



# RATTLE UP

## My Boys

A quarterly publication for those with an interest in sword dancing

Issue 4, Series 7. Winter 1998/99

## The Second Sword Spectacular

May 21st to 25th 1998

In January 1998 Vince Rutland, Secretary of the organising group for the second Sword Spectacular, set out their objectives and the programme for the 1998 Sword Spectacular. In particular Vince wrote:

*"One of our principal aims is to give everyone the opportunity to see performances by all the teams taking part ..... the Saturday afternoon dance tours will end with performances by all groups at adjacent arenas."*

It seems a great pity to start this report with a grouse - especially when I enjoyed the overall event so much, but the idea of making it possible to see all teams (which I don't think is all that critical but was an objective of the organisers) just didn't work. "Slippage" in the timing of some tours meant that it was difficult to see all teams, especially if like me you were dragging video and photographic equipment around.

From 4.00 pm on Saturday afternoon all teams were scheduled for performances at three adjacent spots - the Bandstand, Captain Cook's statue and the Pavilion. The idea was that you could wander from one spot to another to see the groups of your choice. However changes to running order and lack of announcements made it very difficult to catch selected teams and after abortive dashes from one site to another I gave up and decided to stay at one spot.

I worked out that I had missed four teams (10% of the total).

### Change of venue to Whitby

The move to Whitby resulted in many more good dance sites than exist at Scarborough. The base at the Whitby Community College was excellent - one site for everything and an easy walk to the town centre.

### The format of the event

The general format was as 1996 with one major difference - the lack of a formal side to the proceedings - no talks were programmed and the Conference, which proved so successful last time was dropped, probably because of cost.



*A new comer to the second Sword Spectacular - Volkskunstgroep Nele from Belgium performed a wide range of dances including a sword dance with a typically European hoisting as a climax.*

The first two midweek days of the Festival were advertised as involving overseas groups (and as many UK teams as wished to join them) in visits to local schools and public performances. I didn't see any of the early events but Vince Rutland told me that the organisers were disappointed with the level of support from UK teams for these pre-weekend events.

I understand that the Friday evening informal "get-to-know-you" session was very enjoyable.

Saturday morning involved three coach tours to surrounding towns and villages by half of the groups attending. Whitby's excellent dance locations were used to the full as the other teams remained in, and performed around, the town. The groups switched over at lunch time. An enjoyable day ended with a most enjoyable Ceilidh at the Pavilion with music by Pete Coe's band and dance spots by some teams including a

memorable performance of the Flemish Trawantel dance by Boerke Naas from Belgium.

There were well attended workshops at the Community College on Sunday morning from 9.30am - 11.30am including Longsword (by Ivor Allsop); a Rapper session (by Phil Heaton) and Children's Dance for 5 - 11 year olds (taught by Pete and Sue Coe). The publicised Beginners Rapper and Overseas Dance workshops were dropped.

I love parades and the one on Sunday morning, from the Community College to the Bandstand, was superb. I missed the advertised second parade at 3.45 pm to the Pavilion preferring to get a good place for the indoor Gala Concert where virtually all teams performed.

Throughout the weekend there were sword related displays (including photos and scrap books from the 1996 event) and a Craft Fair. at the Pavilion The large lobby area at the Pavilion provided an ideal meeting place - stand there long enough and almost everyone involved in sword seemed to pass by!

### The teams who attended

Vince commented, in his press release, on the cost of staging the Festival and especially accommodating overseas groups. I assume that cutting the number of overseas teams had a beneficial effect on the finances. Nevertheless it was a large reduction - in 1996 14 teams from 8 foreign countries attended - this time we saw 5 teams from 3 countries. It was a great pity that three overseas teams dropped out late on - they would have added variety and "colour" to the weekend and made the claim "International" a little more relevant.

Unlike 1996 when the number of overseas teams increased in the run up to the event in 1998 Strani (Czech Republic), Burgos (Spain) and Lange Wapper (Belgium) all withdrew within a few weeks of the event.

### The overseas teams who attended were:

Bacchu-ber (France) - to give them their full name "The Societie Des Admirateurs do Bacchu-ber" this unique team from South-East France could not attend in 1996. It was a treat to see them this time. Their dance is hypnotic and is distinctively different to other European dances.

Bagnasco Bal do Sabre from the North West of Italy, were the only overseas team who made a return visit. The team dance entirely to the beat of drum. They were very well received, especially at the Sunday evening Concert, and they obviously enjoyed their return visit.

Volkstunsgroep Boerke Naas (Belgium) are no strangers to the UK - the team performed the traditional Flemish Trawantel dance at a number of EFDSS shows at The Royal Albert Hall in the 1970's and have had contacts with Abingdon Morris for many years.

I hoped to see more new (to the UK) exotic and impressive overseas teams. With Bacchu-ber, and Boerke Naas I was not disappointed but I felt that Volkstunsgroep Nele and Volkstunsgroep De Wouwe (both from Belgium) were rather out of place, being principally social dance display teams. In both instances their sword dance performance was indifferent and rather "twee".

### UK teams

The UK teams from 1996 who didn't attend in 1998 (Grenoside Longsword, Dorset Button Rapper, Rumworth Morris, Yorkshire Coast Morris) were outnumbered by new teams attending for the first time including Black Adder Rapper and Step Dancers, Brompton Scorpers,

Castleford Longsword, Highside Longsword, Northgate Rapper, Pengwyn Rapper, Seven Stars, Short Circuit Rapper and York Gentlemen.

The list of teams attending in 1998 was:

Addison Rapper (also attended in '96)  
Bishop Gundulf's Sword (also attended in '96)  
Black Adder Rapper & Step Dancers  
Broughton Scorpers - I didn't see this team - they only performed on the lead-up to the main event.  
Carlisle Sword, Morris & Clog (also attended in '96)  
Castleford Longsword  
Claro Sword & Morris (also attended in '96)  
Coventry Mummers (also attended in '96)  
East Saxon Sword (also attended in '96)  
Flamborough Longsword (also attended in '96) - Sunday only  
Gift Rapper (also attended in '96) - in the 1998 programme but were unable to get a team together.  
Goathland Plough Stots (also attended in '96) - team members were busy acting as tour guides, collectors, door men etc.  
Handsworth Traditional Sword Dancers (also attended in '96) - Sunday only  
Highside Longsword  
High Spen Blue Diamond Rapper (also attended in '96)  
Newcastle Kingsmen Sword Dancers (also attended in '96)  
Northgate Rapper  
Pengwyn Rapper  
Ryburn Longsword (also attended in '96) - two teams, adults and juniors  
Ryknild Rabble (also attended in '96)  
Sallyport Sword Dancers (also attended in '96)  
Seven Stars Sword and Clog Dancers  
Short Circuit Rapper  
Snark Rapper - I assume that the team lived up to their reputation for humorous and skilful performances - I didn't see them.  
Southport Swords (also attended in '96)  
Stevenage Sword (also attended in '96)  
Stone Monkey Sword Dancers (also attended in '96)  
Sullivan's Sword (also attended in '96)  
Thrale's Rapper (also attended in '96)  
White Star Sword Dancers (also attended in '96)  
Wype Doles Sword Dancers (also attended in '96)  
York Gentlemen - not in the programme but on the video

Of the total of over 150 teams from Europe and North America (including the UK) known to dance sword a total of 45 teams attended the first weekend and (according to the programme) 35 attended the 1998 event.

It would be interesting to know why there were no North American teams this time (Half Moon Sword, Orion Sword, Longwood Rapper and Tronoto Sword all attended in 1996) or teams from Germany (Baden Wurtemberg and Uberlingen in '96). Teams from the Czech Republic and Spain dropped out (Bystrice and Komna from Cz and Markina from Spain all attended in '96). I especially missed Lange Wapper and Quevaucamp from Belgium, In de Kring from France and one of the stars of the 1996 event - Jack the Rapper from Norway.

## The future ... (?)

I strongly recommend the organisers of future events to plan an event which adds something (other than enjoyment) to our understanding. If they don't want the added burden of arranging a Conference then at least I would propose one or two "Meet the teams" where some overseas teams could give a little background to their dance and the history of their customs in addition to performing other versions and dances they perform. For example the Basque teams usually have two or three sword dances from different areas plus a range of other traditional dances.

The list of overseas teams who have not attended leaves lots of scope - Oni Kenbai (Japan), Redondela, Burgos, Baiona or San Sebastian Danzas (Spain), Borsky Mikulus (Czech Republic), Korcula Moreska (Croatia), Fennestrelle and Castelletto Stura (Italy), Westerlo (Belgium) plus a dozen or so USA teams. Added to this list are teams from Papa Stour and the Isle of Man - more than enough fascinating teams to go at for the World Millenium Sword Spectacular on the Spring Bank Holiday in the year 2,000. There have also been rumours of an event arranged by an overseas team .... watch this space!

## Thanks to those who made it happen

Keith Thompson was Chairman of the organising committee which included Sally Atkinson, Ian Davies, Stuart Higson, Jeff Lawson (Treasurer), Vince Rutland (Secretary), Mike Smith and Vin Wynne. They are to be praised for an enjoyable second event which avoided most of the pitfalls that beset the first Sword Spectacular in 1996.

### Gordon Crowther

One of the hard working team who made the first event in 1996 work, in spite of a shaky start, was the Squire of the Scarborough based side Yorkshire Coast Morris Gordon Crowther whose local knowledge and contacts helped enormously. Regrettably Gordon died some months ago.

## Bouquets ....

Geoff Austyn wrote

*Was I going crazy? There I was driving to Whitby on a Bank Holiday weekend to a sword dance festival as the sole representative of my team (Ashvale Longsword), not only that but I was planning to sleep under canvas for the first time since I left the army in nineteen hundred and frozen to death. I was going crazy!*

*As I was going to be alone I had already volunteered my services as a steward (a really good idea). I was made very welcome.*

*Having been present at the 'First Sword Spectacular' in Scarborough I was really looking forward to the foreign teams like Lange Wapper and the great Czech team who had made such an impression on everyone, so I was a bit disappointed by their absence. The teams that did make it more than compensated. It was a brilliant weekend all round.*

*The highlight of the whole weekend for me was the Sunday tour to Goathland. I had the good luck to be on the bus with Pete Coe and the Ryburn side and we were entertained there and back in Pete's inimitable style. In Goathland the 'Bagnasco Bal do Sabre' from Italy and 'Ryburn Junior' teams made a huge impression (you were right Ryburn has come on by leaps and bounds since Scarborough 2 years ago).*

*It was with reluctance this tired but happy longsworder dismantled his tent on Monday morning and headed south to Hertfordshire. Looking forward to the year 2000 and another great event.*

Eddie Cass wrote:

*... and it was spectacular.*

*May I add my thanks to those from the platform. My trip from Manchester was more than worthwhile. If I hadn't heard Keith say that the next one was to be in 2000, I would have booked to come back next year.*

Sue Coe wrote

*Thank you all again and congratulations to all your team for such a superb event - we all loved it - but even more so for the "probability" of another one - you are so good at organising the event. Count us in as registered to be there NOW!*

*... and there where others!*

## The Video

My copy of the "official" video of the weekend was ordered at the event - you can order a copy from Vince Rutland, 37 Church View, Brompton, Northallerton, North Yorkshire DL6 2QX (phone 01609 780 536), cost £15 including post and packing. The camera work was by Peter Mernagh, editing by Kate Jensen and Sally Atkinson and production by Sally. I have been able to find out if it is available for the USA system.

Running time 1 hour 16 minutes.

The blurb on the outer case of this video states "This film gives a flavour of the celebrations which truly made the (1998) event a Sword Spectacular". It did this exceptionally well. The camera work was good and the editing and production standards were much more professional than the 1996 video.

However this video has no captions to help viewers to identify each team, merely a list of teams at the end. And to make matters worse it has no supporting documentation included with the video. The amateur production from 1996 had "on screen" maps, captions etc giving background about teams and having enough detail (costume information etc) to enable one to identify teams. The printed details of the teams and the running order are useful documents in their own right. I have looked at the new video a couple of times and enjoyed the memories it brings but it's future usefulness for me is limited by the lack of captions, team descriptions and a detailed running order.

I have, for my own use, produced a printed running order for the video which helps viewers to identify which team is which. If any reader would like a copy simply get in touch.

As far as I can make out all teams were included in the video except Gift Rapper and Brompton Scorpers but there was uneven coverage of teams - some getting a single spot of a few seconds whereas others were show three or four times.

Trevor Stone November 1998

*Just to set the record straight - Keith Thompson, when plugging the 1998 video at the Sunday evening Concert, claimed that the video of the 1996 event "cost a lot of money". In reality it earned the event over £500*

# Photo call



## Details of photos

- |          |          |   |
|----------|----------|---|
| <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | 1 Bagnasco near Captain Cook's statue     |
| <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | 2 Sullivan's Sword from Nottingham        |
| <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | 3 Wype Doles pose for a team photo        |
| <b>7</b> | <b>8</b> | 4. The super Ryburn Longsword team        |
|          |          | 5 Stunning stepping by Short Circuit      |
|          |          | 6 Distinctive dancing from Stone Monkey   |
|          |          | 7 Ivor Allsop taking a workshop           |
|          |          | 8 Stuart Higson, one of the harassed team |

Photos supplied by Steve Armitage, Geof Austlyn, Michael Jackson and Trevor Stone

One of my objectives in setting up the first Sword Spectacular was to encourage more people to travel to see overseas teams (and some UK teams) on their home patch and at their "traditional" time. I was therefore delighted to hear of overseas visits by a number of UK teams within the past two years and to be sent the following report of a visit by Gillian and Rob Guest (late of York Gentlemen before they moved house) who travelled to the South of France to Briançon to see the traditional outing of the Bacchu-ber dance.

## "A day never to be forgotten" - the fête de Saint Roch and the Bacchu-ber at Pont de Cervières August 16th 1998

This August we intended to see the only sword dance in France. We arrived at Briançon on Friday afternoon, and in the evening went to Pont de Cervières to investigate the village (now a suburb of Briançon) and possibly identify the best viewing for Sunday's dancing. The old part of the village consists of one long, steep street, called "la rue du Bacchu-ber", only just wide enough for one car, and shaded by old 4-storey houses. At the bottom, the street opens into a small square, and in front of the church, two thirds of the way up the street, is a small widening too, and these are the two places where the Bacchu-ber sword dance is danced.

In the lower square a wooden dancing platform had been set up, surrounded by tiered seating, and some men were putting the finishing touches to a *buvette* where drinks would be sold on Sunday. We asked them about the fete and when we told them that we had already seen the Bacchu-ber danced at Whitby in May, it was handshakes all round, the president of the Bacchu-ber Society, Bernard Faure-Brac, was called from behind the bar, and a *pastis* was thrust into our willing hands. From then on we were treated as honoured guests. Bernard took us to his house where his wife, Marie-Anne, showed us her collection of costumes used by the singers who accompany the dance. Some of these costumes are over 100 years old; some she has made from material salvaged from other ancient dresses, and others still are modern copies. She also showed us their photos of the Whitby Sword weekend, which to our delight included one of Rob dancing and another of our two musicians - our daughter Linden on fiddle and Jim Spriggs on jew's harp. They had found it interesting that English sword dances were performed to instrumental music, and that each tune was not exclusive to one dance.

On Sunday morning we arrived outside the church at 11 a.m. and Marie-Anne showed us around the collection of Bacchu-ber memorabilia housed in the former village bake-house. This small building was becoming derelict until taken over for the Bacchu-ber as a small museum, and thus one village tradition saved another piece of village history.

We had been specially invited to join the villagers in an aperitif outside the church from 11.30, and everywhere we went we were touted as the people who had seen the dancing at Whitby. A presentation was made of a painting of the Bacchu-ber to Bernard to mark his 25 years as president of the society. We were treated to lunch and after coffee an elderly former dancer produced a venerable bottle from which he

proceeded to pour us a measure of the local special liqueur, *génépi*. It slipped down very easily!

The dancing began at 3.00 p.m. Outside the church a wreath of greenery and flowers had been hung over the centre of the dancing platform and from it was now suspended the medal awarded to the dancers by the prefect of the department in the early years of this century. The dancers performed the Bacchu-ber, slowly forming and unforming their squares, triangles and stars to the singing of the women. It seemed a very private, intimate expression of village identity. To celebrate his 25th year as president, Bernard took part in this performance along with the oldest member of the dance who joined in 1947.

After the performance everyone walked down the street to the square, dancers and singers first, spectators following. The seating was already full as about 500 people waited to see the dancing. As the wreath was being hung again we spotted the *génépi* supplier on the balcony of his house overlooking the square. "Could we come up and watch from there?" "Of course, of course!" So for the second performance we had a grandstand view. The spectators, many of them former dancers, former singers and relatives of today's performers, watched with knowledgeable interest and generous enthusiasm.

When this second performance had ended the rest of the fête began. First children then adults danced a quadrille, an only slightly more animated dance than the Bacchu-ber, but then who can blame the dancers in heavy traditional clothes and heat of 30° for not wanting to dance more energetically! Our French friends had already commented to us how surprised they were to see that English dancing was so vigorous. "We didn't think the English were like that!"

As a finale to the performance part of the fête a septet of wooden *Alpirt* horns, each some 3½ metres long, played several pieces. We were pleasantly surprised at the mellowness of the tone. The players were more than happy afterwards for interested people to inspect and try the instruments while general dancing ensued.

By 9.30 p.m. it was very dark and the time had arrived for the procession. We were never quite sure who the participants were, except that we as honoured guests were required to be a part of it. We gathered at the very top of the village street just as a thunderstorm broke, the thunder rolling around the surrounding mountains. Led by a group of brass players ('band' would be a bit grand), lit by candle lanterns and flaming torches smelling of bees' wax, and preceded by a man who lit and set lurid green and red fireworks at regular intervals each side of the street, we all marched cheerily down to the crowded main square, over the bridge and back again. The ensuing disco continued into the small hours.

### **It was altogether a day never to be forgotten.**

Gillian & Rob Guest, August 1998

See *RUMB*, issue 5, series 1 (Summer 1988) for a report by Bob Schofield on a visit to see the Bacchu-ber dance.

### **How others see us**

Gordon Ridgewell, that inveterate and dedicate correspondent, wrote to draw my attention to a press cutting from "The Independent" of May 24th 1996 referring to the first Sword Spectacular. It reads:

## "INTERNATIONAL SWORD-DANCE

Far removed from the Highland fling, traditional sword-dancing resounds to the clash of steel on steel as dancer's weave complex patterns with their weapons before tying them together in a star shaped lock.

*(So far so good)*

Today, 500 dancers in bright breeches and bell straps will be demonstrating their skills in this massive gathering of sword-manship.

Longsword dances and the Lange Wapper move from Antwerp are just two of the moves that will be in evidence....."

*(Can you work out what they mean? No prizes!)*

## Invention - the mother of Tradition?

Ian Porter, long-time dancer and teacher with Claro Sword from Harrogate, wrote with thoughts he has had on the way Longsword is developing. Ian was prompted to share these thoughts - prompted by the displays by teams he saw at the Second Sword Spectacular.

I was very pleased to be able to spend Saturday 23rd May at the 2nd International Sword Spectacular in Whitby along with my dancing colleagues of the Claro Sword and Morris Men. We didn't have much opportunity to see the 'International' aspects of the weekend, but we did see some excellent dancing from British teams. This set in motion a train of thought that I would like to share with other dancers. I must stress that what follows is an entirely personal analysis, and does not necessarily reflect the attitudes or policies of the Claro Sword and Morris Men. Neither is it intended to be critical; rather to open to a wider audience the questions that were raised in my mind after the Whitby event. If anyone reading this feels unjustly criticised, then I am sorry, but I would like to hear your arguments to refute what I have to say.

Participants in, and audience at the Whitby event were treated to many displays of well-documented dances, of dances which are less well-known and to several 'own label' dances, exclusive to the teams dancing them. Three questions were raised in my mind as I watched and later as I thought about what I had seen.

### Is it a reasonable practice to modify or alter dances to suit local circumstances or conditions?

Alterations to printed notations of dances arise in a number of ways.

Mistakes can and do occur while dances are being taught and learned. Small changes make little difference to the appearance or the spirit of the dance, and could be considered to be a form of organic and natural evolution. For example, the lock at the end of the first part of the North Skelton dance requires that each man's sword is placed across the back of the man following, so that its point is seized by the next-but-one dancer (a figure known to us as 'up your neighbour's'). *In the notation*, left arm is placed over right arm. *Claro* do the other (right arm over left arm), a difference that arose when the dance was taught for the first time, as a consequence of imperfect memory on my part. It makes no difference at all to the appearance of the dance, which is still recognisably the North Skelton dance, and it would be almost impossible for us to change now, after 20 years of doing it 'wrong'.

Unintentional omissions may happen during the learning process, and provided that the omission is not a major characteristic of the dance, again need not make much difference. Of course, figures may be omitted deliberately. Perhaps a 'difficult' figure is left out during the preparation for a specific event and somehow never gets put back. Or figure (or part figure) may be omitted to reduce the length of a performance. *Claro's* current version of the Ampleforth dance omits exactly half of each of the opening figures - we only do three repetition of Fourth-Man-Over etc. This was deliberate policy to reduce the length of the dance to fit a rigid time-slot. We feel that it makes the dance more 'manageable', without losing any of the figures and, we believe, without losing the essential characteristics of the dance.

There is, of course, a limit to how far pruning can take place. Cut too much and you are left with something that doesn't look much like its parent at all.

Additions to dances are a different thing altogether and I shall address myself to those later.

All of this begs another question, namely, what is the accuracy of the printed sources we use as our main repository of information? Until the publication of Ivor Allsop's definitive handbook, the major source of information was the three volumes of Cecil Sharp's *The Sword Dances of Northern England*, together with sundry booklets and off prints published by the EFDSS. Comparison of Sharp's published notations with his field notes show many discrepancies, so it is evident that Sharp exercised quite a lot of editorial tidying-up before committing himself to print. Indeed it is widely believed that Sharp frequently worked to his own preconceived ideas of what was 'correct' and what was not. Sharp's informants were often elderly, but there is no evidence to suggest that they were also forgetful, but there is evidence to suggest that the dances they described had, in their own lifetimes, undergone some changes. Two supplementary questions may be asked here.

1. Is there a 'correct' version of any sword dance? I would suggest that, in the case of the 'living' traditions (Grenoside, Handsworth, Goathland, Flamborough etc.) the answer to this must be 'yes': the correct version is whatever the team happens to be doing at the time.

2. Are the 'revival' sword teams museum curators or custodians of a living tradition? It seems to me that any team may decide which of these two functions it wishes to fulfil, with the caveat that in doing the first, a lively and active team may well find itself doing the second. For reasons given earlier, I believe that small changes are likely to crop up in performance, unless the team decides always to stick rigidly to 'the book' and not diverge from the printed notation in any way. Thus *Claro's* version of the Kirkby Malzeard dance is not exactly the same as *Spenn Valley's* version, although both are recognisably Kirkby Malzeard!

### Is it reasonable to compose or invent sword dances for the exclusive use of a sword team?

I believe this to be a more open question. Dancers are sometimes quite coy about this and do not like to use the words 'invent' and 'compose'. **Interpretation** is sometimes used to describe what I have called 'organic evolution', but more often seems to mean developing a dance from a very poor description. **Reconstruction** is a word used to describe the process of developing a dance from no description at all, just a historical

reference to 'the sword dance' or something similar. Invention and composition at least have the merit of being honest statements of the process that has taken place. **Development and adaptation** are usually based on an existing dance, perhaps one with only a fragmentary notation.

My feelings on this question are mixed. Many years ago, Claro was asked to 'reconstruct' the Knaresborough sword dance for a civic function in that town. We were informed that there was a good description of it in an eighteenth century local history. On examination, the source proved to be totally inadequate, simply recording the fact that there had been a sword dance in Knaresborough. If I remember correctly, what we danced at the function was a fairly brisk performance of the Kirkby Malzeard dance, in spite of the fact that we were announced as performing the Knaresborough sword dance for the first time for 150 years! There are some inherent dangers in the 'reconstruction' process.

On balance I have to say that I can see nothing wrong in a team devising its own dance, as long as two conditions are observed.

1. The dance should be sufficiently distinct from other dances to be recognisable as a separate entity. To ignore this condition, for example, by collating a number of figures from other dances, even with some modification, runs the risk of losing individual identity and making all dances look alike.
2. The dance should be in the spirit of English sword dances. Invented figures which do not look like, or feel like, or generate the same emotions as English longsword dances, should be avoided. This leads to the third question.

### **Is it acceptable to modify or devise dances using Figures or steps from other, non-English traditions?**

Here I believe that the ground is much less firm. There is no doubt that some of the evolutions and figures of continental sword dances have an interest and an excitement different from that found in English sword dances. If I were to devise a longsword dance, I might be tempted to incorporate the hoop figure from the Flemish Trawenteldans, in which a wooden hoop is passed around the closed circle of dancers over each dancer and sword (or stick in the case of the original) in turn. It's a clever movement, chock-full of symbolism. I might be tempted, as some have been, to include a final figure in which the captain or the fool is raised on the locked swords. However, as far as I am aware, neither of these figures has been recorded as part of an English sword dance. (There is evidence that the lost Perth sword dance included a 'raising' of the captain, but I would argue that Scotland's traditional dances are every bit as foreign as those from continental Europe. Scots would probably agree.) While at the Whitby event I witnessed (twice) some excellent rapper dancing from a women's team. Interpolated in the Middle of the dance was a short section of Irish step-dancing, with swords still linked, which necessitated a complete change of rhythm. To me, this was a pity. In spite of being excellently performed, it broke the flow of the rapper, and did not do justice to the step-dancing, so both elements lost out.

I believe that the dangers here relate to a point of view expressed earlier. If we import movements and steps from non-English traditions, we run the risk of losing the uniqueness of the English tradition itself. If I

were to devise a sword dance (which is most unlikely), I hope that I would resist the temptation to use Scottish, Irish or Continental steps and figures, simply because they are not English. I realise that English longsword dancing is part of the continuum of European ceremonial dance, but it is a part which has evolved and developed on English soil and as such, has developed its own characteristics. To water these characteristics down, even in an attempt to 'enrich' them, would run the risk of losing them altogether. I happen to be in favour of a common European currency (although I would have preferred a different name for it) but I deplore the idea of a common European sword dance.

I cannot, nor would I wish to prevent teams from devising their own dances, or deliberately modifying existing dances, or 'reconstructing' dances from slender evidence. These are all part of the fun of dancing. What I hope and ask is that people are honest about what they do. If a team purports to be an English sword dance team, then I hope that they will avoid using exotic steps and figures, to preserve the essential Englishness of the dance.

Based on my incomplete knowledge of sword dancing here and elsewhere, I offer the following lists of characteristics:

### **A. Characteristics found in English longsword dances (and in some non-English dances as well):**

1. Number of dancers is six or eight.
2. Closed linked circles during the greater part of the dance.
3. Movements passing under and over one sword, without breaking the link.
4. Linked pairs of dancers perform figure of eight movements; either in a horizontal plane (poussettes or plaiting) or in a vertical plane (waves or rolls).
5. Linked threes of dancers.
6. When unlinked, dancers perform heys (circular or straight).
7. Lock always made and displayed.
8. Lock may be thrown on the ground.
9. Lock may be passed from dancer to dancer.
10. Lock may be used to decapitate supernumerary figure.
11. Dramatic performance sometimes associated with the dance.

### **B. Characteristics found in longsword dances of other cultures, but, as far as I am aware, never found in English dances.**

1. Number of dancers seven or nine plus.
2. Dancers linked in open chains.
3. Chains move along serpentine paths.
4. Chains wind up into spirals and unwind.
5. Hoop passed over linked dancers.
6. Pairs of dancers fight, clashing swords.
7. Lock made but not displayed.
8. Lock made and used to lift captain or supernumerary figure.
9. Dance does not include a lock.
10. Dance forms part of a performance including other dance forms.
11. Maypole with ribbons used.
12. Solo acts form part of the performance.

Ian Porter, August 1998

*(It is a pity that the Spanish team from Burgos didn't attend the Sword Spectacular - Ian would have seen an 8 sword lock displayed in the air. Trevor)*

# LONGSWORD DANCE OUTINGS

## CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR 1998/99

Be sure to confirm details before travelling

### Early December

#### Belmont "Sexy Sword" School team (Co. Durham)

December 11th - dancing at School PTA Ceilidh and on December 17th Concert. For further details contact Noel Jackson (01207) 560 684.

#### Seven Stars Sword & Step Dancers (Wigan area)

December 12th 11.00 am onwards - Dickensian Day - street fair and parade in the Cheshire village of Lymm - phone Steve Armitage (01925) 754 871 to confirm.

#### Lord Conyers Morris (South Yorkshire)

December 19th 2.00 pm - Wassail at Angel Inn, Killamarsh (may not be dancing sword!). Dusk - The Trysting Tree, Todwick dancing the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance - phone Bill Richmond (01909) 72 3131 to confirm.

#### Handsworth Longsword

December 20th Lunchtime at The Norfolk Arms, Ringinglow. Phone Peter Macham 0114 255 4137 to confirm.

### BOXING DAY, December 26th

#### Claro Sword (Harrogate area)

Tour of Harrogate starting at The Harrogate Arms at 12.00 'ish - phone Barry Slaymaker (01423) 880 526 to confirm.

#### Flamborough Longsword

Likely to dance at 12.00 noon 'ish at the Rose & Crown followed by visits to other local venues ending at 2.30 pm 'ish at Dog & Duck Square, Flamborough, - phone Richard Traves (01262) 851 311 to confirm.

#### Handsworth Longsword

11.15 am at The Crossed Daggers, Woodhouse; 12.00 noon at The Parish Church, Handsworth. Phone Peter Macham 0114 255 4137 to confirm.

#### Highside Longsword (Kirkby Malzeard)

1.00 pm - Grantley Arms; 1.30 - Queens Head, Kirkby Malzeard followed by a tour of the village - phone Ted Dodsworth (01765) 620 374 to confirm.

#### Spn Valley Longsword (Cleckheaton area)

A tour of Cleckheaton and Gomersal areas starts at 12.00 noon at the New Packhorse; 12.45 at the Wickham Arms; 1.30 at the Old Saw and 2.30 at the Wheatsheaf - phone Dave Webster (01924) 402 897 to confirm.

#### Grenoside Longsword

11.00 am - The Old Harrow, Grenoside dance followed by local guest teams and a song session - phone Joe Dunn (0114) 246 0463 to confirm

### SUNDAY, December 27th

#### Barnsley Longsword

12.15 pm 'ish at the The Shaw, Barnsley; 1.00 'ish at Spencers Arms, Cawthorne; 1.45 Cawthorne Village Club - phone Roger Thompson (01226) 281 248 to confirm.

### NEW YEARS DAY

#### Kirkburton Rapier Dancers (Huddersfield area)

Tour of the Kirkburton area starting at 12.30 pm at The Carlton Club; 1.00 The George; 1.30 The Royal; 2.00 Spring Knave (?); 2.30 The Junction Inn at Kirkburton and ending at The Smiths Arms from around 3.00 pm - phone Ken Clarkson (01484) 65 15 10 to confirm.

#### Monkseaton Morris

I understand that Monkseaton Morris perform the Ampleforth play and dance on New Years Day - phone Peter Brown (0191) 252 3022 to confirm.

### SATURDAY, January 2nd

#### White Star Sword (Kent)

Tour visiting 11.30 am Chafford Arms, Fordcombe; 1.00 pm at the Queens Arms, Cowden Pound and 2.30 The Fountain, Cowden - phone Brian Tasker to confirm.

### SATURDAY, January 9th

#### Boars Head Morris Mens' tour

10.00 am to 3.00 pm 'ish - tour of Bradford centre (with Kirkburton and Spn Valley and possibly more sword teams) - phone Andy Fieldhouse (01274) 585 595 to confirm.

#### Grenoside Longsword village tour

A tour of the village. Check details with Joe Dunn (0114) 246 0463.

### SUNDAY, January 10th (Plough Sunday)

#### Claro Sword

Plough Blessing service starts at 10.30 am at St John's Church Knaresborough - dancing afterwards outside the Church followed by a procession to the Market Square - phone Barry Slaymaker (01423) 880 526 to confirm.

#### Sullivan's Sword (Nottingham area)

Dancing at The Full Moon, Morton near Fiskerton and tour of area - phone Alstair Bloomfield (0115 922 7989) for more details.

#### York Gentlemen Longsword

Plough Sunday service at Bolton Percy Church - shortage of dancers may affect dancing afterwards. Check nearer the date.

### SATURDAY, January 16th

#### Goathland Plough Stots

10.00 am to 3.00 pm 'ish - tour of Goathland and Darnholm (usually by two or more teams) ending up at Beckhole. The Goathland Plough Blessing Service is held on the previous Sunday - phone Keith Thompson (01947) 896 311 to confirm.

### SUNDAY, January 17th (likely - but provisional)

#### Highside Longsword (Kirkby Malzeard)

Plough Blessing Services in Kirkby Malzeard Church at 10.30 am and at Masham Church at 6.00 pm, both on Sunday January 17th (includes sword dancing in the Churches) - phone Ted Dodsworth (01765) 620 374 to confirm.

### AND LATER IN THE YEAR ....

#### January 9th

A day-long Longsword workshop (mainly on the Helmsley dance) in Eastbourne - phone Alan Walker (01323) 725 287 for details.

#### March 5th to 7th

DETT in Newcastle - contact Chris Cartridge for more details - (01207) 561 462, e-mail [chris.cartridge@sanofi.com](mailto:chris.cartridge@sanofi.com)

#### March 14th (Mothering Sunday)

Lange Wapper (Antwerp) 30th anniversary year. A number of teams have been invited including Rumworth Morris - contact me for more details.

### Dancers "on the loose"

I have heard of two dancers who have recently moved house, one to Ormskirk and the other to the Malvern area. If any local team(s) would like to contact them the details can be got from me.

### Late news from Wype Doles (Peterborough area)

Dancing in Stamford, Lincs. on December 19th as part of the "Wassail" concert tour; a New Years Day tour and a visit (with the Whittlesea Staw Bear) to a Straw Bear Carnival in Germany around Shrove Tuesday - for details contact Jill Sennett 01733 208 241

### The last issue?"

This is the last issue (No. 4) of series 7. Subscriptions are now due for series 8. I hope that you will renew - but if you do be careful to use my correct address. In the last issue I printed my latest address - but got my phone number wrong! The correct details are:

Trevor Stone, The Old Vicarage, Downe Street, Driffield, East Yorkshire YO25 6DX. phone 01377 253 431  
E-mail number: [jtstone@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:jtstone@globalnet.co.uk)

*The next issue, the first in series eight, will (hopefully) carry the long awaited review of Steve Corrsin's book plus the full article on Sword Dance in Northumberland (referred to in the item by Peter Bearon in the last issue and further information on sword dances from Croatia.*

### Contributions are welcome ...

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