

# English Morris Dancing



Morris dancing is an umbrella term for a number of different types of traditional dance in England. These include Cotswold, North West, Border, Longsword, Molly, Clog Step and Rapper Sword Dancing. These dances, although now done all over England and the world have their origins in different geographical parts of England. Read on to find out more...

## Cotswold Morris

This is one of the oldest forms of Morris Dancing dating back to at least the 1400s and was even done in Tudor courts for the kings and queens. It is probably the most recognisable of the Morris traditions where dancers often wear white and dance with either handkerchiefs or sticks. Costumes – often referred to as ‘kits’ can also include rosettes, waistcoats or crossed over sashes called baldricks.



The Cotswolds includes the counties of Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire after which many of the dances are named. The dancing can be done solo, in pairs or in sets of six or more and includes energetic, high leaping.

## North West Morris

This tradition started in the 1800s in the counties of Lancashire, Cheshire and Greater Manchester. It came out of the mills and factories when workers had time off for Carnival Days – big parades in the towns or villages with dancing and music. Dancers wear clogs which they would have been wearing to work in the mills. They added to this to make kits including bells, ribbons and sashes adding colour and noise.

North West Morris is recognisable because of its straight lines and sharp movements, almost military, in its precision. It is danced in sets of eight, twelve or sixteen people accompanied by a band that includes a drum to give a strict beat.



## Border Morris

This tradition is from the counties that make the border between England and Wales including Shropshire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. It is an energetic and looser form of dance done with sticks and including shouting and swirling.

Dancers traditionally wear colourful tattered jackets which look really impressive when the dancers swirl and move quickly. This is part of their traditional disguise and many teams also have painted faces so you can't always tell who is dancing!





### **Molly Dancing**

This tradition is from the from The Fens around Cambridgeshire and The Wash. Although nowadays it is danced all year round, it's a tradition linked to Plough Monday in January where workers danced around the area to collect money.

The dances are done in sets making patterns with sharp movements and high-knee stepping. Kits are often very colourful and striking where individual dancers make their own individual statement costumes

### **Longsword Dancing**

This tradition is from Yorkshire and done in sets of six or eight dancers. Each has their own sword and also the other end of their neighbour's sword, making a linked loop of people who then interweave 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 six or eight-pointed star which is called a lock. This is held up for the audience to see. Dancers wear military-style kits and there is also an element of marching and precision to the dance. Many places in Yorkshire have their own longsword dance named after the village or town.



### **Rapper Sword Dance**

This is a fast, energetic and exciting dance from the North East of England in the counties of Durham, Newcastle and Northumberland. It came from miners who worked at the coal pits in the area. Many pit villages had their own team and village dance. These dances are still danced today.

Like Longsword, dancers are linked together with swords in a continuous circle. The difference with Rapper is that the swords have a handle on each end and are made from sprung steel so they are bendy. One legend 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 the mill workers in the areas such as Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire, Cumbria and the North East. Similar dancing is done also in Wales. Workers in mills wore wooden-soled clogs and gradually workers started to tap out rhythms with their feet to imitate the sound of the big weaving machines. Dances developed and so did competitions. Clog dancing was also a popular entertainment in the music hall era.

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



# English Morris Dancing Questions



1. Which two styles of dancing are from the county of Yorkshire?

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

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3. What does the phrase 'umbrella term' mean in the first paragraph?

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4. Why has the writer used the word 'military' when describing North West Morris?

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5. Which of the styles is more suited to a parade and why?

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6. Match the features to the styles:

Border Morris

Clog Stepping

Cotswold Morris

Rapper Dancing

Molly Dancing

North West Morris

Longsword Dancing

Sticks and handkerchiefs

Fast with bendy swords

Rigid Swords

Rhythmic tapping of feet

Wear clogs and bells

Tattered Jackets

Colourful with high knees



7. Why might you have to be quite fit to do Cotswold Morris?

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

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9. Why would you never see a solo Rapper dance?

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10. Which style of dance is your favourite? Give two reasons why to explain your choice.

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# English Morris Dancing

## Answers



1. Which two styles of dancing are from the county of Yorkshire?

**Clog Dancing and Longsword**

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

**Tattered jackets and painted faces**

3. What does the phrase 'umbrella term' mean in the first paragraph?

**A word that covers a number of similar things (or similar explanations)**

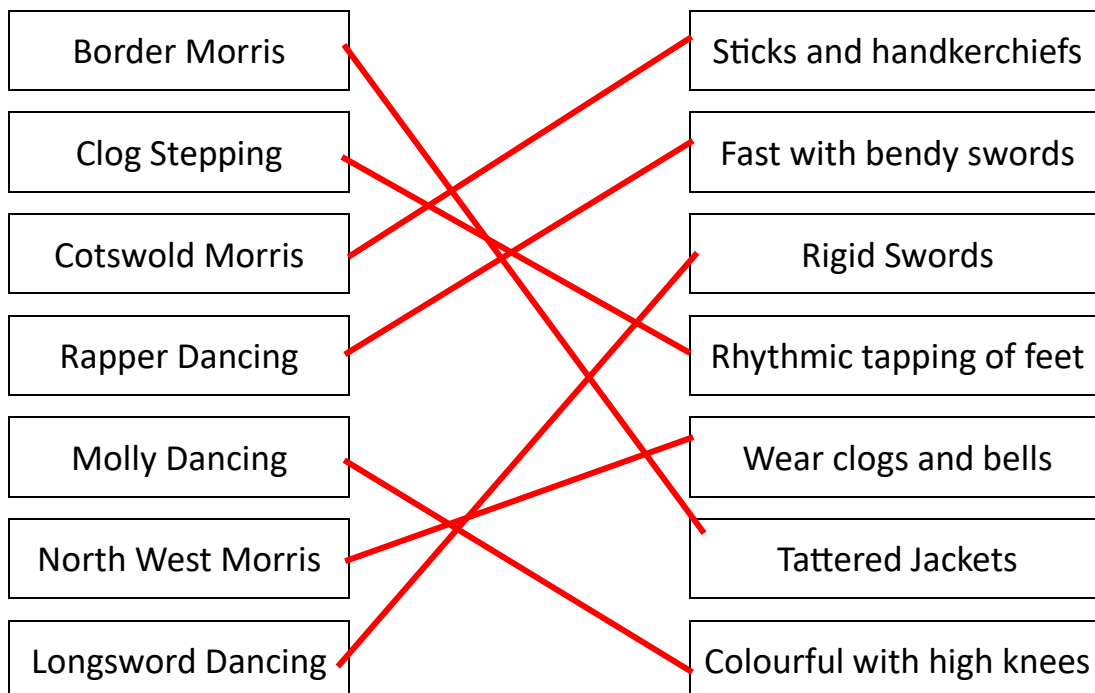
4. Why has the writer used the word 'military' when describing North West Morris?

**Answers that liken the strict rules to an army**

5. Which of the styles is more suited to a parade and why?

**North West Morris because the style was made for parading in carnivals (may also include the long straight lines)**

6. Match the features to the styles:





7. Why might you have to be quite fit to do Cotswold Morris?

**The texts says that it includes energetic, high leaping.**

8. Which style of Morris might Henry VIII have seen in his court?

Show the evidence from the text.

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

9. Why would you never see a solo Rapper dance?

**Any reason/s from:**

- **It is done with linked swords – so infers more than one person.**
- **Swords make a star/lock at the end and you can't make a star with one sword.**
- **It says the word 'team'**

10. Which style of dance is your favourite? Give two reasons why to explain your choice.

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