

WIGTON CARNIVAL DANCE

Morris dance from Cumberland collected by Sue Mycock.

Information from the late Mrs. Williamson (aged 75 then), Mrs. M. Allan, Mrs. Mary Reeves, Mrs. Jean Foster and Sister Aquinas (Wigton Convent), Winter 1977/8.

From Mrs. Margaret Williamson (nee Peel): in circ. 1909 the bigger girls wore garlands of flowers round their heads, smaller girls wore "cloutie" bonnets. Bonnets in one file were blue, in the other file pink. All wore white dresses, black stockings and black shoes. There were two files of dancers, in multiples of four, with the smaller girls in the rear. Handkerchiefs with bells sewn at each corner were used. There was a loop in the centre of the (white) handkerchief, to suspend the hankie from a finger. Garters were also worn round the ankle, with bells sewn on. The tune danced to was "100 Pipers" and it was played by a brass band. Step: 1-2-3-hop. Only one figure remembered: right and left hand stars. (Mrs. Williamson also gave photos showing dance and sticks are held by older girls in one photo, with ribbons hanging from sticks).

Information from other (later) sources: in 1935-6(?) the costumes were made of (crepe?) paper with paper flowers on. They were made by a Mrs. Sally Smith. (Mary Reeves, nee Charters). Some of the girls did dance with sticks, circ. 1939-40, but they were shorter than those in the 1909 photo, with bells and ribbons at ends. (Mrs. Jean Foster, nee Charters).

In the 1970's the Carnival was revived, after a lapse of some twenty years, by the nuns of the convent school in Wigton - in particular Sister Aquinas, headmistress of the school. Sister Aquinas managed to contact Mrs. Lily Scholey, who had at one time lived opposite the old St. Cuthbert's convent school and had taught the dance in the 1940's and 50's. She now lived in Carlisle and was quite old (90?). She taught a team of girls at the school and the dance was performed at the head of the procession in the revived Carnival in 1973(?) and has been performed ever since in the carnival, annually. There is a tendency now to change the costume every year, e.g. in 1975 the right hand file (always called the men's side) wore red satin trousers and berets and the left hand file (the ladies' side) wore white dresses, socks and shoes. (cf. the blue and pink bonnets of many years ago?). Handkerchiefs with bells sewn on at each corner were used. The notation that follows is based on what the girls of the 1977 carnival danced.

Music: "100 Pipers".

Set: multiples of 4 dancers.

Step: 1-2-3-hop throughout (starting R. foot).

Implements: handkerchiefs or sticks.

BARS 1-4:

In position (i.e. on spot, no processing) sweep right hand down to left, sweep back up to R shoulder. Repeat.

PROCESSION:

Four steps forward with right hand sweeping down to right side, then up and down to left (more or less figure-of-eight movement with hand), L hand still.

FIGURE 1:

Cross over with partner, passing right hands. Repeat with left hands to place.

FIGURE 2:

Right and left hand stars (inward turn to change).

FIGURE 3:

Cross over with partner, passing right shoulders and holding right hand up at shoulder to shake (either hankie or stick) in air as pass. Repeat to place passing left shoulders and shaking left hankie/stick.

FIGURE 4:

Right hand file dance forward four steps, hands as bars 1-4 at beginning. Left hand file dance forward likewise, but hands up first, then down. (Repeat, reversing..?)

FIGURE 5:

Chain in fours, face partner and giving right hand cross set, turn up or down file and pass left hands along sides. Right hands across again and left hands down sides to place.