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THE SWORD DANCE OF PAPA-STOUR

(39)

There are three basic sources:-

1. Sir Walter Scott "The Pirate" (not the first edition)
2. Dr. Hibbert "Description of the Shetland Islands" 1822
3. Alex. Johnson "Sword Dance of Papa Stour, Shetland" 1926.

The first two refs. derive from a MSS extant about 1820 & observation of the team. They form the basis of the accounts in

4. Alfred W. Johnston "The Sword-Dance of Papa-Stour, Shetland" 1912
5. Cecil Sharp "Sword Dances of Northern England" Part. 1. p 21. 1911
6. D. H. MacLennan "Highland & Traditional Scottish Dances" 1950
(this has a good photo)

The third ref. was based on performances in 1921-2 & 1926. It is the best source but one can use the others, as did the dancers, for clarification. The following, in "Sword-Dance-English", uses all three and indicates where different interpretations are possible.

Team:- SEVEN dancers (suggests connection with rapper) named in order 1. St. George of England, 2. St. James of Spain, 3. St. Dennis of France, 4. St. David of Wales, 5. St. Patrick of Ireland, 6. St. Antony of Italy & 7. St. Andrew of Scotland.
- the seven champions of Christendom.

Music:- Jigs and a few strange Shetland tunes.

Step:- a slow springy run.

PROLOGUE:- "Calling-On song." 2 to 7 stand in a line facing audience No. 1 sings - during which each dancer in turn is called forth to draw his sword & do a little solo stepping before returning to place.

INTRODUCTION:- 2 to 7 are in one line, sword in right hand, sloping up over right shoulder. No. 1 does a few steps in front of No. 2, then strikes No. 2's sword. No. 2 then moves out of line to follow behind No. 1. No. 1 then repeats this in front of each in turn, each falling in behind in turn. (ref. 2 could mean that each man brings his neighbour into the dance in turn) One can only assume that all that have been called out join in the stepping.

FIGURE ONE - "RING":- all march into clockwise circle, then extend sword to full length to right side & grasp end of left hand neighbour's sword in left hand. Circle left, hilt & point, twice round.

FIGURE TWO - "CLEW, 2 turn out":- Nos. 1 & 2 raise the sword between them & No. 2 passes under, turns to his left & goes c.c.l. round outside of circle. At the same time No. 1 goes down the other side carrying the sword over top of the set. The rest follow No. 2 in order but going alternately to right & left. That is No. 3 to right, after No. 1, No. 4 to left after No. 2, etc. The figure continues ad lib, with men going alternately to left & right & thus each man goes down alternate sides in successive cycles. Swords are crossed over set to make a tunnel - one side has its hands crossed. To finish - No. 1 after going through the tunnel, turns to his right and the rest follow, turning to right also.

FIGURE THREE - "OVER NEIGHBOUR'S SWORD":- All, simultaneously (one supposes it could be done successively as is usual elsewhere) step over their left hand sword, from outside - left over, stepping in & turning clockwise. This leaves all with swords crossed and backs

to centre. All raise right hand sword & turn sharply on heels to right, under it, to face centre. Ring to left twice round (ref. 2. once)

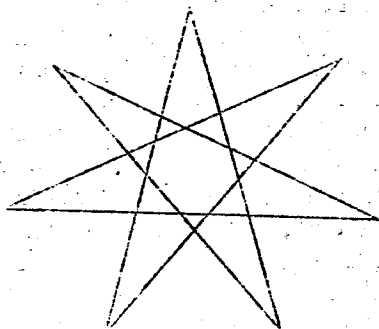
FIGURE FOUR - "UNDER & OVER":- No. 1 crosses set & goes under sword between Nos. 4 & 5 & jumps (ref. 3 - steps) backwards over sword followed in like manner by 2, 7, 3 & 6. Then Nos. 4 & 5 raise sword between them & turn sharply round under it. (No suggestions on phrasing - one might suggest repeating it with others leading)

FIGURE FIVE - "CLEW No. 1 turn out.":- Mirror image of Figure 2 started by Nos. 1 & 2 raising sword & No. 1 turning under it to right, followed by 7, 6, 5, ... going alternate directions as before. (ref. 1 & 2 could be conventional single under but ref. 3 refers to Fig. 2) Ring to left twice around.

FIGURE SIX - "OVER YOUR OWN SWORD":- (here I prefer not to follow ref. 3) All, simultaneously step out, over ones own sword (on the right) right foot first, turning to right, ending backs to centre & swords crossed with "hands across their backs". Dance round in ring till leader calls "Loose!" then each raises left hand (ie. sword which is out at ones right hand side) and turns right to face front.

FIGURE SEVEN - "CLEW No. 1 goes under":- No. 7 lays down his sword. No. 1 crosses set & goes under sword between 4 & 5 & turns to left, lifting his own sword over his head. No. 2 goes under sword & turns to the right. Each follows going alternately left & right & developing a figure similar to 2 & 5. Come out by No. 1 going through tunnel & all following him round to right.

FIGURE EIGHT - "LOCK":- while going round in a ring all let go of neighbour's sword & turn abruptly to right to face away from centre and link up again with man on other side (ie. No. 1 grasps No. 7's point) All turn simultaneously to left, raising right hand sword over their head - face centre with swords crossed right over left. All separate hands pressing swords gradually towards centre; passing right hand under next sword to right & putting hilt on top of point of the next sword to the right. (thus left hand over next to left & under one after that) Making a seven pointed star called a "Shield". Men then dance round in circle to the left; then



(a) each man in turn steps into middle holding shield over head by two points while rest join hands & dance in a circle round him (cf. Ring-a-roses at Grenoside) The last throws the shield forceably to the floor to break the lock & each picks up his own sword & falls back into one line as at Prologue.

or (b) while dancing round in ring each man in turn has the shield upon his head. The shield is then laid down on the floor. Each takes hold

of the hilt & point he had before, but in other hands (ie. crossed) and by uncrossing breaks the lock. After (a) or (b) music stops & No. 1 steps forward & speaks an EPILOGUE.

After fig. 7 all or part of the figs. can be repeated. The swords were straightened barrel hoops.