

STAVE DANCES.

A Stave is particularly a symbol of the various Friendly Societies who had an annual Club walk with banners and band. There were a number of Women's Societies - at least one still exists at Nether Stowey which meets at the Rose and Crown Inn and whose feast is the last Friday before Midsummer Day. A men's club still exists at Priddy, the Victoria Inn, with its feast on Whit Monday. Several clubs still existed and had their annual walk in the 1930's, for example Crewkerne and Timberscombe and at some places, such as Warminster, several clubs would combine for the day.

The Staves only appeared on Feast Day. The "club stick" varied from 4 to 8 ft long and was stained or painted either in a single colour or striped. At Kilmerson the 4 ft stave was painted blue with red and white spiral stripes, decorated with red, white and blue tassel and ribbons hanging below the polehead. In and around Somersetshire the poleheads were often brass emblems. Wooden stave heads were very common, they have just not survived to be collected. At Wookey, where they met at the Ring O'Bells Inn, the wooden knob was painted red and mounted on a blue pole 6' 4" long. At Donyatt by Ilminster the 4' 4" stave had a gilt head with blue tassel and ribbon a yard long. Brass heads were used at Combe May, Corston, Dunkerton, Kelston, Larkhall, Timsbury, Tunley and Wellow near Bath. A wide variety of shapes were used - some can be seen in the Blaise Castle Folk Museum and one from Soundwell, Gloucs, in the Nolburne Museum; Bath.

The usual colour for hat ribbons was blue. Combe May had a cockade of purple and pink ribbons on the hat. Top hats were common and the ribbon would be round the top of the crown with the rosette pinned to the side with its tails flowing down below the brim. Sashes would be worn over the right shoulder, often 3" wide, crossed at the waist and pinned with a rosette.

The Societies usually had banners or flags. Early on these were very often locally made and examples of folk art but later they were usually a plain ensign with the Union Jack in the first quarter and the name of the Society across the lower half.

Interesting accounts exist in William Barnes "Poems of Rural Life in Dorset Dialect" - 'Whitsuntide an' Club Walken' - and Harvey "Club Day, being a description of a Kilmersdon 'Old Club' Annual Parade" pub. 1927. Many Societies ended the day with a dance and some included dancing in the activities during the Club Walk. Raymond in "English Country Life", 1934, mentions the dancing of Hunt the Squirrel and Four Hand Reels. At Paulton step dancing is mentioned in a local history.

Where formal dancing was done it was derived directly from contemporary social, that is country dance. To produce effective display dances some amalgamation is necessary of the available material and the following is a rationalisation similar to that adopted by the Shropshire Bedlams with the Border Dance material. It is then impossible to ascribe the dances to a particular place but to the general district where Somerset, Dorset and Wilts meet around Zeals, although to say that restricts it to too small an area.

Set: normally for 8 in two lines.

Music: usually hornpipes played sedately.

Step: hornpipe 123hop - not a morris step but a travelling step with foot brought up behind the other on the second beat.

Stave: carried over right shoulder - top of stave can be decorated with a garland of flowers.

Style: steady - phrase the movements to just fill the music so as to avoid pauses with marking time, it must flow along.

Usual to pass left shoulders to avoid staves and their decoration coming into contact.

Start with left foot.

Stave Dances cont:

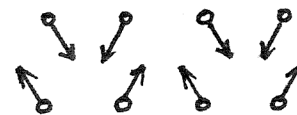
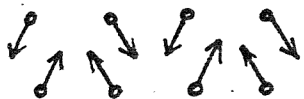
COMMON FIGURES.

ONCE TO YOURSELF: Face in - in the two lines.

CROSS OVER: as in Speed the Plough - pass opposite by left shoulders, crossing and passing opposite's place, turning to right to face back and repeat to place, passing left shoulders again and turning right into place.

ARCHES: odd and even pairs face alternately down and up. The pairs change places and return along the set - the pair going down the set passing on the outside and using their staves to make an arch while that coming up the centre keep their staves sloped over their shoulders and do not duck. The movement is done twice through.

INTO LINE: as in Single Change Sides - into line along the centre of the set shoulder to shoulder, but in pairs not as in a morris half-gyp.



Initial path

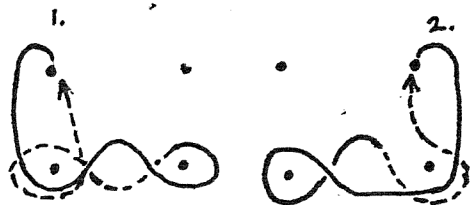
Making Arches

In the repeat

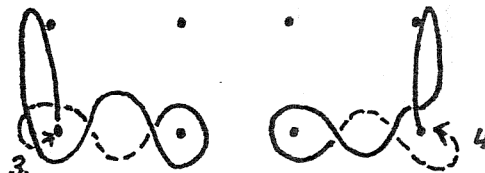
The pairs from each side make and keep an arch with their staves through the first half of the figure. In the repeat to the other side different arches are made. The single persons at the end keep their staves at the slope.

LEAD DOWN: odd and even pairs face alternately down and up the set again. In the first half the odd pairs go down the middle, shoulder to shoulder with their opposite, and retire backwards to place, staves remaining on their shoulders and not used to form arches. In the second half the even pairs go up the middle and retire to their places. The inactive pairs in each half remain stationary and do not mark time.

FIGURE or CAST: all pairs face up. The odd pairs cast out and go down to the evens place, and then make a figure of eight across the set and back, returning to place. The even pairs follow the odds but first move up the set towards the odds places, letting them pass left shoulders down the outside.

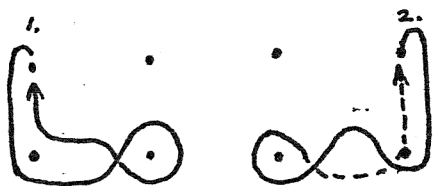


odd pair

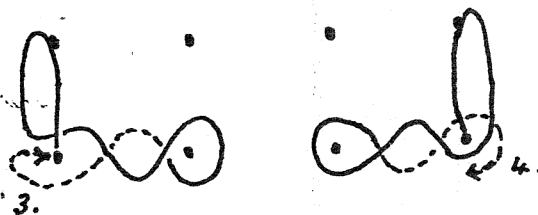


even pair

There are two ways of doing the figure, the odd pair passing right or left shoulders first. The first way is more of a scramble.



odd pair



even pair

Stave Dances cont:

DISTINCTIVE FIGURES

The following movements are the distinctive or chorus movement for each dance, used to follow each Common Figure. The dance ends with a chorus and the dancers stop at attention, in place, facing across the set, stave sloped over right shoulder.

DANCE ONE.

All face to left, up and down the set, dance two travelling steps along the line of the set and turn out to face back, dance two travelling steps back to place along the line of the set, turning to face opposite. Turn opposite once round with a left hand elbow grip and return to own place.

DANCE TWO.

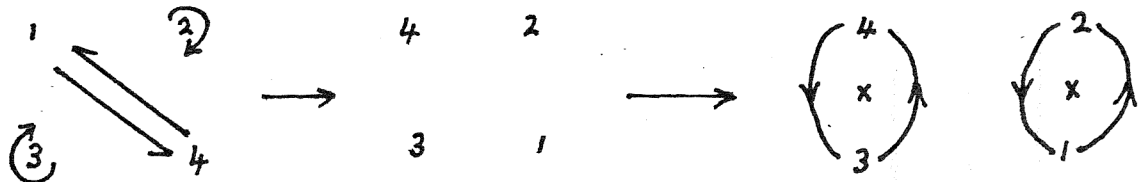
All face down the set. Odd pairs dance one travelling step to bring them between the even pair, who mark time, to form a line of four across the set all facing down. Then all move down the set one travelling step. Turn on the next two bars so that the odd pair in the middle face out and the even pair on the outside face in, ready for a half reel of four across the set, passing left shoulders first, taking four travelling steps. All face up and move up the set two travelling steps, turn to face out and in as before and second half of reel of four across the set ending in original places.

DANCE THREE.

In fours, circle clockwise half way round to opposite diagonal's place, turning into the movement the easy way. All cross back to places along the diagonals, all passing left shoulders in the middle as close together as possible simultaneously, turning to left in place into a circle anticlockwise to opposite diagonals place and cross back along the diagonals and again passing left shoulders and turning the easy way in ones own place to face front. Particularly important not to have any pauses in this movement so must be phrased very carefully.

DANCE FOUR.

In fours (cf Ladies Chain). 1st corners cross passing left shoulders while 2nd corners dance a circle round place. The 2 + 1 and 4 + 3 turn using staves, once all the way round.



Repeat to place. 1st corners cross back, passing left shoulders again, others circle round place, then turn same person with stave again.