

## MORRIS WORKSHOP

Edited by Russell Wortley

## THE "STAFFORD MORRIS"

By Roger Marriott

While examining the *Lichfield Mercury* for accounts of the Lichfield Bower, I came across references to the participation in 1922, and from 1930-36, of morris dancers from the English Electric Company at Stafford. As there was always a chance that some dances other than Lichfield's own had survived, I followed up this reference, and in 1956 met Mr. L. G. Shelley of Stafford, then 82 years old.

In fact, the Stafford dancers had been taught by Mr. Shelley a dance he had learned while resident in Silverdale, further north in the county.

There were 16 dancers in a troupe, in a double column of 8 pairs. In 1906-08 the Silverdale boys wore red, white and blue caps with a red tassel, white shirts, red ties, a blue waistsash, and dark knickerbockers loose at the knee. Sometimes they had red waistcoats. Bells were sewn on to the ends of the knickerbockers, and tied to the shoe-laces. Each dancer carried two sticks, about 14in. long, painted in red, white and blue rings. On each end of each stick was a small knob, two bells, and ribbons about 6in. long. During the dances the sticks were held horizontally above the head between thumb and forefinger.

Dances could be processional or stationary, and all started from the column formation. The step was either skipping, or "heel and knee" (similar to schottische step). The dances were made up from any of eight figures.

"Half right and left"

A skipped cross-over, followed by stationary heel and knee. Repeat to places.

"Counter-march"

Cast off, up the middle in single file. Heel and knee on the spot in file, then fall back into places.

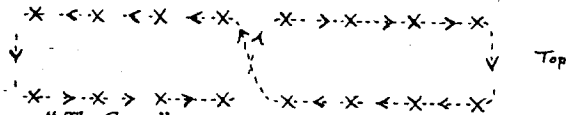
Two variations of "Counter-march"

(a) As above, but come up the middle in twos.

(b) As above, but come up the middle in fours.

"Figure eight"

The top four of the left column, and the bottom four of the right column face up to the set. The others face down. The top half of the set moves clockwise, the bottom half anti-clockwise, dancers crossing over in the centre (see diagram).



"The Cross"

Up the set in fours (how this was achieved was not clear), then each four wheels slowly right at the top, until a cross is formed.

"Swing in Twos"

Right and left allemand. Free hand is held aloft, stick held lightly between thumb and forefinger to make bells jingle.

No name

Counter-march, ending with a "line-out" facing up.

There were no special tunes. Mr. Shelley said "anything lively" was used, and recalled *Garry Owen* and *Bonnie Dundee*.

At Stafford (where the community of a large factory presumably gave him greater resources) the team eventually had the music of eight concertinas, and bass and side drums.

About the same time I met Mr. A. E. Collins of Stafford. He had been Secretary of the Trades and Friendly Societies in 1906, and possessed a photograph of a similar team, active from the Jubilee of 1897. Mr. Collins was not a dancer, and could tell me nothing except that the team were boys, dressed in white, with knickerbockers gathered at the knees, and dark stockings. They had bells only on the sticks.

Shortly after my visit to Stafford, the late Alex Helm tracked down James Brassington of Betley near Crewe, from whom L. G. Shelley learned the dance. As at Silverdale and Stafford, the teams were of boys.

In one way, I was disappointed by my findings. Clearly this was no indigenous Staffordshire morris, but something very similar to the "fluffy morris," imported from Cheshire. Yet it is an interesting dance. There are echoes of north-western morris, and Mr. Shelley remembered meeting dancers "Bolton way" who wore clogs and waved slings. Perhaps the dance of Mr. Shelley is the last survival of a male Cheshire tradition, before it became a girls' dance and part of a competitive, carnival scene.

That morris existed in Staffordshire outside Lichfield is reasonably certain: there are a number of historical references.<sup>1</sup> But that there is any living memory now seems very unlikely.

<sup>1</sup> See Cawte, Helm, Marriott and Peacock in *JEFDS*, 1960



Mr. Harry Willscroft's Morris Dancers, with A. E. Collins (on left), Secretary to Stafford Trades and Friendly Societies Demonstration Committee. Taken in Shire Hall Yard



English Electric Co., Stafford, 1922

The Betley, Staffordshire dance was collected from Mr. Shelley an old dancer in 1956. The essentially same dance was done by the English Electric side at Lichfield Bower between the wars. Mr. Shelley's dance recently published in ED&S. Additional material from an English Electric dancer who came from Preston area.

Music: Scottish jigs - Bonny Dundee etc anything lively, Garry Owen

Sticks: 2 sticks, 14 in long, red, white and blue rings painted on, each end had a small knob with bells and 6 in long ribbons.

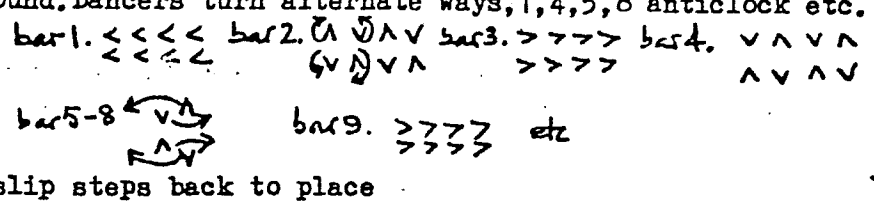
Steps: mostly skipping or the "heel & toe" schottische setting step. Stand on one foot, heel of free foot to side, back to half way up shin, repeat. Then do with other foot.

Hands: sticks held horizontally above head between thumb and forefinger lightly and stepping does most of the ringing of the bells, some shaking done.

Set: 16, eight on each side. Can be done successfully by 12.

1.4 polka steps on spot turning round. Dancers turn alternate ways, 1,4,5,8 anticlock etc. to end facing alternate ways.

Hand up on inside of turn only. In 4's, 1st and 2nd pairs change places with slow slip step passing back to back, leading hand up. Polka & turn again and slip steps back to place



2. Cross over with opposite, "half right and left", pass right shoulder and turn right to face back (4 bars). Heel & Knee setting (4 bars) starting on left foot. Cross back ditto.

Counters. "undermarch" - face up, single cast out from top, odds one side, evens the other, and come up centre in single file, odds in front of their partners (16 bars). Heel & Knee on the spot facing up, on left first, (4 bars) and skip out, falling backwards to place (4 bars)

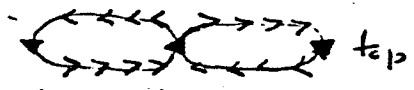
4. As fig 1. (16 bars)

5. Turn opposite - allemande left and right - free hand up and waving - 8 bars each way. Hold hands - one turn only each way.

6. Face up, single cast as 3. come up the middle in twos (16 bars) but fairly close together compared with starting position. Face up & Heel & Knee (4 bars), fall back to place (4 bars)

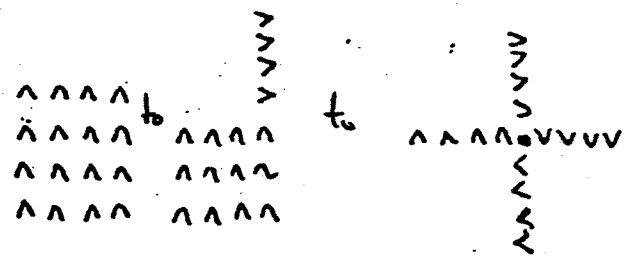
7. As fig 1. (16 bars)

8. Hey. Top of left column and bottom of right column face up the set, the others turn in to face down. Then all dance a large figure eight, the top half of the set moves clockwise and the bottom anticlockwise and dancers cross from one loop to the other in the centre. All go the same way and get back in 16 bars.



9. Face up, single cast as 3. come up the middle in fours (16 bars), 2nd couples between 1sts so that top line is 1 3 4 2 from the left facing forwards. 1sts mark time at bottom waiting for 2nd pair to cast in & get between etc. Heel & Knee facing up (4 bars) Start waving forward into the next movement.

10. Big Cross: From the lines of 4 position wheel on the right hand end of the line to form a cross of lines of four. Put hands on neighbours shoulder and rotate the star. Lines have to wait, or at least only move forward one space while the previous line rotates 90 deg. The leader goes into the middle of the cross.

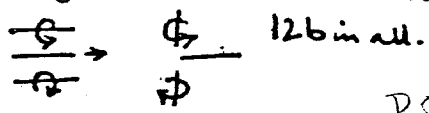


The dance can end in this formation (8 bars) or continue one complete round (16 bars)

- 11. Reform column in 2 files. Not collected but suggest either, a. come up middle in 4's, split into 2's and cast either side, go round and split into singles etc as is often done in a Grand March. b. from the cross come up in fours again, Heel & Knee and fall back to place. c. as cross comes round start to come up in 4's and middle pair drop back to places in column as it comes up.

12. Face up, single cast but come up in a line of 16. Top pair in the middle & rest accumulate on the ends. End sticks crossed overhead

As interpreted by Shrewsbury Lassies - walk step in figs. Sticks horizontal over shoulders in slips. Elbow swing in 5. Danced by 12. Form cross



12b in all. MR 1