

RATTLE UP My Boys

A quarterly publication for those with an interest in
sword dancing

Millennium year issue 3, Series 9, Autumn 2000

A history of the Grenoside Traditional Sword Dancers - part 1

Article from *The Pall Mall Gazette* rediscovered
by Gordon Ridgewell

Some time ago Gordon Ridgewell submitted for publication an article from an 1895 issue of *The Pall Mall Gazette* concerning the Grenoside dance. Gordon had previously submitted this piece to *The Morris Dancer* and Eddie Dunmore, the editor of that publication who is regularly looking to present a wider range of subjects, especially Longsword, used it in his next issue.¹ As I suspect that there are several subscribers to *Rattle Up My Boys* who also see *The Morris Dancer* I decided not to republish the piece at that time.

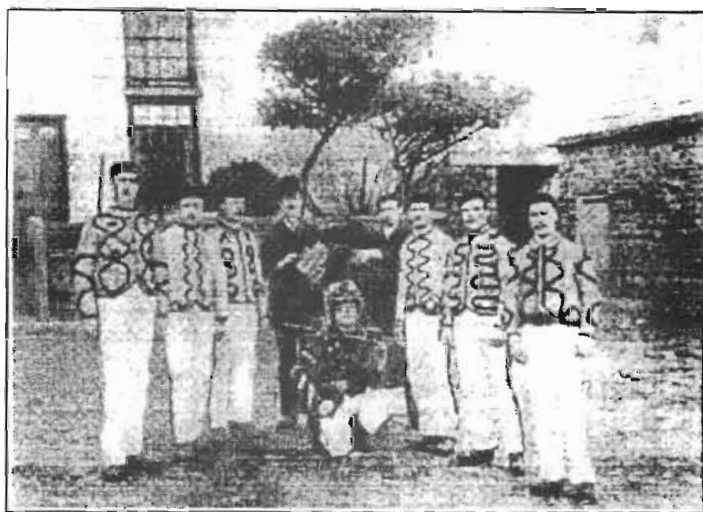
Since then, however, Gordon has carried out further research into Grenoside and has added to material collected by the late Kathy Mitchell², and I also have an interview with the late Ted Frost, the former leader of the Grenoside Traditional Sword Dancers, as yet unpublished³. In addition I now have to hand an 1894 archival photograph of what is presumably the very team described in *The Pall Mall Gazette* article. With all this information coming together I have now decided that the time is ripe to run a three part feature on the history of the Grenoside team for which *The Pall Mall Gazette* article makes an ideal opening.

Gordon writes:

Cecil Sharp in his description of the Grenoside Sword Dance in *The Sword Dances of Northern England*, part 1, page 54, stated: "An interesting and vivid account of the Grenoside dance was published in *The Pall Mall Gazette* of January 8th 1885".

Curious to find out the nature of that article, I visited The British Library Newspaper Library at Colindale in North West London to look it up, but could find no such article in that particular issue. Following a number of visits to Colindale I eventually found it in the issue dated Tuesday evening, January 8th, 1895, 4th Edition, pp 1 - 2.

As to the identity of the writer of the piece this is currently not known but I have my suspicions! The article reads as follows:



The Grenoside team at Toad Hole Farm, 1894.

photo by courtesy of the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library

Twelfth Night on the Moors MORRIS DANCERS IN YORKSHIRE

There is a place where the great town struggles to the fields, and the fields climb to the tumbling uplands, and the uplands roll on and on to the gusty moors - a place where in December the north wind rides the moorland like a master and in July the south wind visits it like a mistress. In that free, wild country, progress and primitiveness meet together, and science and simplicity kiss each other; and there you shall find strange and unlooked-for memories and portraits. Portraits there are of men who love God and horses and fear not white lead nor the devil - short, strong straight-eyed, inarticulate; and memories of old-world plays and mysteries and pastimes, traditional, distorted, meaningless, which being dead yet live. We came down from the vagrant virgin chase where the red deer have wandered since the world began, and wander yet; where, too, 400 years ago the foregoer of my friend ("Thomas knyght for the Kings bode to edard the forth ryehard therd hare vii & hare viii hows faults God perdon") graved on the living rock the story that you still may read of how he "caused a loge to be made hon this crag in mydys of... for hes plesor to her the harts bel"; and you may hear those wild stags' children bellowing there to-day. We came down, and as we came we saw the endless rocks and waves of heather rolling and breaking and burning and glooming in a storm of sunset, and we saw the mines and furnaces and minuscule modernities smouldering and merging amid them. And time stood still and a thousand years were but as yesterday. And the home coming fitly furnished us for what we found at home. There, in the house, we found men waiting - miners, quarrymen, moulders; men soaked in nineteenth-century democracy and free speech and thought, and all our diseases, and yet inheritors

of old renown and mystery. "Morris dancers", "Moorish dancers", call them as you will, these "skilled artisans", but they carried a secret begotten before time, and the old man who loved the roaring of the stag had seen their fathers dance.

And they danced assuredly, and did strange things. Clothed apparently in white samite ⁴, mystic, wonderful, and decked and piped with wild traditional devices in patterns of scarlet, they took the floor. Two facing rows of three, and the captain at the top, all armed with naked swords ⁵. And first the captain, with a fantasy of rabbit skin about his head, chanted the following succinct and lucid prologue:-

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd have you make room
Contented a while fur to be,
It is I and myself that has brought us along,
And my trade you will quicklie see.
Whilst in furrin parts we rambled
All both proper, stout and tall.
Tho' we passed thro' many dangers,
But at length we've caught a fall;
Wounded by a charming lady,
Who her charms I almost dread,
To die for her I am quite ready,
But at length I conquered her.
Six stout lads have I a by me
Both of honour and renown.
Christmas time it's growing nigher,
And sinst we have comed in this town,
Sinst that we have all comed hither,
Fiddler draw thy strings, advance.
Play beside us here to guard us
And these lads will show 'em a dance.

(Music omitted due to poor reproduction of original)

With such an argument all that follows must be as obvious as a work by Mr. Wilde ⁶.

First, of course, to a dashing jig tune, broke out an admirable double-shuffle in faultless time and tact, springing to a quick-step march with waving swords, wherein on a moment, turning on the common centre of their captain, the swords were locked together as you may have seen table-knives ⁷, and necklaced about the leader's neck. Another quick high-stepped dance around him, and the first movement was over. But the pause is short. The music dashes into the Broken Time Hornpipe, the development of which they described to me later as - Single Sword dancing all the way around. Single swords up. Single swords down. Double swords down. Double swords up. Which explains itself. The dash and even the grace of this it is hard to describe. Imagine a combination of a country dance, Sir Roger de Coverley, sword exercise, and a hornpipe, and you will have a few of the elements. The partners opposite clasp each the point of the other's sabre, and, swinging down on their neighbour couple, by an amazing but graceful evolution throw up, without letting go the grasp, their arms and swords, and so lilt their bodies that they find themselves back to back, encircling the pair they had approached, who, prancing in like fashion, swing out beneath the sword-circle and find themselves atop the row. Vary this beyond your imagination, increase the pace, and let the marked foot-rhythm of the hornpipe animate the whole, and - there you are.

But now some breathing space is licitly demanded, and the captain stands forth to deliver the terse but pointed fourth act, entitled "Tantiro". Let it speak for itself.

Tantiro tantiro, the drums they do beat,
The trumpets they do sound upon call,
Methinks music's here, some bold captain's near,
March on my brave soldiers, away!

Terse, we say; but can you beat it? And does not the word Tantiro alone blow through your senses like a trumpet? The fourth and fifth movements (the Reel and the Roll or Smash the Windows) merge one into the other in a maze of devious strategies and counter-dancings, rhythmical sword clashing and the unstrained grace of natural gymnastic. Grand chain and ladies' chain, under and over, outside and inside, and at the end an ineffable combination where the leaders lock their swords, while the others, circling on themselves, dance over the barring steel and round and over again, and never a fault or a slip or a strain or an exaggeration.

And what does it all mean and whence comes it, and why do they do it? The rest remaineth unrevealed. These shrewd shaven Yorkshire faces, from eighteen to fifty, can tell you no more. The oldest dancer's grandfather danced all his life, and in those days never a man who could not play an instrument as well. In no man's memory has a single dance ever suffered change. Churchmen all and men of marked moral worth, eight weeks before Christmas they begin their practice, twice a week if all are past masters, three times if there be a youngster to be broken. Your clever colt will learn in one short month, your dullard must have thrice as long. And there stands but one instance where the palm of insuperable ineptitude and inexpugnable unintelligence has been awarded and the aspirant flung aside. Threepence a week they pay during their season to meet occ. expenses, and from Christmas Eve for thirty days, day and night, they dance ⁸. Thirty shillings, or thirty five shillings - for it hangs on times and weather - may be their reward, and above it the honour and glory of the Guild. Neither music nor words have ever been writ down so far as the dancers know, and what they mean, or who was the lovely lady, and how and to whom she yielded, no tongue can say.

And where and when were the wild rites born ⁹? Was it art, was it religion, was it the mystery of Christ or the cultus of Pan that breathed the earliest inspiration? Was it British war-dance or Passion play, or masque of courtiers filtering down? Or was it a feast of Saracens and Moors that the Crusaders brought back from the Holy Land, and has the true name clung? Take it as you please and you will feel it as you ought. But you must not see it in a London pantomime. Seek ye first the uplands and the moors and the windy sunset and the stags, and then you will see these things rightly; and later, in mid-London, where the wind is smoke and the stag an omnibus, the thoughts of what you saw will come back livingly and your heart will be glad of their renewing.

NOTES

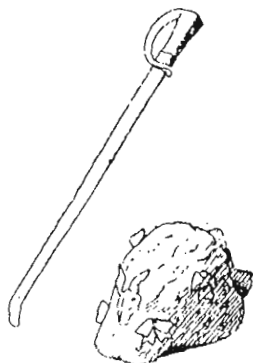
1. *The Morris Dancer*, Volume 3, No. 4. February 1997, pp 102 - 05.
2. Various documents in Kathy Mitchell's collection refer to aspects of the Grenoside team including a brief history.
3. Interview with Ted Frost by Trevor Stone, October 11th 1992 as yet unpublished.
4. *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, edited by Sir James A H Murray. Vol. VIII, Q - SH, part II S - SH, 1914, p 77, defines Samite as "A rich silk fabric worn in the Middle Ages, sometimes interwoven with gold. Also a garment or cushion of this material." This dictionary gives a fascinating account of this ancient word's derivation together with various examples of its usage. I am placing a copy of the entry of this word in Trevor Stone's collection.
5. Such a specific reference suggests that the team used swords of a different design to those currently used (or that the author had not seen the dancers at first hand).

6. Refers to Oscar Wilde whose work was very popular at the time this article was published.

7. A curious reference as table knives of the period were unlikely to weave into a lock.

8. Dancing for "thirty days and nights" - some outing!

9. An early airing for the various theories of the origin of the dance.



THE CAPTAIN.

These illustrations are taken from the original publication and show the Captain's costume including the rabbit fur hat and the cavalry sword.

These latter two items feature in the team's current performances.

Gordon Ridgewell July 2000

The Grenoside song

On the subject of Grenoside, and especially the calling on song, a letter in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library to Cecil Sharp from E Phillips Barker, dated April 13th 1913, said:

"My Dear Sharp

.... calling on songs I have no quarrel with if they are good ones. The Grenoside one, as you know, I object to because it is mostly meaningless, and though it can be sung, it is only by setting accent and music at daggers drawn in every verse except the first."

Following up a lead!

Paul Davenport comments...

Paul Davenport, in an e-mail dealing with another matter, said that "he had a few problems that he needed to air re. the last issue of RUMB". He went on to say that "he was amazed that the amount of care Norman generally takes with his research should have gone out of the window on this one". The article Paul refers to, "Following up a lead!", was submitted by Gordon Ridgewell (not Norman).

It may help readers if I explain a little of the background. Some months ago Paul supplied a copy of a photo to illustrate an extract from his treatise "Forgotten Morris" which was printed in *Rattle Up My Boys* issue 2, series 8, in Summer 1999. He asked if readers could help with information concerning the photo. The only other information Paul supplied was that the reverse of the photo bore the stamp of *The Yorkshire Post* newspaper and that it was thought to be of a group from Carlton, near Selby, taken around the turn of the century.

In addition to printing the photo I also asked Gordon Ridgewell if he could find any information about the photo from newspaper reports he may be able to locate during his frequent visits to the British Library Newspaper Library.

Dealing with the points Paul made in his e-mail:

1. "The photo was brought to my attention by Keith Richardson who deserves a mention in this saga."

Agreed - it is a pity that Paul didn't mention that information initially.

2. "A local 'historian' published an analysis of the picture based on some partly remembered anecdotes. The source of these has unfortunately been rendered unreliable due to careless fieldwork and 'witness leading'. If your readers don't understand this then you need the advice of a social worker trained in counselling to explain. The 'historian' decided that the photo relates to the Clayton family of Snaith whose antics were correctly reported in the last RUMB."

It would be helpful to know where this analysis was published and by whom.

Many readers will be aware of the problems which can be created by superficial and careless research - I also suspect that most readers who carry out research in the field will be aware of "witness leading" (perhaps better known as asking leading questions). I know of many readers who have had some formal training in interviewing techniques and a lot more who have had lots of relevant experience. However if any reader wishes to take up Paul's offer of help I will gladly supply contact details.

3. "An examination of the photo in situ reveals that it is one of a collection assembled in Selby between 1900 and the coronation of Edward VII. The photo is dated 1900 and the context gives one no reason to doubt this."

Where, how and by whom was "the photo dated"? To assume that, because the photo was found in a collection it can be dated "by association", is dangerous. Gordon's article (page 4) gave a date of 1890 for the photo which was printed in *The Yorkshire Post* in 1932. The newspaper's records may reveal how they got this date (in addition to the photographer's name).

4. "I examined the parish records for the period 1900 to 1920 and found no one by the name of Clayton living in either Snaith or Carlton"

So what? Gordon's article made no reference to the names of people depicted in the photo. He dealt specifically with publication details of the photo.

Paul closes by revealing more information that was not given at the outset.

5. "The eyewitness account of the Carlton Ploughstots visiting Carlton Towers circa 1920 which Keith obtained suggests a dance of the Molly type. The informant, Colonel something, recognised the look of the performers but suggested that his older brother might remember it better since they were both allowed out of bed to watch (they were small boys at the time!). The brother is the present Duke of Norfolk however and so may prove difficult to pin down."

Paul concludes that "the information Norman (Gordon) presented is interesting but has nothing to do with the people in the photo".

I think that the name and partial address of the person who took the photo (Mr W T Cliffe of Pontefract), the approximate date the photo was taken (over 40 years before its publication in December 1932), and such a detailed record of previous publication of the photo together with the newspaper's supporting text is a little more than "interesting".

Paul signs off saying "Nothing like controversy to make life sparkle I say". My life would "sparkle" to hear that someone (possibly you Paul?) was intending to follow up the Pontefract connection uncovered by Gordon's careful work and that attempts would be made to at least try to contact the Duke of Norfolk.

Trevor Stone, September 2000

Strong on impressions

comments on the Sword Spectacular by Christopher Cawte

Whitby, May 26th to 29th, 2000

Your editor asked me to write something about the Sword Spectacular. I have a few small problems; I had not attended either of the previous sword spectaculars so I did not know the teams, I had no warning at the time, and we have since moved house, so the programme on which I made notes are in one of many cardboard boxes. So I may be strong on impressions, but I am certainly weak on detail. The editor sent some e-mail comments which were helpful reminders, but the ideas are mine. This is not an account of the event, only some impressions.

First come the organisers. Registration? It was so fast that I wondered if I had missed something, but it was all there, marvellous. There was a large number of people, some with no English, and all of independent mind, but they turned up about when they were wanted, and they performed for about the time allowed. There seemed to be few stewards, but the machine ran smoothly, which together are signs of good administration. As a newcomer I would have been helped by a map with dancing sites marked. If a team is to perform at "Captain Cook", does that mean his statue or his museum? By chance, some overseas dancers asked me where he was on the first evening, and I told them before I knew there were two possibilities Tough.



*Christopher Cawte attending the Longsword dance workshop on Sunday morning at the Sword Spectacular. The workshop was lead by Ivor Allsop.
Photo by Trevor Stone*

It was rather like a Morris Ring meeting, but clearly different in some ways, better dances for example. It must have given the organisers a great deal of work, and some of them may feel they, or their families, cannot give so much time again. Would it be practical to take a leaf out of the Morris Ring book, and for teams to take turns in organising one meeting?

English is an awkward language, and a few overseas teams would have been helped if an English eye had been cast on their text for the programme. For example, one team wrote that "Richard Wolfram found the team in 1585" (roughly, this is from memory). When I met him I would never have guessed he was that old. It was not a misprint, a member of the team said it meant he had found a record of the team in 1585.

The P.A. system in the dance hall was poor, but I heard something about one visiting team having difficulty in affording food. For a start they could have had

my fish-and-chip chit, which is no reflection on the quality of the fish. Now we know, can we do something about it next time? I very much hope there will be a next time, and that we can.

So here we are, lots of teams to watch in different parts of Whitby, we cannot see everything so where do we go? In the end it did not matter much, because in the course of two days it became possible to see nearly every team, and the final indoor show filled the few gaps, more evidence of good planning.

As I was reaching my first dancing site I saw an elderly gentleman who levitated slowly and smoothly above the watching crowd. I guessed how it was done, but



*The German team from Baden Württemberg featured a hoisting - in which their leader appeared to levitate above the crowd - as a climax to their dance.
Photo by Trevor Stone*

Sword Spectacular? Certainly. There were good crowds everywhere, and there is no doubt that the event attracted much attention, all favourable so far as I could tell. At one time when the Sleights team visited Whitby they used to be pelted on the quay with bits of fish, but should all ancient customs be revived?

I do not enjoy the Young Musician of the Year programme because, although some performers are better than others, the final few are so good that it does not seem fair to pick out one. It was the same at Whitby, and besides, I have no programme. So instead of winners and losers I offer a few personal golden moments from among others.

Every right-thinking person knows that the best sword dances come from Tyneside, but on Sunday afternoon three consecutive teams danced Yorkshire sword dances at the bandstand From memory one was American and only one was from Yorkshire. Each performance was quite different in style and feel, and though an uninformed person might say they all did the same dance, to me they were all different, and in combination they made a performance in which the styles so held my entire attention that the details were of no importance. That is how it should be, and I shall never forget the feeling. "It ain't what you do, it's the way how you do it." That dance with hoops; each dancer eased his body through the hoop, slid it along the stick to the next man, and no one let go. I do not think the hoop was as much as two feet in diameter, and my eyes were lower than the shoulder of one of the dancers (*likely to be the Flemish Trawantel Dance by Boerke Naas*). How do the Basque dancers move their toes so fast? The Horwich team had a boy of seven He knew what he was doing, took it all

seriously, and was a great credit. Three teams of children of much the same age performed a sword dance they had put together during the weekend, and each team lifted one of their number on their star at the end. They were small children, and the swords looked too light for the job, but it worked. Some of the European teams had a different kind of shine; very careful practice, precision, absolute discipline, and (at least for me) unusual performances. The precision of the Italian team was almost beyond belief. That is not to say that all the English teams lacked these things, but one can always learn more.

As I am an expert on hobbyhorses I will ride one of my own. My comments will perhaps help to explain why the comments in the e-mails were made. Rapper is a spectacular dance, it can be and it ought to be. The rapper I saw at Whitby was so-so at best. Films of the old teams show that the Tommy and Betty did their business quietly, and I believe that the "watch me I'm a comedian" style was largely developed by some very able students in about 1950. There must be scope for variation, but if these characters make so much noise that it is difficult to hear the music, or if they distract attention from the dance, something has gone wrong. The dancing was slow. Alan Brown knew as much about performance as anyone, and he advised a speed of 180, though he was willing to lower it to 160 for the elderly. Sharp recorded 160 at Earsdon in 1910. That means 160 steps per minute - count the steps for fifteen seconds, two to a bar, and multiply by four. One or two teams just made 160, but some were little over 130. The Jigging (stepping in English) was generally sloppy. In case it is the fault of the dancing surface, do as was done for the High Spen boys' team, and get a wooden board five and a half feet square, five feet if you think you are good, take it with you and dance on that. My suspicion is that dancers do not wear suitable shoes. I am sure some had not practised, and a few could not jig at all, it was obvious that they were only pretending. Geordie Osborn of Earsdon required a newcomer to practise jigging for six weeks before he was allowed to take hold of a rapper. "Wherever you see a space, fill it up" said several old dancers. If you keep close together you do not have to walk so far, and it looks more difficult, so you gain twice. Above all, style; fancy figures are fun, but they are no substitute for style, and a team is in trouble unless at least one person knows from the start what, in the end, the dance should look like. Some dancers say the detail does not matter because the audience will not know if it is right or wrong. That may be literally true, but as with many other skilled activities the public will certainly admire the team which shines, and be bored by the one which does not, even if they do not know how it is done. Like I say, it ain't what you do . . .

The procession was a great show, and attracted a crowd at almost every point. The Horwich men had an unfair advantage because their dance is designed to be performed moving along a street, but many teams made a show, perhaps with some music, holding up their lock, carrying a banner, and so on. In particular the foreign teams seemed to have a clear idea that they represented their country, and walked with dignity. While that was true of many teams, a few ambled along doing nothing special, with some in anoraks who joined and left as they felt inclined. If they had been going to Tesco they would have looked tatty, here they were a disgrace to their dance and their district. Now, where did I put that box of fish offal?

E. C. Cawte. August 2000

Follow up items

By the time you read this issue of *Rattle Up* copies of transcripts of the presentations at the Sword Spectacular Conference should have arrived with those people who ordered and paid for copies in advance. Readers who didn't place advance orders but wish to have copies of the proceedings should contact Vince Rutland, 37 Church View, Brompton, Northallerton, North Yorkshire DL6 2QX phone 01609 780536 e-mail: rutlandsv@netscapeonline.co.uk. I

understand that the price is £12.50 plus £2.50 post and packing. Vince can also advise on the availability of the "official" videos of highlights of the weekend.

E-mail comments following the event

Not all subscribers to *Rattle Up My Boys* have access to e-mail (and especially the Morris Dance Discussion List) so I am printing a sequence of postings about the Sword Spectacular:

from Ian Davies, a member of the organising committee

Team of the Festival - Nominations stand at:

- 1) Orion Sword
- 2) Lockwood School, Boosbeck

Best Sight of the festival - Nominations are :

- 1) Lockwood School rattling up SEVEN baskets at Sleights School
- 2) Orion's "four over" figure in "Dual Pelican - No Bleeper"

Best Moment of the Festival

1) Lockwood School throwing up three locks simultaneously with a shout, at the Gala

Best Dance of the Festival

- 1) Orion's new dance (if you haven't seen it, I won't spoil the fun)

(other correspondents added further "nominations")

from Steve Corrsin

I note with interest the postings about "best in show" at Whitby. It makes me wonder if I attended the same event. While many of the continental teams (Kemen, the Czechs, the Austrians, Bagnasco) were suitably spectacular, I thought that - with the exceptions of Sallyport, Stone Monkey, and a couple of other English teams - the rapper was pretty dreary. Stepping mostly a low shuffle (sounded like people were trying to scrape gum off their shoes), the same tired tunes (aren't there any more possible rapper tunes?), nothing new or difficult in the figures. Also, what I heard people referring to as "best in show" were a couple of - dare I say it? Yes! - Yankee teams. Literally Yankee, because they were both from the Baaaaaaahston (Boston, Massachusetts, to the rest of you) area: Orion, who held the other dancers' attention completely when they performed; and Velocirapper, who performed with energy and drive such as only a few other rapper sides displayed. I used to think that there was nothing drearier than boring Cotswold, but now I've added boring rapper to my list.

Another key moment (missed by most): in the Conference, when the leader of Flamborough, Richard Traves, proved that Flamborough women had danced Flamborough before World War 2: he showed a hitherto unknown photo with his mother and a side of, I believe, girl guides, perhaps from the early 1930s. Just one of a number of moments, in fact, encouraging to those of us who believe in women dancing sword dances.

from John Asher

Steve Corrsin made some interesting points in his posting. I have some comments to make on them. (The points relate to Steve's e-mail above).

I cannot help but largely agree with his point about the standard of the rapper, although the main problem was not the admittedly-low standard of many of the rapper sides, but that there were so many of them, and so interest in rapper was quickly flagging (especially as most of the audience had seen rapper many times before), whereas the continental sides were different enough for interest to come from novelty alone, which added to their good standards. However, it must be admitted that there are a number of rapper sides outside the north-east of England whose standards are poor and whose rapper is boring, with excessively long calling-on songs and over-reliance on chorus figures. One particular side, which is actually fairly long-established (and whose name I will not mention here), were so bad that you would have thought that they had only learnt rapper in the beginner's workshop that morning.

Not all southern sides are bad by any means, in fact there are some excellent ones, but sadly I increasingly get the impression that Steve's comments are largely well-founded. Stepping was poor throughout the event, but that was mainly thanks to poor stepping surfaces around the town. However, the floor at the Gala Concert was reasonable and there were still too many soft shuffles. The best stepping was at the best stepping surface in town - the Tap & Spile pub on Saturday night.

I do believe though that Steve's comments lack balance, as he did not put enough emphasis on the excellent performances of some teams, such as Pengwyn, who put in a number of new, technically-difficult figures (perhaps Steve, with his limited experience of rapper, did not notice these). It should also be noted that although Kingsmen and Sallyport did not really do themselves justice, membership overlap and festival organising commitments taking away some of their best dancers (four of the organisers were members of one or both teams) meant that both were effectively fielding "C teams" at best.

(Also, what I heard people referring to as "best in show")

Again, the attention was mainly due to novelty value, with technical skill not really being an issue in deciding whether people watched or not.

(Another key moment (missed by most): in the Conference, when the leader of Flamborough..... those of us who believe in women dancing sword dances.....)

There is plenty of good historical evidence of women dancing both rapper and longsword for longer than the Morris Ring has existed, and any Morris Ring propaganda to the contrary should be ignored.

The above comments, especially on standards of rapper, are my own and not necessarily those of any team(s) of which I am a member.

from "Ranko"

Interesting points from Steve Corrsin and mostly well replied to by John Asher, but one point has been missed (I think) - the most important point of all - about 45 teams turned up. What the quality of their dancing was like is immaterial, to get around 30 British teams and 15 overseas teams, or anything like it, meant that the whole event was a success. The fact that there is dreary rapper shouldn't surprise Steve in the least. There is dreary Cotswold, Border, Longsword, Molly, North West etc. etc.

Some teams have a spark, some teams don't, most teams are trying to get or keep that spark. Don't knock them because they haven't got it. Just be glad they are doing it. Much the same goes with the music. The weekend was not a competition, neither was the Gala performance, it was a weekend of dance and a display to show what your team does. I don't know about many of the teams, but for Clydeside the "same old tunes" are always different, depending what pub you go into. The same goes for Tommy and Betty jokes, everyone in the team (and many other teams) have heard them before, but the guys boozing in the pubs in Shettleston Road haven't.

from J Scott Marcus (Velocirapper groupie)

For me, as a Yank and a first-time attendee, the Sword Spectacular was a wonderful experience. I would be hard-pressed to think of a single performance where I didn't see or learn something interesting. So I am not much inclined to debate "best of show" honours....

I'd like to express special thanks to the organisers - it must have taken an incredible effort! Also, I am particularly appreciative of the rapper teams that took the teenagers of Velocirapper under their wing, so to speak, and/or taught them useful things, including Sallyport, Stone Monkey, Jack the Rapper (from Norway), and many more.



The Czech team from Bystrice pod Lopenikem have attended all three Sword Spectaculars but this time they had modified their performance to include a sword dance performed by the girls of the group who previously were limited to providing a sung accompaniment for the men's dance.

Photo by Michael Jackson

Conclusions by Trevor Stone

I'll drink to the sentiments expressed in that last e-mail - especially the compliments and thanks to the organisers. As I said in the last issue of *Rattle Up My Boys* I am grateful that I saw this fitting climax to a truly remarkable trio of events. Ranko is spot on in pointing out that the event was not a competition.

However I cannot agree with Ranko's point that "What the quality of their dancing was like is immaterial" - surely if you put yourself on display you should do your best? I think that there may be an unfortunate temptation to assume that the general public cannot judge a good from an indifferent performance.

This reminds me that one reason for the first event was to encourage teams to perform in front of their peers - I hoped that having a knowledgeable audience of other sword dancers would encourage teams to give their best. I also wanted to ensure that "the average (British) dancer" saw and learnt a little more about the variety and spread of the international tradition of sword dancing.

One welcome outcome of the three events has been the number of contacts made by teams, contacts which have resulted in exchange visits. Also these exchanges have enabled British dancers to see overseas teams perform in their own patch - often very different to seeing them at a UK event. The team from Bagnasco have been a colourful and dramatic spectacle at all three events - but to see them at their own events in Italy is truly memorable.

Handsworth and In De Kring tour the Peak district

June 10th & 11th 2000

As I said above I am particularly pleased to see so many friendships develop between teams and numerous exchange visits have sprung up. Such contacts have developed between Handsworth Traditional Sword Dancers and In De Kring from Dunkirk - their latest get-together was on the weekend of June 10th & 11th. The teams danced in Sheffield on Saturday - I managed to get to the Sunday tour of the picturesque Peak district, which included Eyam Hall and Bakewell, for a very pleasant day out. Dancers with In De Kring commented on how much better they regarded England having added Sheffield and the Peak district to the areas they have visited.

Trevor Stone, August 2000



The Handsworth team and In De Kring danced in Sheffield on Saturday, June 10th and visited the Peak district on the following day. Photos by Trevor Stone



Dancing in West Cumberland by Andrew Kennedy

Following Norman Peacock's piece about the response to Cecil Sharp's postcard survey (*Rattle Up My Boys* issue 5, series 6, Winter 1997) I spent some time seeing what I could find out about the references to sword dances seen at Clifton and Stainburn (both near Workington) at the end of the 19th century.

While there is no evidence surviving on the scale of that from 19th century Yorkshire, there are persistent signs that sword dances could be found throughout the North-west, such as those from Lathom (1638) and Crosby (1712), both in Lancashire, and from Cumberland - Great Orton (circa 1780, west of Carlisle) and possibly the Whitehaven area (1788). All these are mentioned in Stephen Corrsin's *Sword Dancing in Europe: A History* (Hisarlik Press, 1997). Roy Judge (cited in *Rattle Up My Boys* Issue 3, Series 7) mentions 16 lads of the Manchester Mechanics Institution as having performed a sword dance some time after 1847, and there is also the reference in Sharp's collection (as listed by Norman Peacock) of a dance at Deane, on the outskirts of Bolton, circa 1860.

Great Clifton was built around coal mining, whereas Stainburn is predominantly agricultural, although within walking distance of a number of former pits. There was undoubtedly a thriving clog-dancing tradition in the area, but so far I have found nothing about the dances to which Sharp's informant refers. What I did find was evidence of at least a continuing interest in sword-dancing.

According to the *West Cumberland Times* of the 25th October, 1930, a Workington man, Mr C F Todd, emigrated to New Brunswick, USA. He subsequently returned to his home town and donated a trophy in order to popularise sword dancing.



The trophy, known as the Todd Challenge Trophy, was 25 inches high and made from a shell case decorated with repousse work (hammered brass work) of rose leaves and flowers, and finally copper-plated. The sword lock was cut from a single piece of brass. The design and execution were all Mr Todd's work.

The trophy was to be competed for in the annual Workington Musical Festival (an event which still takes place). There is no mention of sword dancing in the results for 1930, but in 1931 all the competitors in this class were children, and the trophy was won by St. George's Scouts, of Workington, performing their "own choice". There is no further mention of sword dancing in the Festival's results for subsequent years, and I am informed by the current Entries Secretary that the trophy was transferred to the Senior Violin Class in the late 1930s.

In 1953 a Miss Enid Young came second in the Senior Violin Class. That year she had visited Canada as part of an exchange marking the Coronation, and while there she met a Mr Edwin Todd, of C F Todd's family, so some link had been maintained.

The last time the Todd Challenge Trophy is named in the Festival's results was 1958, when it was won by T W Heron of Great Clifton.

If Mr Todd had reached the position of being able to return from Canada in 1930, it is likely that he had emigrated either before the First World War (any time back to about 1890), or certainly no later than the economic recession of the early 1920s. Either way, he would have missed the results of the Folk Dance Revival - Sharp's *The Sword Dances of Northern England* was only published in 1911-13 - and it seems more likely that his desire to encourage sword dancing would have been based on his own memories. How is it that he knew enough to make an accurate lock, and yet chose to use these particular swords? The design is one which would be completely unknown to anybody whose experience of sword dancing was confined to the Yorkshire model - see Appendix 2 of Ivor Allsop's *Longsword Dances* (Northern Harmony, 1996).

What next? I have been diverted by other commitments for the past two years, but the next step will be to try to trace the last winner and see where the trophy went next. In the meantime, I am indebted to Mrs J M Thompson, of Workington, and to Mrs M B McCleary, Entries Secretary of the Workington Musical Festival, for their help.

Andrew Kennedy, April 2000

Andrew tells me that he is currently working on the possibility of links between the Scottish East Coast and the Low Countries - and on the possible implications for sword dances from these areas - Trevor.

The Sweepers Sword team

As we saw at the Sword Spectacular Pete and Sue Coe have made a super job of reviving interest in the Boosbeck dance with children from Lockwood Primary School, Boosbeck. However I was keen to meet Pete and get more details on the team shown on his Christmas card described as "The Sweepers Sword Team, Ganaktulir, Dhaka, Bangladesh" It was a fake!

Fighting the wind...



The climax of the Lange Wapper dance involves noisting the leader who proceeds to unfurl a large flag. In the sheltered conditions outside the Cathedral in Antwerp the move requires care and skill - atop a wind swept cliff at Whitby during the last Sword Spectacular it calls for nerve and an exceptional sense of balance. In spite of the tussle with the elements they completed the move!

Web site update

Mark Van Orshoven (the jester with Lange Wapper) contacted me recently to let me know of improvements to the Lange Wapper Sword dance Internet site. It is now available at www.sworddance.be.tf

It carries details and photos of Flamborough's visit to Antwerp at Half Lent

He also plans an "international division" which will have links to other sword dance teams, especially those teams who have visited Antwerp over the years or groups who the team have met at International meetings. If teams wish to be featured on his site you can contact him by e-mail on markvo@glo.be

Whilst on about the Internet Renaat Van Craenebroeck drew a site to my notice - have a look at <http://www.schwertertanz.de/lwt.html>

Norman Wood revisited

Ted Dodsworth, of the Highside team, sent a little more detail about the team's recent meeting with Norman Wood, son of the leader of the revival team in Kirkby Malzeard. He writes:

After our last dance out at the Plough Blessing Service last January in Kirkby Malzeard, our picture appeared in the *Darlington & Stockton Times* where it was seen by Norman R Wood. Mr Wood wrote to me to ask when and where our next dance out would be, as he would like to come to see us. It had to be before the end of May as he needed to have a medical for his driving licence and he didn't think he would pass (he was 90 years old). Norman danced in the Kirkby team in 1925 and his father Ralph was instrumental in starting that team. Norman now lives in Skeeby near Richmond. He was born in 1909.

We said that we would go to Richmond and dance for him. Norman arranged the tour! Road works in Bedale meant that we were late for our meeting with him.

This was unfortunate as he had planned the rest of the day with the utmost precision. We danced for him and a handful of people outside the newly refurbished Priory Hospital. He was very complimentary about our dancing, he said we danced better than they ever did. His long term memory was excellent but he didn't remember the calling-on song, he said he was the seventh man and was led round in the dance. And it was 75 years ago!

Norman had arranged for us to dance in Richmond Town Hall which had involved getting the caretaker there to open it. We thought that it would be better to dance outside as there was quite a crowd including several members of Slubbing Billy's team on a walking holiday. This we did, Norman didn't seem very pleased with this and wandered off into the market.

We then went to his house in Skeeby and danced in the road outside his bungalow where a large crowd of his relatives and neighbours had gathered even though the Grand National was on TV. It was cold but we got a good round of applause especially when we 'beheaded' Norman.

Tea, sandwiches and cakes were laid on for us in Skeeby Village Hall which we consumed after dancing again. Norman decided there weren't enough cakes so he ran home for some more! Norman knew our musician Ray Waite's father Bob who played for the Kirkby team in the 1920's & '30's.

We have had further correspondence with Norman and also with Norman Peacock who danced with Leeds Morris Men (amongst other teams) in the 1950's - they danced in Kirkby and met Norman Wood there. We hope to visit him again shortly and present him with a photograph of him and us and a photograph of his father's team taken in the 1920's.

Ted Dodsworth, June 2000

Barnsley dance out - again



*Barnsley Longsword perform their Haxby dance during the Chipperfield weekend on Sunday July 16th 2000.
photo by Gordon Ridgewell*

A few years ago it seemed as if Barnsley Longsword, one of the earliest "revival" teams from the 1970's, was fading. They always managed to dance out on their traditional date (the first Sunday after Christmas day) but their other appearances were few and far between.

However, as is often the way, interest was revived when a couple of youngsters joined the team. Gordon Ridgewell spotted them at Greensleaves Morris Mens' Chipperfield weekend in July.

Contributions are welcome ...

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The next issue will feature the second part of a history of the Grenoside Traditional Sword Dance team which includes 1920's material discovered by Gordon Ridgewell in the Sheffield Independent. I also plan to publish a report by Ivor Allsop of a project he undertook to teach a sword dance to the cast of a stage play.

The promised reports from the Sword Spectacular Conference will be delayed until after the transcripts have been supplied to those who ordered copies.