

WORKSHOP SERIES

ABRAM CIRCLE DANCE



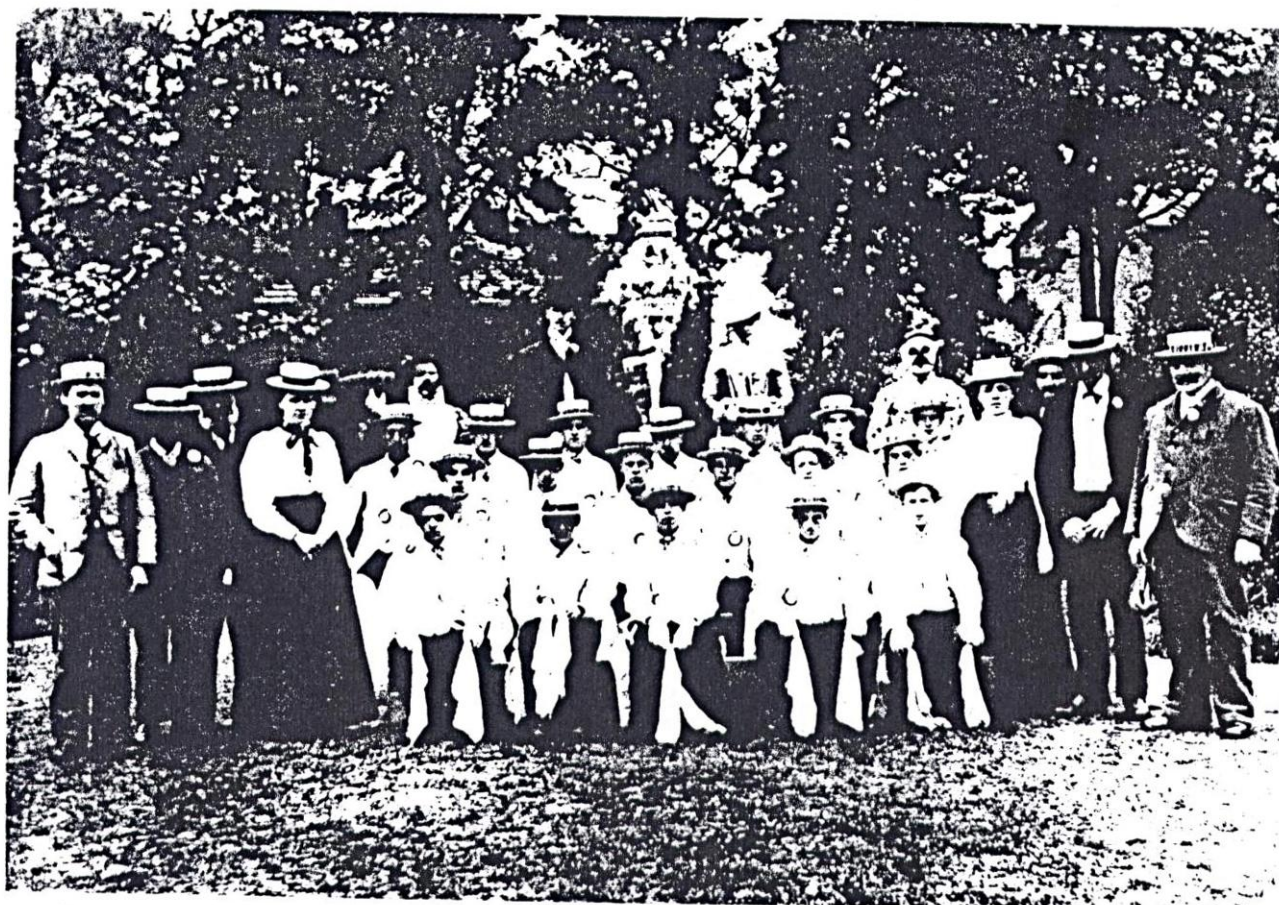
A Morris Federation Publication

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ISBN 0 948383 02 X

The Notation Group of the Morris Federation would like to
Extend thanks to the following people for their work on this dance notation:-
Chas Marshall for the text and format,
Barbera Butler for reviewing the manuscript,
June Smith for drawing the music,
Phill Butler for the diagrams
And England's Glory for permission to produce their variant.



Abram Morris Dancers c. 1900
(R. Dommett collection)

ABRAM CIRCLE DANCE

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Abram is a small town situated a few miles from Wigan. Two dances were performed in Abram - a road dance and a circle dance. The road dance was called the "Long Morris" and was said (Karpeles 1.) to be a simple form of dance resembling the Winster Processional. The circle dance, which is described below, was performed at stopping places and is not typical of most North West morris. The dancers used to be accompanied by a King, a Queen and two clowns. These supernumerary characters, who wore costume, reacted to but did not take part in the circle dance.

The dancers, who were unmarried men, dressed in white straw boaters, white shirts, white waistcoats, dark trousers and short, laced, dark boots. This costume was decorated with red, white and blue vertically striped waistbands and hatbands. Wide sashes fastened with rosettes were worn diagonally over the shoulder. A large white handkerchief was knotted to the middle finger of each hand.

Our information of the Abram Circle Dance comes mainly from the following sources:-

1. Karpeles, M. (1932). The Abram Morris Dance, Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, 55 - 59.
2. Corrigenda (1933). Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society.
3. Leyland, J. (1882). Memorials of Abram. 113 - 115, Manchester.
4. Dommett, R. Personal Collection, Photograph of the Abram morris dancers circa 1900.
5. Foster, A. The Abram Circle Dance in A Collection of Six Morris Dances and Jigs. English Folk Dance and Song Society, London.
6. Karpeles, M. MSS (Vaughan Williams Memorial Library).

Ideas on interpretation came from the following notes in the Morris Federation archive:-

1. Barbara A Butler: Notes on the Abram Circle Dance from an instructional in Cardiff given by Derek Froome 1974.
2. Bath City: Notes on Abram by Gill Smith (ex-squire).
3. pre Women's Morris Federation Handout: Abram (sic) by Sarah Jarrett.

2. MUSIC

There is a special 7 - part tune which accompanies the dance and this used to be played by a "band of music". The music appears to be two tunes put together; the first two parts and the last two parts being variants of the "Long Morris" and the middle three parts being known as "Cross Morris" or "Nancy Dawson" (the finale tune of dances from the Manchester area). Note the change of rhythm in this middle portion - from a march (4/4 time) to a jig (6/8 time) and back to a march. The whole tune is played through twice for the full dance - see the summary (paragraph 8) as to how the tune fits the dance. The music is given at the end of the notation and should be played at a speed giving 8 bars (or 16 steps) in about 11 seconds.

3. THE DANCERS

The usual number appears to have been eighteen although any even number of dancers can take part. However, if too few dancers take part, say less than ten, the circular nature of the dance tends to be lost (see paragraph 9, Variants). The dancers are numbered anticlockwise in pairs and begin standing in a circle facing the centre so that the number 2's are on the right of their partners, the number 1's.

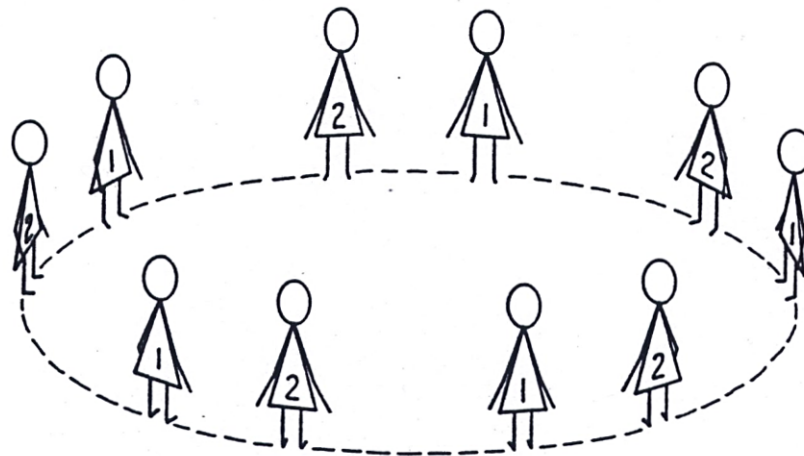


Diagram 1. Numbering of the Set.

The dancers shown in Diagram 1 are in distinct pairs for clarity but the spacing between the dancers should be even in practice.

4. STEPPING

This is a low skip step starting with a step on to the right foot. During this step, which is also known as a single step or a step-hop, the free leg is raised so that the thigh is about 45° from the horizontal with the lower leg hanging loosely in a vertical position. During the hop the weight-bearing leg scarcely leaves the ground. The emphasis of this step will change depending upon the music.

During the march rhythm (4/4 time), each step and each hop occur at equal time intervals, giving an even beat - tum-tum, tum-tum, tum-tum, etc. During the jig rhythm (6/8 time), each step and each hop occur at unequal time intervals, giving a "broken" beat - tum-ti, tum-ti, tum-ti, etc. This difference of emphasis is best explained musically:-

March (4/4)	
Jig (6/8)	

Where	r	=	step onto right foot
	hr	=	hop on the right foot
	1	=	step onto left foot
	hl	=	hop on the left foot

5. ARM MOVEMENTS

5.1 Alternate Arm Swing

This is the predominant arm movement used in the dance. The left arm is raised at the same time as the right foot so that it reaches its highest point with the hop. Then the right arm is raised similarly at the same time as the left foot. The wrist is flicked at the top of the movement to make the handkerchief stand up. The basic movement and co-ordination is similar to the action of the arms when walking but the extended arm is swung in a loose relaxed manner up to shoulder height. The swing of the arms also goes slightly behind the body.



Diagram 2. Alternate Arm Swing.

5.2 Throw Up

Many figures are concluded with this movement on the final step. The hands are thrown up above the head and the wrists are flicked so that the handkerchiefs stand up on end. (See Historical Note 9.3)



Diagram 3. The Throw Up.

6. PRACTICE HINTS

It is valuable to practise stepping on the spot doing a sequence of repeated skipping steps (say 8) using Alternate Arm Swing and a Throw Up on the last step. This helps to develop the skill of changing the arm movements while not being distracted by the details of particular figures. This will also give the dancers the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the tune so that they are able to anticipate the changes in rhythm.

In this dance it is important to maintain the circular nature of the figures and to keep the spacing between the dancers even. It is useful to imagine the patterns created by the dance from above the set (ie a bird's eye view).

7. THE FIGURES

A figure is a sequence of movements or steps normally involving all the dancers, which lasts for a phrase of music, usually 8 bars. The following description of each figure is first given in general terms and then in detail with the number of steps, arm movements and evolutions. The names given to the figures are those in common usage amongst sides currently dancing. The figures follow one after another with no pause between.

7.1. Once to Yourself

This is an initial phrase of music to lead into the dance. It is for the dancers to sense the timing and for the leading dancer, should one be nominated, to alter the speed if necessary. It also attracts the attention of audience and the dancers to the fact that the dance is about to start. Dancers stand poised with their arms by their sides, in a circle as shown in Diagram 1.

7.2 Double Circle

The dancers move round in pairs in a clockwise circle starting on the right foot.

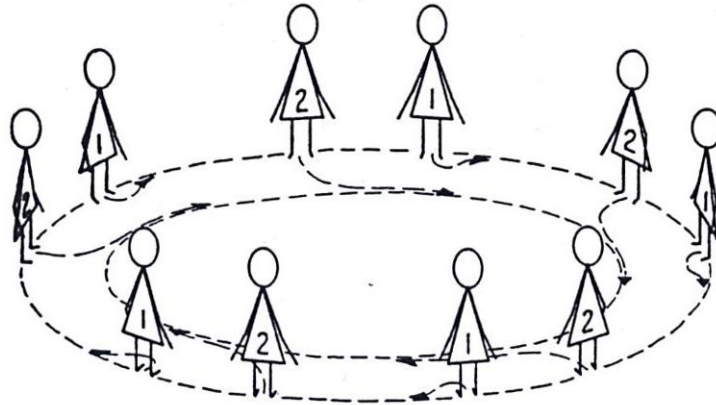


Diagram 4. Double Circle

<u>Skip Steps</u>	<u>Arm Movements</u>	<u>Evolution</u>
1 - 2	Alternate Arm Swing	Two large circles are formed, one within the other. The outer circle is made up of 1's. The inner circle is made up of 2's. The 1's make a 90° turn to their left dancing on the spot, while the 2's move in alongside them.
3 - 15	Alternate Arm Swing	The dancers move clockwise around the circle in pairs.
16	Throw Up	The 1's make a 90° turn to their right and the 2's make a 90° turn to their left so that partners are now facing. The 1's are facing the centre of the circle and the 2's have their backs to the centre of the circle. The dancers are not necessarily near their starting positions.

7.3 Back to Back

The dancers move forward and slightly to their left. They pass sideways to their right crossing behind their partner and then retire backwards to their own place. This is then repeated moving forward and slightly to the right, passing to the left behind their partners and retiring to place.

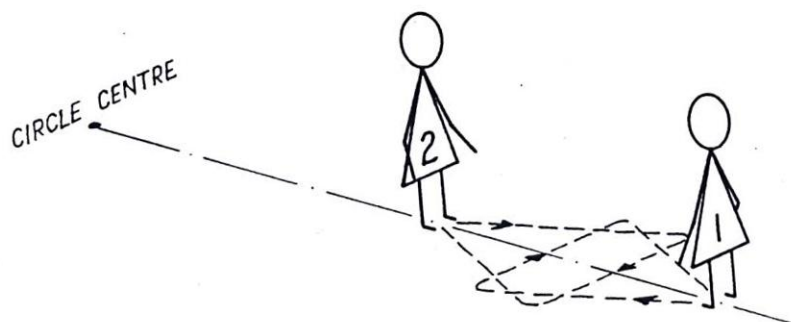


Diagram 5 Back to Back (first half).

<u>Skip Steps</u>	<u>Arm Movements</u>	<u>Evolutions</u>
1 - 7	Alternate Arm Swing	Each pair of dancers perform the first half of a Back to Back by moving towards the left ie passing right shoulders.
8	Throw Up	The Throw Up occurs with partners facing at the end of the movement.
9 - 15	Alternate Arm Swing	Each pair of dancers then perform the second half of a Back to Back moving towards the right ie passing left shoulders.
16	Throw Up	The Throw Up occurs with partners facing at the end of the movement.

7.4 Circles

The dancers move round in pairs in a clockwise circle (similar to Double Circle) but return anticlockwise to the position from which they started the figure.

<u>Skip Steps</u>	<u>Arm Movements</u>	<u>Evolution</u>
1	Alternate Arm Swing	The 1's make a 90° turn to their left while the 2's make a 90° turn to their right.
2 - 7	Alternate Arm Swing	The dancers move clockwise round the circle in pairs.
8	Throw Up	The 1's make a 90° turn to their right while the 2's make a 90° turn to their left, the Throw Up occurring with partners facing.
9	Alternate Arm Swing	The 1's make a 90° turn to their right while the 2's make a 90° turn to their left.
10 - 15	Alternate Arm Swing	The dancers move anticlockwise round the circle in pairs.
16	Throw Up	The 1's make a 90° turn to their left while the 2's make a 90° turn to their right, the Throw Up occurring with partners facing.

The 1's remain in the outer circle and the 2's remain in the inner circle for the whole of this figure.

7.5 Salute

This is a stationary figure taking the same length of time as 8 skip steps (ie 4 bars). The "Skip Steps" are included below to give the timing of the figure but they are not to be danced.

<u>Skip Steps</u>	<u>Arm Movements</u>	<u>Evolution</u>
1 - 2	The right hand is swung in a big circle in front of the body moving anticlockwise. Start by moving outward and upward.	Dancers stand in position facing their partners.
3	The right hand is lowered ie completing the circle.	All make a slight bow,
4		then straighten up.
5 - 6	The left hand is swung in a big circle in front of the body moving clockwise. Start by moving outward and upward.	Dancers stand in position facing their partners.
7	The left hand is lowered ie completing the circle.	All make a slight bow,
8		then straighten up.

7.6 Small Circles

The dancers move round in two small circles individually. First to the right, clockwise, and then to the left, anticlockwise.

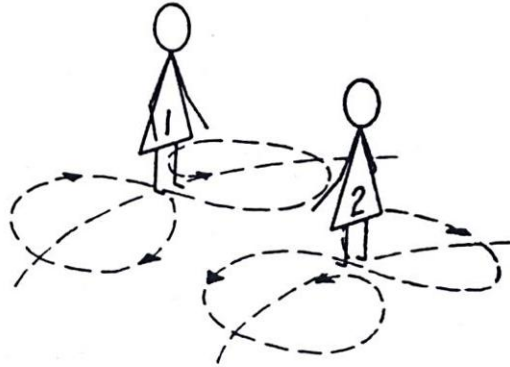


Diagram 6. Small Circles.

<u>Skip Steps</u>	<u>Arm Movement</u>	<u>Evolution</u>
1 - 7	Arms relaxed, held down at side.	Each dancer moves in a small complete circle clockwise, ending facing their partners for the Throw Up.
8	Throw Up	
9 - 15	Arms relaxed held down at side.	Each dancer moves in a small complete circle anticlockwise and then turns an additional 90° so that the 1's are facing round the outer circle clockwise, and the 2's are facing round the inner circle anticlockwise.
16	Throw Up	The Throw Up occurs at the end of the movement.

7.7 Opposite Circles

The dancers move round in opposite directions, the outer circle moving clockwise and the inner circle moving anticlockwise.

<u>Skip Steps</u>	<u>Arm Movement</u>	<u>Evolution</u>
1 - 30	Alternate Arm Swing	The 1's dance round the outer circle clockwise while the 2's dance round the inner circle anticlockwise.
31	Alternate Arm Swing	On the last two steps the 2's slip into the outer circle between the 1's ideally, but not necessarily, alongside their original partner. This brings the set back to the single circle with which the dance commenced.
32	Throw Up	

7.8 Centre

All dancers face the centre of the circle and move slowly into the centre and then retire to their places.

<u>Skip Steps</u>	<u>Arm Movement</u>	<u>Evolution</u>
1 - 15	Alternate Arm Swing	All dancers move slowly, using very small steps, in towards the centre of the circle.
16	Throw Up	
17 - 31	Alternate Arm Swing	All dancers retire slowly back to their places.
32	Throw Up	

Customarily the dance is repeated from this position starting straight into the Double Circle. When performing the Centre figure to finish the dance the last two steps are modified as follows:-

<u>Skip Steps</u>	<u>Arm Movement</u>	<u>Evolution</u>
31	Throw Up	Retiring
32	Swing the arms down and out to shoulder level and hold momentarily.	The hop of the last skip step is suppressed, the left foot is simply placed beside the right foot so that the feet are together.



Diagram 7. The Finish.

8. SUMMARY

Music	Time Signature	Figure	Steps	Number of bars
A	4/4	Once to Yourself	Stationary	8
A	4/4	Double Circle	16 Skip Steps	8
B	4/4	Back to Back	16 Skip Steps	8
C	6/8	Circles	16 Skip Steps	8
D	6/8	Salute	Stationary	4
E	6/8	Small Circles	16 Skip Steps	8
F	4/4	Opposite Circles	32 Skip Steps	16
G	4/4	Centre	32 Skip Steps	16

Repeat from "Double Circle".

9. VARIANTS9.1 A Variant Developed by England's Glorya) The Dancers.

A minimum number of 6 dancers can take part and stand in a double circle formation as shown below:-

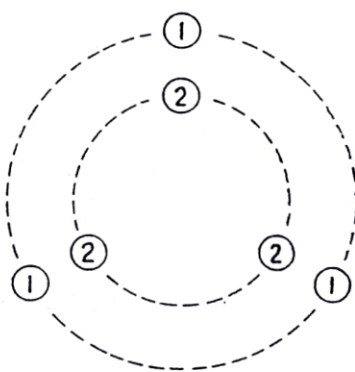


Diagram 8. Six Dancers in a Double Circle Formation.

However the dance is more commonly used as the last dance of a performance and all the dancers present (to make an even number) may be invited to take part. This can involve up to 40 participants.

b) Stepping and Arm Movements

A high step is used with the raised foot kicked forward and then pulled well back. The same foot and hand are raised. (This is because of the style in which other dances are performed by this side rather than following any notation.)

c) Figures.SUMMARY

Music	Time Signature	Figure	Step	Number of bars
A	4/4	Once to Yourself	Stationary	8
A	4/4	Double Circle	16 skip steps	8
B	4/4	Back to Back	16 skip steps	8
C	6/8	Circles	16 skip steps	8
D	6/8	Salute	Stationary	4
E	6/8	Small Circles	8 skip steps	4
E	6/8	Opposite Circles	8 skip steps	4
F + G	4/4	Centre	48 skip steps	16 + 8

NB The figures are not repeated.

9.1c) i) Once to Yourself

During this figure, the dancers raise their arms very slowly culminating with a Throw Up.

ii) Double Circle, Back to Back and Circles

These figures are as described (paras 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4).

iii) Salute

This is as described (para 7.5) except that the hand describes a triangular rather than circular movement. At the first highest point ie with steps 2 and 6, the hand is twisted to make the handkerchief stand up. The bow is simply a nod of the head.

iv) Small Circles

This is similar to the first part of the figure already described (para 7.6). Usually called Turn Single, it is a turn 270° in an anticlockwise direction only, using 8 steps and the first 4 bars of the E Music. The dancers face around the double circle in preparation for the next figure.

v) Opposite Circles

The figure is similar to that already described (para 7.7) except that the outer circle moves in an anticlockwise direction and the inner circle moves in a clockwise direction, and that the movement is completed in 8 steps and 4 bars of E Music. The Throw Up occurs with the 8th step.

vi) Centre

Using 8 bars of F Music, the dancers face in and complete 16 steps and a Throw Up on the spot. On the following 8 bars of F Music, the dancers retire to form a very large circle using 16 steps and a Throw Up while the musicians enter the circle.

Using the last 8 bars only of the G Music, the dancers then move slowly in to form a smaller circle with 15 steps and end with a stamp, shout and Throw Up.

9.2 Arm Movement Variations

The dance, as performed by currently dancing sides, displays a wide variety of arm movements, some of which are noted below:-

- a) There are No arm movements in the dance except the Throw Ups in the Centre figure.
- b) There is No Alternate Arm Swing in the Centre figure.
- c) The Throw Up is at the beginning of each figure rather than at the end of the previous figure. The Throw Up is executed on the first beat or first step of each figure.

9.3 Historical Note:

The issue of performing the Throw Up at the end of a figure or at the beginning of a figure was a subject of correspondence between Maud Karpeles and Derek Froome. Mr Froome was attempting to resolve an argument between himself and his foreman and he wrote:-

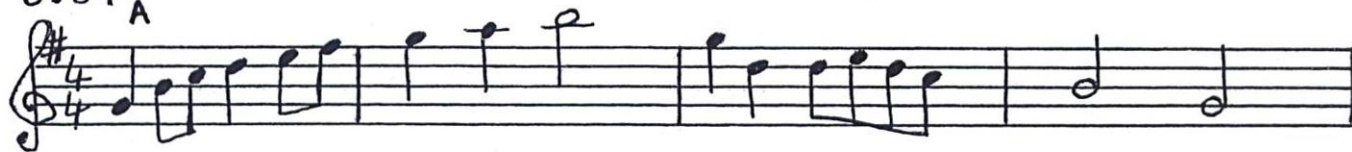
" I am maintaining, from DNK's instruction, that it was strictly on the first beat of the new phrase, whereas our Foreman thinks and teaches it as the last beat of the preceding phrase."

Miss Karpeles' reply was:-

"From Mr Porter's description I took it that the handkerchiefs were thrown up on the middle beat of the last phrase (as described in the Journal) and this was confirmed by Mr Adam Ingram (age 80) who had danced in 1901 (the last time the dance was performed)."

ABRAM CIRCLE DANCE

$\text{♩} = 84$ A "LONG MORRIS I"



$\text{♩} = 84$ C "CROSS MORRIS"



$\text{♩} = 84$

"LONG MORRIS II"

Handwritten musical score for "LONG MORRIS II". The score is written on eight staves, each beginning with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The first staff includes a dynamic marking of **F** (Forte) above the first measure. The second staff includes a dynamic marking of **G** (Glorioso) above the first measure. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together in groups of four or eight, creating a rhythmic melody. The eighth staff ends with a double bar line.

Four empty musical staves, each consisting of five horizontal lines, provided for additional notation.

Published by The Morris Federation

ISBN 0 948383 02 X