

English Morris Dancing



Morris dancing is a phrase used to describe different types of traditional dance in England. These include Cotswold, North West, Border, Longsword, Molly, Clog Step and Rapper Sword Dancing. Each style of dance has its origins in different areas of England. Read on to find out more...

Cotswold Morris

This is one of the oldest styles of Morris Dancing starting in the 1400s or before. It was even done in Tudor courts for kings and queens. Dancers often wear white and dance with either hankies or sticks.

Costumes are called 'kits' and can also include rosettes, waistcoats or crossed over sashes called baldricks.

The Cotswolds includes the counties of Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. Cotswold Morris can be done on your own, in pairs or in sets of six or more and includes lots of high leaping, so you have to be fit!



North West Morris

This started in the 1800s in the counties of Lancashire, Cheshire and Greater Manchester. Many people worked in mills and factories and had time off for Carnival Days. These are big parades with dancing and music. Dancers wear the clogs they would have been wearing to work in the mills. They added bells, ribbons and sashes adding colour and noise for dancing.

North West Morris is famous for its straight lines and sharp movements, it is very precise! It is danced in sets of eight, twelve or sixteen people with music from a band including a drum to keep everyone dancing in time.



Border Morris

This is from the counties where England joins Wales and include Shropshire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire.

It is full of energy and done with sticks. It includes shouting and swirling making it exciting to watch.

Dancers usually wear jackets made from rags which look really good when the dancers swirl and move quickly.

This is part of their disguise. Many teams also have painted faces or masks so you can't always tell who is dancing!



Molly Dancing

This type of dance is from the from an area called The Fens around Cambridgeshire. Even though today it is danced all year round, it's a tradition linked to a day called 'Plough Monday' in January where farm workers danced to collect money like buskers.



The dances are done in sets making patterns with sharp turns and high-knee stepping. Kits are often very colourful and not matching.

Longsword Dancing

This is from Yorkshire and done by six or eight dancers. Each person holds their own sword and also holds the other end of their neighbour's sword, making a linked circle of people. They weave in and out to make patterns. It can look like they are tying themselves in a knot! At the end of the dance, the swords are woven together to make a star. Their kits sometimes like old-fashioned soldier outfits. Many places in Yorkshire have their own longsword dance named after the village or town.



Rapper Sword Dance

This is a fast and exciting dance, full of energy from the North East of England in the counties of Durham, Newcastle and Northumberland. It was started by coal miners who worked in the area. Many villages had their own team and dance.



Like Longsword, dancers are joined together with swords in a circle. The difference with Rapper is that the swords have a handle on each end and are made from a metal called sprung steel so they are bendy. One story suggests that the double handled 'rapper' was used to scrape the sweat from pit ponies in the mines.

Clog Stepping

Clog Step Dancing came from people who worked in the mills in areas such as Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire, Cumbria and the North East. Similar clog dancing is also done in Wales.

The clogs worn by the workers are like shoes with wooden soles. Workers started to tap out rhythms with their feet to copy the sound of the big weaving machines.



Today, clog stepping is done solo, as a pair or in teams. The stepping is very complicated and looks similar to tap dancing or Irish dancing.

English Morris Dancing Questions



1. Where is Longsword dancing from?

2. In Border Morris, name something that is used as a disguise.

3. Longsword and Rapper both make what shape with swords at the end of the dance?

4. What is a 'kit'?

5. Why did farm workers do Molly dancing on Plough Monday?

6. Match the features to the type of dance:

Border Morris

Sticks and hankies

Clog Stepping

Fast with bendy swords

Cotswold Morris

Swords from Yorkshire

Rapper Dancing

Tapping rhythms with feet

Molly Dancing

Wear clogs and bells

North West Morris

Tattered Jackets

Longsword Dancing

Colourful with high knees



7. Which style of Morris might Henry VIII have seen in his court?
Show the evidence from the text.

8. Which style of dance is your favourite? Give a reason why to explain your choice.

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Answers



1. Where is Longsword dancing from?

Yorkshire

2. In Border Morris, what two things are used as a disguise?

Any from: Tattered jackets, painted faces or masks

3. Longsword and Rapper both make what shape with swords at the end of the dance?

A star/lock

4. What is a 'kit'?

A dancer's costume/clothes/outfit

5. Why did farm workers do Molly dancing on Plough Monday?

To collect money

6. Match the features to the styles:

Border Morris	Sticks and hankies
Clog Stepping	Fast with bendy swords
Cotswold Morris	Swords from Yorkshire
Rapper Dancing	Tapping rhythms with feet
Molly Dancing	Wear clogs and bells
North West Morris	Rag Jackets
Longsword Dancing	Colourful with high knees

A diagram showing red lines connecting boxes from the left column to boxes in the right column. The connections are: Border Morris to Rag Jackets; Clog Stepping to Tapping rhythms with feet; Cotswold Morris to Sticks and hankies; Rapper Dancing to Fast with bendy swords; Molly Dancing to Colourful with high knees; North West Morris to Wear clogs and bells; Longsword Dancing to Swords from Yorkshire.

7. Which style of Morris might Henry VIII have seen in his court?
Show the evidence from the text.

Cotswold Morris because the text says it was done in Tudor courts for Kings and Queens. (It also mentions it started in the 1400s).

8. Which style of dance is your favourite? Give a reason why to explain your choice.

Open ended but with supporting evidence/reasons from the text.