

Notes from 1992  
(Slightly Updated)

**BEING THE RAMBLINGS OF AN OLD FART**  
(originally written by Paul Hurst, Secretary)



## INTRODUCTION

This guide is simply intended to suggest a few points to the “new bugs”, as well as perhaps reminding the ‘old farts’ of past decisions. Its aim is to help us collectively keep to our highest standards. As a democratic team, we should ALL be maintaining and policing standards.

Champions ‘kit’ consists of ribboned hat, sash, black face and hop string. Boots, cords, braces and white shirt and non-black face is accepted as ‘out of kit’.

There is NO acceptable half-kit between these two options.

## PRE-PERFORMANCE

The aim of a performance is to put on the best show possible with the dancers available. Any time spent in kit before the gig will detract from the initial impact, and any time after will ‘dilute’ the effectiveness of the dancing itself.

It is usually best to turn up out of kit in time to confirm the correct time of the “spot”, be ready to dance 15 minutes before the stated time and then de-kit as soon as possible after the event. Running off to the bar afterwards in full or half kit is an absolute no-no. We will always be judged as a group for the actions and utterances of any one person in kit, even by those who know us. If you want to get rat-arsed, slag off another group or the world in general please change first! Many find a good technique is to turn up with boots, cords and white shirt on, then add the black face, hat, sash and leg ties at the event, reversing the process or else changing completely depending on if we are dancing again later. Others prefer to make a complete change for each performance. Sort out which you prefer, so long as you are ready in time.

Know exactly in what dances and set positions you are able and confident - being “almost sure” can result in more than a modicum of public embarrassment.

Make sure that you bring a suitable jacket. Having an immaculate set of hat, boots and sash and then turning up in a rainbow fluorescent day-glo puffa jobbie is only a valid option if we all have them (oh wow, yes please)! Discuss.

## FESTIVALS

Most festivals etc. tend to be fairly loose in their organisation, so by turning up a quarter of an hour early it is possible to cover any last minute alterations. It also gives an opportunity for a last minute run-through of the set and looks professional! Yes I know that some festival organisers can manage only a fairly flimsy grip on events (or even reality), but that is no excuse for us to do the same. It is also regrettable that some stewards are of limited ability. If faced with a "Jobsworth" use the standard technique of being firm, polite but persistent, never lose your rag as that means they have won. If you are logical and controlled without getting angry they will usually back down. If not then just ask for their name, go to the festival organiser and see if they can help.

Never ever pick up all the side's tickets unless that has been specifically agreed. Finding the "information" office is not usually a problem, but tracking down one of our dancers through all the pubs in a town is not quite so easy!

It's not really fair to expect Uncle Mike (who is not a personal social secretary) or anyone else to sort out camping equipment, lifts, bail, probation officers or other logistical problems for you. Please arrange your own transport, times, places and clean kit well in advance of the event. Ask around, it is usually possible to sort out things in house without too many problems.

## PERFORMANCE

During any performance the only correct stances for a dancer are:

- Stationary and "frozen" (Standard at ease posture)
- Dancing correctly
- Dancing incorrectly but in a purposeful manner (don't stop!)
- Writhing on the floor and going for the sympathy vote (not really chaps, only Joking!)

In other words if standing in set don't look around, natter away or scratch your nuts. At events like Ceilidh and arena spots this also applies to those standing outside the set, they are still part of the act. If you make a cock-up in a dance at least do it in a confident manner, quite often the punters won't even notice. It also looks really naff if the dancers and musician all chip in with their little asides and bon mots whilst the announcer is rabbiting - that's his job folks. We probably won't even be heard clearly and it just looks like we're sharing "inside" Jokes - a sure way to alienate an audience.

Keep a lookout for any opportunities however; we seem to have acquired a reputation for comedy, as well as dancing. If spotting an opening I usually just point it out to whoever is "molly" at the time and leave it up to their judgment. It may be that a dancer is the only person able to exploit a situation, but it's very unlikely this will happen (some say it never will) and any attempt at comedy will probably detract from, rather than improve the overall effect. The announcer should also avoid waffling, if he isn't enhancing the performance then the overall effect is being lessened.

Find out your position in a dance before going into a set but if you do forget, or end up in the wrong starting position remember that even though crossing and milling about looks messy, it's not half as bad as cocking up the dance by beginning in the wrong place. Ideally it can be done whilst the molly or other is announcing.

## **STANDARDS**

At various times in our history we have relied on comedy to cover for a weaker dancing standard. We have moved on from there and must be able to depend on the quality of our dancing so that the two enhance and complement each other. You can fool some of the people some of the time...

We hopefully take our performances seriously, and must extend the courtesy to other sides of not bugging up their sets, processions, introductions or music. (Interplay with another team in a procession or at a pub stand is fine as long as both teams are up for it) Our own reaction to anyone else doing this to us would not be very tolerant. It is also rather bad form to ignore the other performers and chat away in our own little huddle whilst someone else is strutting their stuff - a tad elitist and arrogant. Play the game, chaps.

No one can be criticised for giving their best effort at their current level of ability, but general fitness and stamina can always be improved or if already fit, maintained. Sobriety is down to us being responsible adults and knowing our own limits with regard to performing. 'Nuf said.

## **POST-PERFORMANCE**

Any public post-mortem or ritual disembowelling should not be held immediately after a cock-up. Wait until the next practice (or dark alley, whichever comes first...).

At an event know when the next stand is and be ready for it; think ahead. Don't wander off without checking for the next spot and don't assume a big side means that you are spare, at one event nine dancers dwindled to five in a few minutes just before we were due to dance. If you need surgical supports, clothes, ropes, brooms, instruments or any other props please think about it in advance rather than at the "OK lads, yer on ..... " stage.

## **TEAM**

In general the fun comes from working as a team to get the buzz from a solid performance. The more we put in, the more we get out, and some of us have fairly demanding egos to massage! As a side our best performances have been when we feel confident before starting. A good or bad momentum can build up during a set so give us every chance of success by being ready and prepared beforehand.

It is hoped that the side will run as much as possible as a democracy, and that anyone with an opinion or suggestion will feel free to make it known. Let rip rather than letting things fester and rankle, and don't wait for the next A.G.M. to come round if you want something discussed now.

We can be bad about encouraging anyone who wants to develop skills or abilities rather than relying on the status quo. If you always wanted to be the first morris musician playing the electric harpsichord, or the first skateboarding molly why not give it a try (at practice!) to see if it works?

## DANCES

Dances do get changed at practice. We should communicate this to all, however... If you are a country member or have missed some practices, ASK if there have been any recent changes.

Many dances and positions have problems all of their own, here are a few I can think of.

### ***Birds a'building***

Traditionally our first effort of a set, so please get the first step right. It really does look very impressive if all eight (or twelve) boots hit the ground together, and if they don't that lack of confidence starts creeping in...

### ***OTP - Over The People***

Superb if all that dancing is going on without anyone getting booted. Start kicking the victims about and the overall effect is rather shabby. I'm also not too sure how well our insurance covers us in a situation like that anyway!

### ***5 Hand / 10 Hand Reel***

Are you the first to swing with the molly? Are you going to correctly anticipate the first beat or be a prat and have to perform a hurried scuffle to catch up - hardly one of our finest figures.

### ***College Hornpipe*** (If and when we do it)

Just remember that there are four parts - most cock-ups occur when we switch into the "birds on autopilot" mode.

### ***Russells***

Most often forgotten bit is those first three stamps. Again, it helps to start cleanly. Agree before if final tiller girls figure is to be 1.5 or 2 turns.

### ***Special Molly***

Anticipate the first beat of the "falling masonry" figure, it's very hard to get that multiple lead-down right if your foot does not hit the ground correctly, the problems are then magnified for the following pairs.

### ***Whizzo***

If danced to 'Fever', intro is 4 finger clicks from muso and remember four extra single steps on the spot at the end.

## IN GENERAL

The dances that do not rely on overly complicated or energetic figures (Birds, Five Hand,) are transformed when performed with style and confidence. It can be enough to move even hardened veteran folkies. Anyone can enjoy seeing a tight performance but few will be moved by watching a group who do not quite make a complicated dance work.

