and then down the middle to place.

4 ANOTHER THREE HAND REEL

- Source** : Cine of a Women’s side from Norfolk.
- Steps** : Skip change step to travel and can end movements with three stamps like a hornpipe.
- Set** : Three dancers in a line, top facing down the set and the other two facing up. 1 > 2 < 3. However the figures are all based on circling.

- CHORUS** : Version 1 : Reel of Three every time.
Version 2 : first and fourth times one end dances a Figure Eight around the other two : second and fifth times the other end dances a Figure of Eight : third and sixth times a full Reel of Three.

FIGURES :

- 1 **Star** : (hands across) right and left, turn **in** at half way.
- 2 **Ring** : (hands round) to left and to right, with or without joining hands.
- 3 **Star** : but at half way and at end reverse direction by casting **out**, all following No.1, so that the order is reversed, and forming a circle a little to the side of the original star. No.1 followed by the others traces a near figure of eight path.
- 4 **Ring** : joining hands, and popping dancer under as in “Pop Goes the Weasel” at the end of bar 2, all letting go hands and then rejoining them; carry on to the left, each popping in turn at the ends of bars 4 and 6. Repeat the circling to the right and popping at the ends of bars 2, 4 and 6 again. The figure is 16 bars long in all.
- 5 **Star** : right handed, and each dancer in turn pops under the arch made by the other two without letting go of the star at the ends of bars 2, 4 and 6. The first two can turn the easy way going under

but the last has to do a reverse direction of turn to avoid twisting an arm. Turn out (alone) to come back and repeat it all left handed.

- 6 **Ring** : No.1 pops under at start without letting go, turns to face centre so that all have hands crossed in a clover leaf and “basket” round to the left to end the dance.

In dances with Reels of Three, occasionally the reels are danced facing to the side throughout and sidesteps could be used.

PROGRESSIONS

For this section the set starts with the numbering shown here and the changes experienced by the dancers keeping their initial designation throughout.

The starting position is,

“even side” 2 4 6 8

“up” Musician “down” for as many as join in.

“odd side” 1 3 5 7

The following are the positions of the active dancers at the start of each numbered repeat, usually 32 bars long. The stationary dancers are self evident.

1 **FOUR PAIR DUPLÉ MINOR** - with progressive start and finish.

$\bar{2}$ 4 - - $\bar{-}$ 2 6 - $\bar{-}$ 4 6 2 8 $\bar{-}$ - 4 8 -

1 3 - - - 1 5 - 3 5 1 7 - 3 7 -

$\bar{6}$ 8 4 2 $\bar{-}$ 6 2 - $\bar{-}$ 8 2 6 4 $\bar{-}$ - 8 4 -

5 7 3 1 - 5 1 - 7 1 5 3 - 7 3 -

$\bar{-}$ - 8 6

clearly the last one or two repeats could be ignored.
- - 7 5 for a better appearance.

2 **FOUR PAIR DUPLÉ MINOR** - all start and finish together.

$\bar{2}$ 4 6 8 $\bar{-}$ 2 8 - $\bar{-}$ 4 8 2 6 $\bar{-}$ - 4 6 -

1 3 5 7 - 1 7 - 3 7 1 5 - 3 5 -

$\bar{8}$ 6 4 2 $\bar{-}$ 8 2 - $\bar{-}$ 6 2 8 4 $\bar{-}$ - 6 4 -

7 5 3 1 - 7 1 - 5 1 7 3 - 5 3 -

3 **FOUR PAIR DUPLÉ MINOR** - all start together and have double progressions.

$\bar{2}$ 4 6 8 $\bar{-}$ 4 8 2 6 $\bar{-}$ 8 6 4 2 $\bar{-}$ 6 2 8 4

1 3 5 7 3 7 1 5 7 5 3 1 5 1 7 3
etc.

4 **FOUR PAIR TRIPLE MINOR** - only three pairs at any one turn

$\bar{2}$ 4 6 - $\bar{\bar{}}$ - 2 6 8 $\bar{\bar{}}$ 4 6 8 $\bar{\bar{}}$ - 4 8 2

1 3 5 - - 1 5 7 3 5 7 - - 3 7 1

$\bar{6}$ 8 2 - $\bar{\bar{}}$ - 6 2 4 $\bar{\bar{}}$ 8 2 4 $\bar{\bar{}}$ - 8 4 6

5 7 1 - - 5 1 3 7 1 3 - - 7 3 5

5 **FOUR PAIR WHOLE SET** or **TRIPLE MINOR** - with a slip to the bottom

$\bar{\bar{}}$ 2 4 $\bar{6}$ 8 4 $\bar{6}$ 8 2 $\bar{6}$ 8 2 4 8 2 4 6

1 3 5 7 3 5 7 1 5 7 1 3 7 1 3 5

6 **THREE PAIR DUPEL MINOR**

$\bar{2}$ 4 - $\bar{\bar{}}$ - 2 6 $\bar{4}$ 6 - $\bar{\bar{}}$ - 4 2 $\bar{6}$ 2 $\bar{\bar{}}$ - 6 4

1 3 - - 1 5 3 5 - - 3 1 5 1 - - 5 3

7 **THREE PAIR TRIPLE MINOR** and **WHOLE SET**

$\bar{2}$ 4 6 $\bar{4}$ 6 2 $\bar{6}$ 2 4

1 3 5 3 5 1 5 1 3

There are also non progressive dance constructions,

8 **FIGURES** plus **CHORUSES** - Cotswold like in structure,

9 **JUST** a sequence of **FIGURES** - North West in structure.

Finally There are the **THREE**, **FOUR** and **SIX** hand reels that have been mentioned which may or may not have a changing order element.

CYRIL PAPWORTH'S BROOM DANCE

- Source** : Just a little of it came from his grandfather in 1937. The following notes are based on his teaching in a workshop on 24th October 1981, without reference to the two published versions. The write up in *English Dance and Song* omitted a figure.
- Tool** : A large yard broom with a long handle and a shaped head, from the days when people used to have large brooms. It needs a shaped or angled head so that it can be trodden on to lift up the handle. The old brooms must have been heavy and unwieldy, and with big heavy boots it would not have been easy to dance either. He did not know if the dance had ever been done with a besom. His grandfather performed it indoors in order to amuse the children and put its head on a tray on the carpet. Before he went out Cyril sandpapered the handle to avoid it slipping and before starting always wiped his hands well.
- Music** : Originally used the *Keel Row* tune but he now prefers the collected *Cross Hand Polka* as on the *Plough Jacks* record.
- Order** : Its order was haphazard. His grandfather ended by putting the broom on his shoulder and walking off. Cyril now finished with a Hobby Horse figure and had a more structured approach to the dance. The movement names are all Cyril's in the absence of traditional titles.

Rattle the Head : Rattling was his term, the local name was "jigging". The rattle is done by rocking the head in the rhythm $\overset{\uparrow}{1} 2 3$, akin to the rant. They always rattled the broom head in Cambridgeshire, but the precise rhythm depended on the tune type used. Dancers should let the handle lay in the right hand, and not put the thumb over the top, this then allows the necessary movement. The canted head lays so the the bristles are parallel to the floor, not the other way, otherwise it cannot be rattled properly! Groups should practice it standing in a circle. It is desirable to keep the head "jigging" at any opportunity throughout the dance, so Cyril adds Rattle Broom figures between some of the movements. In the last bar of a phrase of a rattle the dancer should minimise the bangs by fitting to the rhythm of that bar of the melody, eg, two beats only.

- 1 **Once to Yourself** - Stand still, holding the handle tip and facing along the broom handle, and rattle the head only in the last two bars.
- 2 **Dance Round** - Start from having the broom head in the centre and dance once around clockwise, holding the tip of the handle. The dancer must finish each move in time to start the next one, that is be ready, facing in, about half a bar ahead of the tune. The dancer does not run in the polka step but taps the foot down, rather than lift, an action similar to the Cotswold Morris.
- 3 **Leg Over** - The broom tip is passed under the left leg and then the right, in the direction from inside the leg to out, one pass per bar whilst dancing a slow hop like a country dance balance. He found that he had to hop twice! During this he was also able to rattle the broom head. Finish the figure by dropping, or throwing, the end onto the floor, with a bang, and making sure that the broom head is the other way up with the bristles angling down not up.
- 4 **Dance Round** - As 2.
- 5 **Step Up Broom** - He did not know the detail of the original local stepping. The dancer only goes half way up the handle from the tip. The stepping should not be rushed. He danced up the right side of the handle moving towards the head and tapped with the right foot out to the side first and then crossed it over the handle, four times in two bars, and then retired doing the same thing four times more. On the last beat he landed on the right foot and changed his weight onto it from the left. He then started to repeat it all on the other side and with the other foot leading, but this time carried on right up to the head and danced out over it, turned, landing on the left foot facing the head on the left side of the broom, and lifted the handle up by treading on the shaped head, so that it swung up to his shoulder. If it does not come up straight away pick it up. Tread it up early in case it does not come up first time, and, if necessary, fill in any time with rattling. As an alternative, when near the head he turned, landing on the left facing back along the handle, and used his right foot on the nearest side of the head to lever the handle up, catching it with the right hand.

- 6 **Dance Round** - As 2, but speeding the dance up a little. He now danced with the knee coming up quite sharply, and in a decidedly broken rhythm.
- 7 **Broom Under** or Fool's Jig - He had put this figure in, but he was not sure if it was local. When he had spoken to an aunt, she suggested it, but it was not 100% certain. "Some bits never told about, but always knew." The attitude was that it is the broom that is dancing.

Hold the handle in the middle. The movement starts with passing the head under the left leg going out to the left, weight on the right foot on doing a hopstep. The tip leads when going under the other side, so that the broom is not reversed.

- 8 **Hobby Horse** - Step to the head "anyhow you like". He did four bars of stepping like an open sidestep, moving to the right and left as went forward up the right hand side of the handle to the head. He lifted the broom by treading on the head so that the handle came up and hit his shoulder in the fourth bar, or by levering as described in 5 above. He then lifted his right leg over the handle, while turning anticlockwise so that it was between his legs, broom head on the floor, he danced forward with polka steps, working up along the handle until he reached the tip, hand over hand to end right hand on the tip, rattling the head on the ground. The dancer needed to bend (well) down and keep the shoulders down so that it was easier to rattle. He dismounted by swinging his left leg over the handle.
- 9 **Dance Round** - as 2.
- 10 **Walk Off** - With the broom sloped on the dancer's shoulder, head uppermost.

Can also have a figure involving swinging the broom around the head or around the back of the body as well. He would add a phrase of rattling after 5 and 7 above and perhaps another dance round before 8.

PERSONAL VIEWS ON DANCE ISSUES

1 DEFINITIONS

Duple Minor : the working unit in the dance is two pairs. The pair of each unit nearest the musician or top of the set is often called the “first” or “top” pair and the other the “second” or “bottom” pair. A first pair works down the set as the first pair in each unit until they reach the bottom of the set, where, after a full turn of doing nothing, they then become a second pair and work back up the set.

Triple Minor : the working unit in the dance is three pairs. The pair of each unit of three pairs nearest the musician or top of the set is often called the “first” pair and the others the “second” and “third”. A first pair works down the set as the first pair in each unit until they are one pair away from the bottom, then as there insufficient pairs to continue the patterns, they slip through to the bottom of the set. Sometimes these bottom two pairs will attempt an abbreviated version of the figures for the full three pairs. Normally the pair on reaching the bottom of the set would stand two full turns of doing nothing at the bottom before coming back in to work up the set acting alternately as third and second pairs.

Whole Set : the working unit is the whole set. The pair nearest the musician or top of the set is often called the “first” or “top” pair and the only progression in a dance is to bring this pair to the other end or “bottom” of the set and all the other pairs moving up one place in the set. Thus each pair in turn acts as the top pair.

Non-Progressive : the working unit is the whole set. During such a dance each pair retains their initial relative order or numbering and there is no obvious progression with repeats of the patterns of movements involving different pairs, although the formations of the dancers within which the patterns are danced may change.

Swing : the working unit is the pair. This is a movement in which the pair turns round whilst moving, and is not normally a turning on the spot as more modern country dance usage of the name implies. The mixed sex ballroom hold is usually inappropriate, as is also the crossed hands children’s hold. It is usually difficult to dance it with hop-steps or schottiche steps and normally it is done with a polka, without the emphasis of a hop or the so called “waltz” step, as danced in common or jig time. Changing positions working as pairs without rotation is often called a **pousette**.

The Reels : these are defined as a type of dance that alternates reels, heys or figure eights with other simple movements, which need be no more than a stepping on the spot.

2 LENGTH OF LONGWAYS SETS

From a Performer’s Point of View : Only in New England and in modern Barn Dances has the social progressive longways for as many as will meant sets of eight or more couples. In Victorian times sets of a maximum of five or six couples were more common, and this has been reflected in the usual Scottish Country Dance sets in recent years. At typical country dance speeds a 32 bar sequence takes roughly half a minute, so that a four couple set would take 4½ minutes, a five couple set 6 minutes, and a six couple set 7½ minutes to all return to their starting positions. It was then socially unacceptable that some dancers would dance mostly as firsts or seconds. For a participatory social dance ten minutes is a tolerable maximum length, implying either seven couples for a progressive start and finish or ten couples with all starting and finishing together. However as dancers often paid by the dance they would want value for money! At the slower display speeds dances are proportionately longer and potentially more boring.

From a Spectator’s Point of View : Dances with more than eight persons are hard to follow in detail and the performers need to be mostly working in unison to produce a simple overall impression. Large numbers are impressive but also after a while monotonous, unless the figures are correspondingly “large”, therefore they should be used sparingly and as climaxes for shows. But large numbers of dancers are hard to come by. With a tradition of progressive duple or triple minor dances the changing activity patterns are interesting, but for ten dancers they are always asymmetric and therefore far less satisfying aesthetically. It should be clear from the progression patterns already given that there is much more scope for variety with eight than six dancers, and

that this number is therefore a desirable aim, particularly when the occasion is not dominated by consideration of an end of day money share-out. However watching the same sequence for four or five minutes is seldom inspiring, unless there are well rehearsed variations, so that a dance would not be allowed to run to a finish but be cut short after only a few repetitions. Stopping when the top pair returns to the start with the rest still out of place will not normally shorten the dances enough.

3 **SPEED**

Country dance speeds are fastish to create an effect within the dancers, who after all have paid to enjoy themselves. Display dances are usually slower to allow of greater effort and expression by the performers and hence for more show to compensate for the lowered excitement of the music being at a reduced pace. The interest is recovered by the musician infilling the melody and adding “bounce”. Country musicians played slowly primarily for listening, but also for social dancing so as not to overstress older dancers.

The known dances were collected from older men, who were naturally slower and also had an old man’s body language. A facet that may require compensation in modern situations.

4 **THE ERA OF THE SOURCE OF THE DANCES**

The dances being performed by the Molly in the decades 1890-1910 are like those popular amongst country people from about 1860, thirty to fifty years earlier. Thomas Hardy claimed that when he was a teenager in Dorset the longways dance form was spreading into the dancing of the working people, even though before they had been a part of the middling class culture of houses and assembly rooms for a century. He said that they displaced the older local step dances and reels. The Fletts say that similar dances were only spreading into the Highlands and Islands by the turn of the century. Thus it is reasonable to assume that the form of the surviving Molly dances did not appear in their culture until well into the nineteenth century. Russell Wortley formed the opinion that the Molly was at its height about 1860. It is not impossible that many of our “ancient” customs had a major stimulus in the poverty decades of the mid nineteenth century. This was also the start of the era of the popular acceptance of the quadrilles, eg. *The Lancers* and *La Russe*, but none of the recognised quadrille derived movements such as the ladies chain, sideways galloping, the grand chain, basket, or balance and swing occur in the notations. Thus it might be deduced that the repertoire was already freezing by mid Victorian times. As it is common in tradition that innovation is essentially a young dancer phenomena, it is probable that the Molly decline started when the young people were encouraged by their “betters” to find other leisure interests and thus had less need of the mid-winter patronage.

5 **THE COLLECTORS ATTITUDES TO THE DANCES**

It is clear from the manuscripts that Cecil Sharp saw Molly Dancing just as he had Border dancing in Worcestershire. However although he made some dance notes on them very early in his collecting experience, he appears later to have deliberately ignored what he considered to be poor or degenerate dances. His objective was not the revitalisation of traditions at the local level. He made little attempt anywhere in England to notate stepping, perhaps because it was still very common rather than just being somewhat difficult and tedious to write down. Other commentators have usually not taken the form seriously, leaving us with the danger of interpreting the tradition only in comic or entertainment terms, whereas this had been only one facet. It is difficult to accept that the collectors may not have seen anything special in the dances being done, because they would have been obsolete or seemed at least very old fashioned to anyone who was an active dancer themselves. Unfortunately the idea of it being a degenerate form persisted. But even the Cotswold Morris may have had its origins of figures and steps in an earlier social dance. There is a lot to be said for deriving material which is recognisable from current dance experience. Until the antiquarians predominated there was nothing special about what was done being old. The collectors may have seen the dances as derivative from the social dance, the modern enthusiast tries to see it differently, properly putting the occasion first and not seeing the dance as an end in itself.

6 REPERTOIRE

The nineteenth century Molly had a simple form, compatible with the then memories of old social dances, the very limited opportunities for practice, but also only one dance being performed per dance spot. In the days when entertainment was sparse there was little requirement for a long show in order to earn the expected money. The modern team has to provide a show, that is several dances in sequence, probably in a larger space and to a larger audience, which is also more sophisticated in its taste of what it will stop to watch.

Russell Wortley had suggested adapting more movements into the same known dance framework, such as *Soldiers' Joy* and *Stoney Steps*. This introduces the same problem as the revivers of the Dorset Stave Dances found when adding new choruses to the Stourton Caundle set. The Cotswold Morris could get away with small changes, like 20%, between various dances in the same style because of the way the Cotswold dances were with these differences as the highlights. This approach does not work for other traditions. As there are already so many Molly dances in the standard format, in practice new movements will be switches rather than additions. The conclusion must be that the basic collected repertoire does not represent a full flowering.

Whatever the source of the inspiration for a dance it will need to be adapted for three or four pairs. Is there a place for non-repeating, non-progressing dances within the tradition? Such non standard street dances are appearing in nearly all the English traditions. The club repertoire needs both major and minor dances. It needs contrast, or "light and shade", by using different rhythms such as jigs, polkas, schottiches and hornpipes, and at different speeds, but not reels which were seldom played in the late nineteenth century in Eastern England.

The problem is always with over choreographed dance arrangements which may be too difficult for the audience as well as for the dancers. A criterion could be whether a nineteenth century group would have accessed or conceived such a sequence. However modern crowds are sophisticated compared to those of the past and a few major, more complex dances may be desirable, hence the attractiveness of developing existing material as has so often been done in recent years. To avoid potentially unsuitable dances which might spoil the general public image of Molly, it suggests a policy of contact and exchanging between sides until a hard core of good new material exists. Trust the judgement of those who are now the tradition!

We are looking for fresh dances in character with the tradition, when the available examples are very limited. It is a near impossible task. As with the Border Morris it will be necessary to consider any scraps of information for inspiration, for example, having a team which is half men-women. Frequently mentioned in the past but seldom evident in modern repertoires are the various Reels. These were probably the older dances, and they have obvious structure.

Although there is little evidence surviving, it is likely that they did the obvious things such as dance with members of the crowd, used "modern" tunes and the then contemporary popular dances in moments of relaxation. "Magical" moments are also periods of tension and need relief. It is a characteristic of people that they can switch in and out of experiences, like reading a book a little at a time, or watching TV broken with adverts.

7 WIDER LOOK

The important factors are,

- a when did the known dances appear?
- b what was not used and why not?

We need to examine a hypothesis of a common traditional process.

It is normal for there to be a wide range of ideas exploited in a period of growth, both in the past and today. This creative phase goes with young people, both because the expansion is usually based on such persons, but also because older people settle down to what to them is a satisfying repertoire and resist further change. In a stage of decline the less standard developments drift out of the repertoire leaving simple material which is characteristically seen as no more than is necessary to maintain the annual activity. Collectors concentrate on old people to recover the most ancient forms, but in doing so ignore the creative generation, and this aspect of the tradition becomes forgotten.

A team needs to decide its objectives at the start because the investment it makes in practice and in the choices of dances and venues will stay with them for a long time. The present and future opportunities for the Molly are all the usual ones of Festivals, Folk Events and local occasions throughout the year, but also the mid-winter times of Christmas Shopping evenings, Boxing Day and the New Year, and the near Twelfth Day and Plough Day weekend. It must be recognised that any involvement in the local community will take many years, eight to ten, to establish a contribution as “traditional” and therefore “expected”, and this degree of commitment is often beyond the imagination of many teams who want a more instant success.

The advice to keep it simple is not easy as such ideas are hard to produce. Thus the merit of the suggestion of starting from existing country dance notations and elaborating them a little.

8 OTHER PROGRESSIONS

Unfortunately the collected dances all have the same simple progression typical of its historical period. There are a variety of other progressions possible, either in different eras or recorded in other parts of England, even in Victorian times. A study of books of notations, particularly those that may be available in local collections, should be rewarding. There are certainly other forms related to the Molly example as well as more ingenious methods.

Other variations on lead down the middle and back, with or without a following swing and change, are,

- a First pair go down the middle and back using a walk, skip or polka step and then cast down one place, separating to go around the second pair into their place while they move up, and then all swing either on the spot or moving completely around each other once or twice.
- b Both first and second pairs go down the middle and back, keeping the same relative position with the second pair always below the first, until the first pair is back and casts down one place.
- c The first pair goes down the middle followed by the second pair, who then lead the first pair back up, while making an arch under which the first pair go before reaching their starting place.
- d Dancers can go down the middle four in a line with the one pair split and outside the other, and either at the turn to come back or by a cast when back make a progression. As the progression is strictly by the cast, as in b above, the following movement can be any non progressive figure.

9 SOLUTIONS

Most of the problems and issues raised have been recognised by existing Molly sides. They have solutions and interpretations, many of which are good and some exceptional. Unfortunately an outsider does not see them on their home ground and cannot comment on how far they present the magic of the Molly or indeed are outward looking.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Notations have been rationalised as far as the originals allow and expressed in non sexist language where it is sensible, that is, pairs not couples and opposites not partners. There are no issues of proper or improper formations. They are mostly derived from the publications referenced in the bibliography supplemented by the teachings by Cyril Papworth at his workshops, particularly those of 24th October 1981 at Hertford. The Comberton dances at least remain in copyright and have been reproduced solely for the purpose of the workshop.

The ambiguities in the notations are indicated as options. It must not be assumed that there was only one “proper” way and that somehow the different sources are really consistent. It is a general characteristic of tradition to be “different”, ie, to make anything their own. This facet can be observed in the many options in the very “common” *Norfolk Long Dance*.

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ANNEX

DEMONSTRATION DANCES - NOTES ON TALKS

The first two groups started from the dances taught at Cyril Papworth's workshops but they have been developed in quite different ways.

1 **PIG DYKE** - Tony Foster of Xayley Morris

Their kit was chosen to make an impact and has led them to a black and white basis. It is a mixed team and cross dressing is accepted as the individual desires. They do five dances, three related to the old dances and two newly composed. They have developed the collected movements and introduced other country dance figures. They have a "*Short Back and Sides*" version of *Up the Sides and Down the Middle*. They are conscious that the old teams had their emphasis on the occasion rather than the dances.

2 **OUSE WASHERS**

They have tried to express the arrogance and power of the West Norfolk people. So they have combined *Smash the Windows* with *Birds a Building*, plus a dance single-step with the knees well up, and using lots of power.

3 **SHITWITCHES**

Their background has been described in the most recent *Morris Matters* issue. They do the Molly only at Christmas. They have one of the first pair dressed as a woman. There are four dances in their tradition, which is still evolving.

4 **KEMP'S MEN**

They are not so committed to the Molly. The dance taught is still being worked on, hence its current name of *WIP* which stands for Work in Progress.